

Francesco Gonzales
Katharine Hogg

Hung, drawn and tortured:
violence in drawings by
Guercino and Ribera

Edward Payne

Lucretia

Guercino and Handel

A dialogue between art and music

The Sir Denis Mahon Charitable Trust

The year 1591 saw the birth of two artists who have become household names in the field of Seicento studies: Giovanni Francesco Barbieri (d. 1666), nicknamed Guercino – the little squinter – born in the small town of Cento in northern Italy; and Jusepe de Ribera (d. 1652), nicknamed Lo Spagnoletto – the little Spaniard – born in the small town of Játiva near Valencia¹. Revered in their own time, the reputations of Guercino and Ribera fell dramatically in the eyes of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics, only to experience a complete reappraisal from the mid-twentieth century onwards: Guercino, largely through the distinguished scholarship of Sir Denis Mahon and Nicholas Turner; Ribera, by virtue of major exhibitions in Europe and North America². The work of these artists continues to prompt scholarly attention and debate. Though often the subject of individual monographic studies, Guercino and Ribera have rarely been examined together, a curious lacuna considering the many parallels in their works on paper. Taking as its focus the

drawings of violent subjects that permeate the graphic production of these exact contemporaries, this essay will endeavour to reveal what a comparative study of Guercino and Ribera can teach us not only about their distinct bodies of work, but also about their diverse approaches towards drawing the body in pain.

Both Guercino and Ribera were prolific draughtsmen. However, the character of their corpus of surviving sheets is markedly different. An exceptionally high percentage of drawings by Guercino survive – between 1,000 and 3,000 authentic sheets – a testament to the value that he placed on drawings, which the artist carefully preserved in his studio, the Casa Gennari, for future use³. This figure contrasts with the approximately 160 known sheets by Ribera. While Manuela Mena claimed, in 1992, that the primary function of drawing for Ribera was not preparatory for paintings but ‘autonomous and independent’, Zahira Véliz, in her catalogue of the Courtauld Gallery’s Spanish drawings, reminds us that, thematically and

conceptually, the subjects of Ribera’s paintings and drawings are connected.⁴ Most of Guercino’s drawings are preliminary studies for painting commissions. Religious subjects dominate, as is to be expected during the height of the Counter-Reformation. Noteworthy examples include multiple studies of the *Assassination of Amnon*, *Saint Sebastian* and *David with the head of Goliath*. The artist also explored mythological subjects on paper such as *Apollo flaying Marsyas*, and occasionally scenes of domestic conflict. The large number of sheets by Guercino depicting saintly martyrdom offers a striking parallel with drawings by Ribera. The bound man performs a leading role in Ribera’s graphic oeuvre, taking on a range of identities in scenes of religious, mythological and contemporary violence. Gabriele Finaldi has calculated that around forty surviving sheets by Ribera portray men tied to trees, and over twenty depict Saints Sebastian, Bartholomew, Andrew and Albert⁵. Mythological subjects include Marsyas, Tityus and Prometheus, while scenes of contemporary torture comprise two surviving sheets of the *strappado*, and one of a man bound to a stake. Ribera’s explorations of the bound man motif vary from abbreviated preparatory studies for paintings and prints, to more worked-up sketches and independent sheets. Not surprisingly, Ribera’s representations of violent subjects have prompted conflicting interpretations in the literature on the artist. The early modern cliché of the cruel Ribera originates in biographical accounts: Joachim von Sandrart describes the visceral effects of Ribera’s extreme imagery on the spectator, and Bernardo De Dominici laments the artist’s supposed hostility towards his arch-rival, Domenichi-

no. In his 1973 catalogue of Ribera’s prints and drawings, however, Jonathan Brown argues that the artist’s drawings of physical suffering are *not* evidence of a personal fixation on violence, and he presents Ribera *not* as sadistically dwelling on pain, but as an impartial, non-participant observer of aesthetic values. Considering the recurring presence of the bound man in purely aesthetic terms, Brown states that it enabled the artist to experiment with different poses of the human body, and that *this* was Ribera’s obsession, as opposed to any other darker purpose⁶. More recently, Gabriele Finaldi has argued the opposite, suggesting that the numerous drawings of men tied to trees express Ribera’s obsessive, sadistic identification with suffering, and citing the biographical sources as providing confirmation of this character trait⁷. Rather than interpreting an artist’s violent imagery as a transparent window onto his personality, or using alleged episodes in his life to explain the violence in his art, it may prove more fruitful to read the works against the grain, rather than through the lens of biography. For instance, Carlo Cesare Malvasia’s description of Guercino as ‘humble, well-mannered, honest, respectful, chaste, and agreeable’ offers a striking contrast to the leitmotifs of martyrdom and torture that punctuate his graphic oeuvre⁸. Indeed, a juxtaposition and re-examination of drawings by Guercino and Ribera might open up another set of interpretations. In this essay, I will argue that the artists’ drawings of violent subjects underscore a crucial slip-page between the twofold ‘execution’ processes at work: the execution within the fictive image, and the execution of the crafted object. Moreover, I will suggest that Guercino and Ribera

