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7

WOMEN WRITING AUTO/BIOGRAPHY: ANNA BANTI'S *ARTEMISIA* AND EUNICE LIPTON'S *ALIAS OLYMPIA*

Claire Marrone

Neat definitions of biographical and autobiographical writing have been challenged in the twentieth century. Rather than the typical third-person biography, for example, an author may tell the life of another in the first person, assuming the identity of the subject. Instead of the traditional first-person autobiography, self-portraits may shift from first- to third- or even second-person renditions. Modern and postmodern literature have also questioned central concepts in life writing, namely the possibility of a unified self, the validity of memory, and the notion of "truth." This essay offers a comparative study of two texts which may be classified as autobiography or biography or both, and which, because of their blurred generic boundaries, bring to light several theoretical questions about life writing. Anna Banti's *Artemisia* (1947), the story of the noted woman painter from Renaissance Italy, Artemisia Gentileschi, and Eunice Lipton's *Alias Olympia: A Woman's Search for Manet's Notorious Model and Her Own Desire* (1992), an account of the nineteenth-century model and painter Victorine Meurent, highlight significant issues regarding subject choice, identity, and self-discovery in auto/biography. This study considers three questions: Why do these authors choose to explore their own life stories largely through the lives of others? How does the process of biographical research lead them on the road to self-discovery? Does the biological subject's gender influence the autobiographical components of these texts?

Artemisia and *Alias Olympia* are part of a growing canon of hybrid

texts involving life writing. Several authors have written "creative biographies" that include marked autobiographical components. Maria Bellonci, for example, offers a personal interpretation and reconstruction of the life of Isabella d'Este, the Marquise of Mantua, in her *Rinascimento Privato* (1985; *Private Renaissance*). Julian Barnes embarks on a personal odyssey in his study of Gustave Flaubert in *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984). Annie Ernaux writes biographies of her deceased mother and father, *Une Femme* (1987; *A Woman's Story*) and *La Place* (1983; *A Man's Place*) respectively, and at the same time relates her own life story. Ernaux has further published another version of *A Woman's Story* in the recent "*Je ne suis pas sortie de ma nuit*" (1997; "*I Have Not Escaped My Misery*"). As Carol Sanders notes, Ernaux aims at "a new form which combines social history with authorial reflection, alongside its autobiographical and fictional elements."¹ Like Banti and Lipton, these authors provide fertile ground for an analysis of subjectivity in life writing.

In *Alias Olympia*, Lipton focuses on her relationship as an art history scholar with the fascinating model and painter Victorine Meurent. Lipton juxtaposes two historical moments—American academics in the twentieth century and the art world of nineteenth-century France. In her text, the temporal distinctions are clear. Lipton creates an embedded autobiographical portrait in *Alias Olympia*, Lipton's imagined account of Victorine's life story—in effect, an auto-fictional interlude. The embedded first-person tale, cast in bold print and set off from the larger story of Lipton's search, assumes a certain autonomy and is distinguished from the present of Lipton's story.² Only occasionally is Victorine brought into the present moment of writing, as in the following example: "Even now as I write [Victorine's] name, she draws me into a state of wonder and reverie. . . . [S]he says, half tease, half entreaty, 'Find me, Eunice.' How, Victorine?"³

In Banti's *Artemisia*, the narrator is an art historian who juxtaposes her own experiences during the Second World War with those of her Renaissance protagonist, the painter Artemisia Gentileschi—a passion between researcher and subject similar to that in Lipton's work. Artemisia's suffering and loss because of rape and sexual discrimination mirror the struggles and losses of the author/narrator living in war-torn Italy. Because of the two temporal moments at play—the Second World War and Renaissance Italy—the dominant themes of the text are ahistorical. Banti thus seeks to uncover essential truths about the human experience regardless of the era in which one lives.

Whereas past and present are clearly discernible in Lipton's text,

in Banti's work the two temporal moments tend to merge. Banti shifts adeptly from the narrator's meditations to the heroine's. In the following passage, for example, the Artemisia of the past is suddenly alongside her narrator in the present: "Scorched a thousand times by the flames of her violation, a thousand times Artemisia steps back only to draw breath to throw herself once more at the fire. Thus was her wont then, thus does she behave with me today."⁴ At another moment, the narrator contemplates a turning point in Artemisia's career when she lived and painted in Naples. Suddenly, the protagonist appears, and we learn of Artemisia's concerns about the account. Banti writes:

I am leaving [Artemisia] for my first trip since the war. . . . She spills a whole bottle of ink onto my papers. And then we look at each other. She has become very suspicious about this period of her life in Naples . . . uncertain whether I will remember what I had written, or if I will start afresh. (95)⁵

Echoes of the past creep into Banti's text in other ways as well. As Banti explains in the foreword, "To the reader," she no longer has her original manuscript: "[T]he story . . . under the title 'Artemisia,' had reached its final pages in the spring of 1944. That summer, due to events of war . . . the manuscript was destroyed" (1).⁶ The rewritten text opens with the sympathetic character, Artemisia, comforting the author/narrator as she sits in Florence's Boboli gardens, crying in the darkness because of her lost manuscript. "Do not cry," implores Artemisia (3).⁷ Later, Artemisia is "obliged to help" the narrator relocate the ruined house where her first manuscript had come to life and been destroyed (41).⁸ The present text is thus a reconstruction—a painful "re-membering" of Banti's first account of Artemisia's story. The previous version of the story permeates the tale at hand, and at the same time emphasizes the theme of loss in *Artemisia*. Further, since the Artemisia of this text is a second version of the heroine, in essence a revised subject, we have evidence of the many potential biographical portraits.

This notion of numerous possible subjects and countless potential biographies is critical to current feminist endeavors to reinterpret the lives of women. Both *Artemisia* and *Alias Olympia* participate in projects of recovery. According to these authors, the accounts they had inherited about their subjects were slanted—primarily male versions of women's life stories. For example, according to an inscription describing Artemisia's celebrated *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Paint-*

ing, the artist was “raped by Agostino Tassi and loved by many.” (199)⁹ Banti laments, “thus it was repeatedly written” (199).¹⁰ Banti resuscitates Artemisia and offers us not a victim, but a proud, bold heroine. Similarly, in *Alias Olympia*, Lipton quotes the French art historian Adolphe Tabarant, who thinks little of Meurant’s paintings: “[Victorine] thought about exhibiting in the Salon. . . . In 1876 she sent them her own portrait and then some historic or anecdotal paintings. Wretched little daubs” (Lipton on Tabarant 6). Lipton explains that for writers such as Tabarant, “Victorine Meurent is a wretched lower-class model from the streets of Paris. She is promiscuous and alcoholic; she draws and paints unsuccessfully; she is foolish in her persistence and ambitions” (7). But Lipton comments, “I never saw her that way” (7). Lipton reveals another version of “the naked woman . . . staring quite alarmingly out of [Manet’s *Olympia*]” (2). For Lipton, the Victorine of *Olympia* and other paintings embodies “a woman who could say ‘yes,’ or she could say ‘no’” (2). Like Artemisia, Victorine emerges a strong and savvy figure. Furthermore, Lipton’s work emphasizes history’s erasure of scores of talented, influential women like Victorine whose stories have vanished unrecorded.

How do Banti and Lipton balance the biographical and autobiographical portraits in their texts? In *Artemisia*, the information offered about the author/narrator’s life is limited; we only know of her research, her experiences during WWII, and her relationship with her protagonist. Rather, the text is dominated by the “imaginative biography” which Banti creates from the scant and slanted details she uncovers about Artemisia. This type of life portrait, which I term “biographical fiction,” includes a great deal of speculation on the part of the biographer about the subject. Shirley D’Ardia Caracciolo explains that Banti created a full-length novel from “a few musty, stained pages containing the meager facts of Artemisia’s life”.¹¹ Banti offers a new interpretation of information from Artemisia’s rape trial and of her relationships with noted Renaissance painters including her father Orazio Gentileschi. Banti also includes scenes of Artemisia painting her famous *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, now housed in the Uffizi, and her *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting*, displayed in Kensington Palace. We learn that the painter became a shrewd negotiator as she matured, arranging portraits for royals and traveling through Europe.