conceived physical violence not as a product, but as a process, and that in drawing these violent subjects on paper, they simultaneously call attention to the process of drawing itself. But the story will become more complicated, as I further argue that the artists diverged sharply in their approach to capturing these violent episodes. As a more ‘classicising’ artist, Guercino not only idealises the bodies he depicts, but also the violence that they endure, either by partially suppressing the torture, or by oscillating between the moment immediately *before* or *after* the execution. As a more ‘realist’ artist, Ribera produces images of violence that are as raw as a wound itself, habitually focusing on the moment *during* the execution, the moment of maximum pain. Naturally, there are revealing counter-examples in both cases, which will also be explored. Since it would be impractical here to provide a comprehensive survey of Guercino and Ribera’s copious drawings of violence, I will instead examine a cross section, concentrating in particular on objects in the Courtauld Gallery’s collection. The essay is divided into three sets of case studies: the first investigates the different ways in which these artists treat the visceral subjects of Marsyas and Bartholomew flayed alive; the second explores Guercino’s preparatory studies for the *Martyrdom of Saints John and Paul* and the *Assassination of Amnon*, as well as Ribera’s *Inquisition scene*, shedding light on the tensions between bodily and pictorial execution; the third compares two alternative conceptions of the bound male figure – Guercino’s *Saint Sebastian* and Ribera’s *Man tied to a tree, and a figure resting* – in order to consider the limits of suffering and the wider implications of these deeply serious drawings.

Flaying on paper: Marsyas and Bartholomew skinned alive Hardly exclusive to Guercino and Ribera’s oeuvres, the figure of Marsyas was frequently depicted by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European artists, who turned to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as a model in which the satyr is graphically described as ‘all one wound’⁹. The story goes that Marsyas, half-man, half-goat, challenges Apollo, god of the muses, to a musical contest. Marsyas competes with a double-reed instrument known as the *aulos*, Apollo, with the seven-stringed lyre. The terms of the competition state that the victor could do with the loser as he pleased. After Marsyas’s inevitable defeat, Apollo punishes the satyr for his sin of *hubris* or extreme pride by tying him to a tree and flaying him alive. The Courtauld *Nude figure of a youth lying on his back, with his left arm and leg raised* is one of several preparatory drawings for Guercino’s painting of *Apollo flaying Marsyas*, commissioned by Cosimo II, Grand Duke of Tuscany, in 1618. **(Figs. 1 and 2)** The sheet demonstrates an important practice in the artist’s working process of drawing after the posed nude model, for Guercino established an *Accademia del nudo* in his native Cento, where he taught drawing from life. In this sheet, an early study for the painting, the figure is depicted in isolation, skin-intact and thus far unharmed. Here, the drawn figure has retained his identity as a posed model with human limbs, rather than being transformed into a suffering satyr with goat legs. The viewer is left to complete the scene by imagining Marsyas’s imminent flaying by Apollo, whose presence is implied through the position of the figure and the summary sketch at top left. A more advanced study for the painting can be found in a drawing at

Windsor Castle, which portrays Apollo in the act of flaying Marsyas alive. **(Fig. 3)** Here, Guercino has added a narrative element to the scene by including the *aulos* and lyre. Although the composition focuses on Apollo's gruesome task of tearing the skin from Marsyas's arm, Guercino has suppressed the violence by portraying the satyr from behind so that we do not see his agonising expression. The artist's final painted solution further tempers the violence of the event through the serene treatment of the figures. While in the Windsor drawing, Apollo shoves his foot into Marsyas's groin, in the Pitti painting, he rests it on the satyr's stomach¹⁰. The extremely foreshortened figure of Marsyas in Guercino's picture recalls Ribera's configuration of the same subject in his arresting 1637 painting at the Museo di Capodimonte in Naples. **(Fig. 4)**

A single preparatory drawing in pen and ink survives. **(Fig. 5)** In contrast to Guercino's ink and wash drawings, here the spare use of the pen reveals Ribera's speed of execution, and the unsettling quality of the line seems to resonate with the unsettling subject matter. Ribera has literally amplified the violence in the painting by accentuating the prominence of the wound, and by redirecting Marsyas's screaming face towards the spectator. While the onlookers in Guercino's picture appear indifferent to the action in the foreground, the satyrs in the background of Ribera's painting are appalled by Marsyas's screams, for one even blocks his ears to try to muffle the noise. Echoing the torturer-executioner, the painter-executioner does violence to the figure of Marsyas, who is both flayed by Apollo and foreshortened by the artist. By inverting the satyr's head and thus obscuring his face, Ribera inflicts further violence on po-

tential viewers, who are forced to twist and turn their own bodies if they wish to read Marsyas's expression right side up.