By contrast to *Artemisia*, the autobiographical component of Lipton’s work dominates the text, as we learn a great deal about the author/narrator. She includes extensive information about her par-

ents—the intellectual formation she gained from her father and the abuse she suffered from her mother. She also discusses her academic career and her abandonment of university teaching in New York to pursue writing and art history research. She examines her failed first marriage and her current marriage to a man who shares her passion for art and travel. Lipton's biographical portrait of Victorine is certainly important, but more for its relevance to the author/narrator's personal journey than for the information it offers us about the French model. In a review of *Alias Olympia*, Katherine A. Powers observes: "It is not, after all, Meurent who is the true subject of this book: That position is occupied by Eunice Lipton. The greatest portion of the work is a minxish, self-regarding account of Lipton's [relationships with others] . . . as well as her search for herself and her decision . . . to become a full-fledged writer."¹²

Like Banti, Lipton has little information from which to paint her portrait of Victorine. Through her research, however, Lipton learns that Victorine is most remembered as the model for Édouard Manet's paintings *Olympia* and *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. A girl of humble origins, Victorine may have been a prostitute. She was also a painter. Lipton thus treats class issues and ponders the stifled artistic talents of a model of modest origins. Linda Wagner-Martin examines the life portraits of such "forgotten" women as Nelly Ternan,¹³ Charles Dickens's lover, and Victorine Meurent—women who have currently become the subject of biographical speculation.¹⁴ She calls these subjects "voiceless" because in their roles as lovers or models they were necessarily inferior to the dominant male in nineteenth-century patriarchy.¹⁵ Meurent, she explains, "left behind the image of her body rather than her voice."¹⁶ Indeed, it is the impact of Victorine's physical image that leads Lipton to write about her: "From each and every canvas I saw that the model surveyed the viewer, resisting centuries of admonition to ingratiate herself" (4).

Though Victorine painted, exhibited her work, and became a member of the *Société des Artistes Français*, Lipton is never able to locate her paintings. Significantly, *Alias Olympia* is greatly informed by the author's desire to learn that Victorine *was* a talented artist—a romantic longing intensified through its lack of fulfillment. Via the narrator's research in America and voyages to France in search of Victorine, Lipton's personal journey of self-discovery unfolds.

The hybrid nature of *Artemisia* and *Alias Olympia* becomes complicated, for the texts not only cross the boundaries of autobiography and biography, but those of factual life writing and fiction. Further-

more, the invented aspects of the texts are apparent, as shall be demonstrated in this essay. We as readers are clearly invited to join in the fantasy and consider these texts both as life stories and novels.

Fabrication is indeed common to both texts. Rather than merely lamenting the limited information available on Artemisia's life, Banti transforms this lack into a creative opportunity. She ponders a potential life for Artemisia and embellishes recorded information. Although many of the important facts Banti relates about Artemisia's life are true—her father's success, the rape, Artemisia's travels, her own painting—the invented aspects of the text are numerous. For instance, through the voice of her protagonist, Banti claims that Artemisia was raped at fourteen by Agostino, the "gentleman and famous painter" (11)¹⁷ hired to explain perspective to her. However, trial documents have her at fifteen, and recent studies reveal she may have been as old as nineteen.¹⁸ Other discrepancies concern Artemisia's marriage. According to critic Ward Bissell, Artemisia married Antonio Stiattesi (a hurried arrangement by Artemisia's father) one month after Tassi was tried for rape.¹⁹ Bissell explains that Artemisia accompanied her husband to Florence soon after. In the text, however, Artemisia does not actually begin living with Antonio until several years after their betrothal. In addition, Banti's Artemisia has only one daughter, while the real Artemisia had two. Textual invention is also apparent when the narrator reveals that Artemisia "corrects her," appeals to her, or influences her: "I recognize the tender, violent way Artemisia intervenes when she wants to force my interpretation, my memory" (85).²⁰ At times, the narrator offers various *possible* reactions Artemisia might have in a given situation. After Artemisia's husband leaves her, for example, and we hear of the heroine's despair, the narrator speculates: "She might even have yawned from exhaustion" (85).²¹ Such postulation places the narrative somewhere between a possible reality and fiction. Banti at times feels guilty for pushing her interpretations/inventions too far:

I was in the habit of preparing small surprises for [Artemisia], interpretations that were the opposite of what the record of her life suggested to me. . . . [O]nly today do I realize . . . that what I longingly took to be her consent has been, for a long time now, her absence. (108)²²

According to Beverly Ballaro, Banti "manages to create an effect of verisimilitude while blending invention, historical facts, and metahistorical speculation."²³ Deborah Heller concurs: "From the outset . . . the narrative presents itself as something other than simple histori-

cal reconstruction, something at once more personal, more imaginative, and more arbitrary."²⁴ In *Artemisia*, because of the limited information on Artemisia's life, the conjecture may be viewed as necessary if something even reminiscent of Artemisia's life story is to be told. It may also be viewed as a choice on the part of the author, whose greater talents may lie in the realm of fantasy. Heller explains that Banti's fabrications reflect a desire to create "greater pathos" and that her consistent development of a "complex, consistent, and rich inner life for her protagonist" are in fact "the stuff of realist fiction."²⁵ D'Ardua Caracciolo adds that "the novel itself yields little in the way of the concrete information that would be found in a traditional biographical work. . . . [W]hat holds the novel together is the tremendous coherence of the character's psychological motivation."²⁶ Because of Banti's successful character portrait, we the readers become engaged in the fiction and are less concerned about the veracity of the account.

Banti is also able to generate various possible portraits for Artemisia through experimentation with narrative voice, a technique common to both Banti and Lipton's texts. Banti creates a textured narrative which incorporates a multitude of voices. At times, the narrator speaks in the first person, as does Artemisia. Frequently we have a third-person narrator. At still other moments, the narrator addresses her protagonist in the second person. At other times, the voices are indistinguishable, so intense is the bond between narrator and heroine. Consider the following two examples. Shortly after her marriage, Artemisia departs for Florence accompanied only by her father. We read: "Who could tell whether that whole marriage . . . was not just a pretense carried out for the purpose of atonement, a fiction that Orazio had put together? . . . All ready and waiting for her in Florence, perhaps, was a noble husband whom her father had secretly chosen for her" (37).²⁷ When Artemisia arrives in Florence and fears that her father will soon abandon her, we read: "He was in a hurry: why on earth was he in a hurry? And she began to feel alone once more" (37).²⁸ Banti intentionally allows the narrative voices to merge. Her free indirect discourse²⁹ renders these passages both ambiguous—are these the narrator's thoughts or Artemisia's?—and poetic. Another example arises regarding when Artemisia actually lived with Antonio. Records are unclear, yet Banti attributes this uncertainty to her protagonist and uses the interrogative form and free indirect discourse once again for rhetorical purposes: "For two years, however, they lived together. From 1622 to '24? Or from '25 to '27? Thus might Artemisia ask herself when she is a forgetful old lady" (55).³⁰ Finally, Banti points out her narrative experimentation to the

reader: "And back into Artemisia's mind came the ungainly, makeshift husband she had married. I was on my own (this commemoration often slips from the third person), I was on my own in Florence" (38).³¹ Through such shifts in narration, Banti draws attention to the fictionality of the passage. The reader is lulled by the literariness of it and by Banti's elegant prose, and less bothered by the lack of specific information normally necessary in a biography.

In *Alias Olympia*, Lipton, too, engenders a life story through the meager morsels she uncovers about Victorine. Like Banti, she will never find answers to all of her questions about her subject's life and art. Therefore, as the title suggests, Lipton allows her own desire to lead the narrative. In the embedded autobiographical subtext, we hear "Victorine's voice" as Lipton imagines it. The narrator explains how she came to conceive of Victorine speaking, and how she felt free to include this in her professional writing after she had abandoned academics, and with it objective "academic discourse": "[A]s a lark, I started writing as if I were Victorine" (149). When she refutes her husband's enthusiastic suggestions that she incorporate such writing into her work, he counters: "Why not? You're not a professor anymore." (149). It is clear that the autofictional interlude is an invention and that we are to enter into Lipton's fantasy with her. For instance, Lipton renders Victorine's voice in English in the subtext. Despite the author's attempt both to include common French phrases, such as "tant pis" and "voilà," and recognizably translated French expressions—"I would amuse myself" clearly derives from "Je m'amusais"—we know that Lipton is indulging her desire to empower Victorine through speech.

Through the "dialogue" between these two versions of Victorine—Lipton's biographical subject and the fictional autobiographical one—the author is able to experiment with various scenarios in Victorine's life. For example, when Lipton locates records of the model's shared residence with another woman, Marie Dufour, she writes: "Were they lovers? I think so. I hope so" (166). In the segment of the embedded autobiographical portrait which follows, Lipton actually makes them lovers. She imagines Victorine thinking: "Marie was kind, not like other lovers I'd had" (167). Another example emerges when Lipton discovers a letter, currently housed at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, that Victorine had written to Manet's widow. It concerns a financial reward that Manet had promised Victorine. In the letter, she writes: "M. Manet, having sold a great number of his works . . . told me that he was going to give me something. I refused . . . adding that when I could no longer pose I would remind him of his promise"

(52). Victorine continues to describe her mother's ill health and her own maladies, including an accident in which she broke a finger. In a segment of the embedded autofictional portrayal three pages prior, however, Lipton imagines the possible circumstances of this letter and attributes to Victorine the following lines: "I did write to Manet's widow. . . . It had been on my mind . . . especially as money got tighter. . . . I told her about my difficulties; I even mentioned my mother. I threw something in about a broken finger. I exaggerated here and there" (49). Thus, like Banti, Lipton embellishes the facts; she suggests that Victorine may have exaggerated her misfortune. In addition, she is able to ponder her subject's motivations and emotions. However, Lipton's narrative experimentation in the subtext is different from Banti's preference for shifting narrators and free indirect discourse. In the autobiographical interlude, Lipton gives Victorine a sustained voice, ostensibly separate from her own. And yet at the same time, because this voice is an invention, Lipton permeates Victorine's "speech."

Ultimately, Lipton superimposes many of her own convictions onto her protagonist. As the autofictional interlude unfolds, Lipton attributes progressive feminist beliefs—much in keeping with her own—to Victorine. For instance, Lipton uses the subtext to refute many of the negative assumptions about her heroine's modesty and self-esteem. One example is when Victorine stops by Manet's studio. She comments on a particular painting and starts discussing art world gossip with him. She then notes, "before I knew it, he was drawing me. I was flattered, but annoyed, too. It didn't feel right. He hadn't even asked permission" (70). Regarding critics' lack of respect for Victorine as an artist, we hear her state: "But what really upsets me is knowing what Manet's friends wrote about me. I had the impression that they were taking me in, seeing me . . . a little. But they saw nothing. They had only contempt for me" (118). Here and elsewhere, Lipton voices Victorine's defense for her—the modern sister making right the wrongs of centuries of sexual discrimination.

Lipton's attempts to speak in Victorine's voice and Banti's continual merging of narrator and protagonist are evidence of the intense bond which exists between these writers and their subjects. Indeed, the "friendship" which evolves in each work develops into a sense of identification between narrator and protagonist. For Banti, Artemisia's artistry is associated with the author's sensitivity as an art historian and creative writer. As Ballaro suggests, "Banti's identification with Artemisia Gentileschi is strongly rooted in the common ground of being women artists caught up in historical adversity:

Banti as a writer struggling to survive the war, Artemisia as an artist trying to create a voice in a world which admits of no women painters" (40).³² Similarly, Lipton and Victorine share creative sensibilities and ambitions. Victorine's experiences in the nineteenth-century art world echo much of the discrimination the author encounters in twentieth-century academics, namely Lipton's difficulty in bringing gender politics into art criticism largely because of resistance from male colleagues.

This connection between narrator and subject in *Artemisia* and *Alias Olympia* ultimately becomes a creative inspiration for the authors and a vehicle for self-understanding. Common to life writing is the depiction of the evolution of the subject who learns, progresses, and discovers herself or himself as the result of life's experiences. In these two works, it is the protagonists *and* the narrators who evolve.

Artemisia is able to move past rape, abandonment by her husband, and scorn for female artistry to become a noted painter traveling to France and the royal court of England to practice her craft. Yet the narrator also learns about the human experience through her relationship with Artemisia. She tells us early in the text, "Through Artemisia I have come to realize all the forms, all the different ways in which the grief of a violated purity can express itself" (18).³³ Further, she finds that "this awakening of Artemisia's is also my own awakening" (108).³⁴ The narrator also uncovers "truths" about the female experience, vulnerabilities which she shares with other women: "Our paltry freedom is linked to the humble freedom of a virgin who, in the year sixteen hundred and eleven, has only the freedom of her own intact body, the eternal loss of which she cannot ever come to terms with" (18).³⁵ In addition, the narrator learns to understand better her own shortcomings. As she compares herself to Artemisia, and her generation to that of the Renaissance, she notes: "Three hundred years of greater experience have not taught me to release my companion from her human errors and reconstruct for her an ideal freedom" (111).³⁶ The narrator's evolution occurs as the result of her close relationship to her subject—her fascination as a researcher with Artemisia, and her sensitivity as a woman to the pains Artemisia suffered in an era when female artistry was a novelty.

As in *Artemisia*, both narrator and protagonist evolve in *Alias Olympia*. Lipton confirms through her research that Victorine achieved a certain stature in the artistic world. In the autobiographical interlude, Victorine emerges as an intelligent, opinionated artist with progressive ideas. Her feelings regarding one of her paintings, the *Bourgeoise de Nuremberg au XVIe Siècle*, serve as an example: "I was fed

up with seeing all those paintings of sprawling naked women. . . . I wanted to make a painting of a woman in life" (99–100). Lipton also elevates Victorine's status by placing her in the context of other famous, successful women, such as Sarah Bernhardt. Finally, she celebrates the forgotten member of the *Société des Artistes Français* and dismisses Tabarant's image of the failed artist who died in an alcoholic stupor.

Lipton's personal evolution is nourished by her "ardent kinship"³⁷ with Victorine. As she conducts her research in Paris, for instance, Lipton explains, "We're walking the city together now, she and I" (90). Lipton is also enchanted by Victorine, and it is this allure which leads her to explore her own sexuality in the story. In the following passage, Lipton's attraction to her creation is apparent: "[Victorine] looks at me wistfully and brushes the hair from my face. She whispers in my ear and hints at marvelous discoveries" (42). Finally, when Lipton finishes a draft of the book, she states: "By this point, I know it is about both Victorine Meurent and me" (159). It becomes apparent that the tale is not only a resuscitation of Victorine, but also a *künstlerroman*, the story of the birth of the writer Lipton has become—that esteemed profession she so admired in her youth. Then, she couldn't dream of such aspirations and good fortune ("[s]uch nachas" 33). By the end of the text, Lipton has left academics and become an artist in her own right. The narrator, with her newfound confidence, even dyes her hair red, the bold color of Victorine's hair and a motif throughout the story. Olympia is thus not only an alias for Victorine, but a pseudonym for Lipton as well.

It is clear, then, that in *Artemisia* and *Alias Olympia* the choice of subject is central to the writer/narrator's sense of identity. Each chooses to write about a woman whom she admires and who reflects for her an aspect of herself. One could make the argument that all biographers feel a particular attraction or repulsion to their subjects—they must feel *something*, or why (financial considerations aside) would they invest so much energy in investigating the subject's life? One could also argue that a woman might feel an important connection to a man from the past and write her own story though an examination of his. Yet in the texts studied here, the centrality of female issues renders the gender of the biographical subject significant: Artemisia's rape echoes centuries of female victimization; and Victorine the model represents the objectified woman (whether or not she returns the gaze), while Victorine the prostitute brings to the fore the exploitation of women's bodies. Since all of these issues regarding the degradation of women still exist today, Banti and Lipton partici-

pate in contemporary feminist struggles through (re)writing these women's lives. Through the "biographical fiction" of these works, the authors are better able to generalize from these women's plights about other women's difficulties, and by extension about their own.

Lipton's assertion that "each of us has looked for ourself in a woman from the past" (91) fittingly echoes her title and, indeed, the project she shares with Banti. "A woman from the past" also recalls the appeals of many feminist critics who have encouraged women artists and scholars to discover the lost women of years gone by and at the same time to find their own voices and images. Virginia Woolf, particularly admired and studied by Banti, entreats women: "Consider any great figure of the past, like Sappho, like the Lady Murasaki, like Emily Brontë, you will find that she is an inheritor as well as an originator."³⁸ Regarding this dialogue and influence between women, Paola Belloch concurs:

We women often read books by other women to find a confirmation of our identity. . . . Or . . . for a sense of solidarity . . . or finally to explain feelings which are still obscure and confused, as they have been suddenly awakened in a feminine consciousness which had lain dormant for so many years (my translation).³⁹

Today, it is readily accepted that women have "spoken to each other," sometimes in veiled language, throughout the centuries—from Woolf reading George Eliot, to Colette reading George Sand, to Artemisia painting Judith. Did Lipton know of Banti's *Artemisia*, whose English translation appeared four years before *Alias Olympia*? The marked similarities between the two works suggest that she did, although there is no reference to Banti in Lipton's text. Regardless of Banti's particular influence, the type of recovery project she undertook and the hybrid life story she penned were clearly familiar to Lipton; as such, Lipton certainly speaks to her Italian predecessor.

For many feminist writers and critics, the female "anxiety of influence" is not so much a question of surpassing the mother in order to assert oneself,⁴⁰ but of bonding with her so that the voices of mothers and daughters can be heard above the din of patriarchy. Marianne Hirsch's study *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* is germane to the Banti-Lipton relationship I hypothesize and to the connection both authors feel to their female subjects. Hirsch explains that in order to understand better women's lives, mothers and daughters must continue to "speak and listen to one another."⁴¹ In a quotation fitting for the experimental narratives

Banti and Lipton produce, she asks: "But what if [mother and daughter] inhabit the same body . . . speaking with two voices?"⁴² Do not these literary mothers attempt to inhabit textually their subjects' bodies and utter the pain of sexual repression? These two authors both (re)write the lives of their female forebears in two (or more) voices, and also create a dialogue with one another. They participate in a dual interrogation common to so many women writers: what is woman? and who am I as a woman? These are, of course, difficult questions to answer given the diversity of women, past and present, and the complicated nature of identity. And yet they are integral to biographical and autobiographical pursuits. The discoveries that both Banti and Lipton experience through writing their own lives, and through painting new portraits of Artemisia and Victorine, indeed contribute to a fuller understanding of women's many possible histories.

NOTES

1. Carol Sanders, "Stylistic Aspects of Women's Writing: The Case of Annie Ernaux," *French Cultural Studies* iv (Feb. 1993) 22.

2. Critics tend to have little esteem for this autofictional interlude. In a review published in the *New York Times Book Review*, 7 March 1993, Robin Lippincott claims that Lipton's "attempts to write in Meurent's voice truly distract the reader." In her review in the *Boston Globe*, 12 December 1992, Katherine A. Powers calls Meurent's imagined voice a "cozied-down psychotherapeutic chirp."

3. Eunice Lipton, *Alias Olympia: A Woman's Search for Manet's Notorious Model and Her Own Desire* (New York: Charles Scribner's) 42. All subsequent quotations from *Alias Olympia* are from this edition and shall be cited by page number in the article.

4. Anna Banti, *Artemisia*. Translated by Shirley D'Ardia Caracciolo (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988) 19. All subsequent quotations in English shall be from this edition and cited by page number in the article. The original Italian quotations shall appear in the endnotes. The first quotation in Italian reads: Scottata mille volte al bruciore dell'offesa, mille volte Artemisia si fa indietro e prende fiato per lanciarsi di nuovo nel fuoco. Così usava un tempo, così usa oggi con me (Anna Banti, *Artemisia*. Milan: Bompiani, [1947] 1994) 22. All subsequent quotations from the original Italian shall be taken from this edition and cited by page number in the article.

5. Io abbandono [Artemisia] per il primo viaggio dopo la guerra. . . . Lei me rovescia sul foglio un'intera boccetta d'inchiostro. E poi ci guardiamo. Di questa sua vita di Napoli . . . è fatta sospettosissima, incerta se ricorderò quel che avevo scritto o se batterò nuova strada (90-91).

6. [II] racconto . . . , intitolato *Artemisia*, era alle ultime pagine nella primavera del 1944. In quell'estate, per eventi bellici . . . il manoscritto veniva distrutto (7).

7. "Non piangere" (9).
8. le corre obbligo (41).
9. "violata da Agostino Tassi e amata da molti" (181-82).
10. così è ripetuto a stampa (182).
11. Shirley D'Ardia Caracciolo. Afterword to *Artemisia* by Anna Banti. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988) 216.
12. Katherine A. Powers, "Alias Olympia," *Boston Globe*, 12 December 1992, sec. 9: 14.
13. See Claire Tomalin's *The Invisible Women: The Story of Nelly Ternan and Charles Dickens* (New York: Knopf, 1990).
14. Linda Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women's Lives: The New Biography* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).
15. *Ibid.*, 163-64.
16. *Ibid.*, 164.
17. cavaliere e gran pittore (15).
18. See Deborah Heller, "Remembering *Artemisia*: Anna Banti and Artemisia Gentileschi," in *Donna: Women in Italian Culture*, ed. Ada Testaferri (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989) 102-3.
19. See Heller's discussion of Bissell, 104.
20. Riconosco il modo tenero e violento con cui Artemisia interviene per forzare la mia interpretazione, la mia memoria (81).
21. Magari sbadiglio' dallo stento (82).
22. Preparavo [per Artemisia] delle piccole sorprese, delle interpretazioni a rovescio di quel che la memoria della sua vita m'aveva suggerito. . . . [Solo oggi m'accorgo . . . che il suo vagheggiato consenso è, da lungo tempo, un'assenza (102).
23. Beverly Ballaro, "Anna Banti," in *Italian Women Writers: A Bio-bibliographical Sourcebook*, edited by Rinaldina Russel (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994) 39-40.
24. Heller, "Remembering *Artemisia*," 100.
25. *Ibid.*, 102, 100.
26. D'Ardia Caracciolo, "Afterword," 216-17.
27. E chi poteva dire che quel matrimonio . . . non fosse tutto una finzione espiatoria, una commedia che Orazio avesse imbastita? . . . A Firenze c'era forse per lei, bello e pronto, un marito nobile" (38).
28. Aveva fretta, perché mai aveva fretta? E principio' a risentirsi sola (39).
29. Free indirect discourse differs from indirect discourse because of its lack of introductory phrases ("She thought," etc.). It is often introduced by a question. It further suggests direct discourse, but does not employ quotation marks; thus the intentional ambiguity of voice arises.
30. Pure due anni stettero insieme? Dal '22 al '24? Dal '25 al '27? Così poté interrogarsi Artemisia da vecchia senza memoria (54).
31. E ad Artemisia torno' alla memoria il marito che aveva preso, goffo e di ripiego. "Ero sola (questa commemorazione scavalca spesso la terza persona), ero sola, a Firenze" (39).
32. Many of Banti's characters are in fact artistic, whether musicians, painters, or creative writers. Perhaps an unwritten subtext is the fact that Artemisia is at times remembered in the shadow of a great man, Caravaggio,

also a longtime object of Banti's research. Artemisia is said to be a follower of his style. Banti, too, is remembered in connection with a great man—the eminent art historian Roberto Longhi whom she married.

33. Per quante forme, per quanti modi diversi possa esprimersi il dolore di una intattezza violata, Artemisia me lo fa intendere (22).

34. Questo risveglio di Artemisia è anche il mio risveglio (101).

35. La nostra povera libertà si lega all'umile libertà di una vergine che nel milleseicentoundici non ha se non quella del proprio corpo integro e non può capacitarsi in eterno di averla perduta (22).

36. Trecento anni di maggiore esperienza non mi hanno insegnato a riscattare una compagna dai suoi errori umani e a ricostruirle una libertà ideale (104).

37. See Richard Eder, "Art-World Feminist Fights Cultural War," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 December 1992, sec. E: 2.

38. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton Books, 1988) 104.

39. Paola Blelloch, *Quel mondo dei guanti e delle stoffe . . . : Profili di scrittrici italiane del '900* (Verona: Essedue, 1987) 7.

40. This is a reference to Harold Bloom's noted *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973) in which he discusses how literary sons need to outdo their fathers in order to establish themselves in the Western poetic tradition.

41. Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) 199.

42. *Ibid.*, 199.

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