Guercino and Ribera were equally preoccupied with depicting the related subject of Saint Bartholomew in paint and on paper. The Courtauld sheet is one of a series of preparatory drawings for an altarpiece in the church of San Martino in Siena, which depicts the martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew, an apostle and missionary who was flayed alive for his Christian faith¹¹. **(Fig. 6)** Flanked by two executioners, Bartholomew stands before the block at the edge of the sheet, head raised to the heavens, while the executioners are positioned behind him, their faces concealed. The action of skinning the saint is subtly portrayed, as the drawing unveils the painful process of torture. Julian Brooks has noted that, with a single vertical line, Guercino explores the possibility of the executioner at the right wielding his knife in the manner of a pen¹². This particular passage narrows the gap between the activities of torturer-executioner and artist-executioner.

Moreover, Guercino's youthful, idealised saint contrasts sharply with Ribera's ageing, long-bearded Bartholomew in the multi-figured drawing at the Morgan Library & Museum. **(Fig. 7)** Worked up in pen and ink with wash, this drawing depicts the saint with limbs outstretched, gazing heavenward as he is brutally flayed alive. At the extreme right of the composition emerges the shadowy silhouette of a knife-sharpener; he is balanced by another figure at the left, tightening the ropes that bind Bartholomew's legs to a tree stump. Behind him stands the principal executioner, who pulls down a large flap of skin from the saint's right forearm. The distinctive arrangement

of figures lends the drawing an almost instructional function, demonstrating, step-by-step, how to martyr a saint.

This execution process is likewise laid out in Ribera's 1624 print on the same theme; **(Fig. 8)** its design, though in reverse, may well have been the point of departure for the Morgan drawing. While the central focus of the composition is on the body of the saint and the ripping of his skin, Bartholomew's attention is actually directed elsewhere as he gazes heavenward at the descending crown, to which is attached a palm leaf that resembles a quill. By skilfully alluding to this instrument in the composition, Ribera arguably makes a connection between the activities of printmaking, flaying and writing. Bartholomew, therefore, visually connects the instruments of knife and pen, both wielded by the hand (though here the hand alone strips the skin), and intimately bound by their functions of cutting and inscribing¹³.

Execution revealed: martyrdom, assassination, torture

It is noteworthy that Guercino's creative process involved exploring a scene or subject on a fresh sheet of paper and working it through fully, rather than conceiving a series of related sketches on a single page. A doubled-sided drawing in the Courtauld is one such example, which belongs to a series of preparatory studies for the *Martyrdom of Saints John and Paul with the Madonna and Child above*, now in the Musée des Augustins in Toulouse. **(Fig. 9)** Saints John and Paul were brothers and Roman officers, beheaded for their Christian faith in A.D. 362 during the reign of Emperor Julian the Apostate¹⁴. On the verso, the executioner dominates both the saints and the composition. He lunges forward with a sword in his right hand and with his left, grips the

hair of one saint who is kneeling on the ground. Here, Guercino creates a visible progression of figures and actions, from the head of the executioner, to the head of the saint he grasps, to the headless corpse of the other saint. The steep, downward thrust of the composition is accentuated by the position of the sword, underscoring the process of bodily execution, the motion of striking down on the neck. Although the drawing represents the martyrdom of Saints John and Paul, it can also be read as a narrative of the different phases of executing a single saint, unfolding the process of martyrdom in a similar fashion to Ribera's Bartholomew drawing. On the recto, the composition has shifted from the verso and is closer to the orientation of the final painting. **(Fig. 10)**

In a reversal of Guercino's Courtauld drawing of Saint Bartholomew, here the executioner is positioned in the centre of the sheet, flanked by the two saints. Portrayed from behind, the executioner implicates the viewer as a participant in the scene; standing before the work, we seem to identify with him for, just as he rotates his body between the saints, so, too, does our eye dart between the figures. The executioner acts as a visual and narrative hinge between two different moments, the 'before' and 'after' of the execution. Like the verso, the recto can equally be read as the martyrdom of two saints, and as two distinct moments of a single execution. Operating as a pivot between these two moments, the executioner places his hand on the back of the kneeling figure, while the blade of his sword points to the freshly executed corpse. Towards the centre of the composition is the hand of the executioner, gripping the handle of his sword. Delineated by line and wash, this prominent hand at once symbol-

ises the hand of the executioner that carries out this gruesome task, and recalls the hand of the artist that created this violent scene.

Moreover, in a drawing of the same subject from the Mahon Collection, Guercino has appended a small flap of paper over the head of the executioner, which allowed him to try out an alternative head without losing the original. **(Figs. 11 and 12)** This paper correction is especially fitting to the subject of the drawing: while the torturer-executioner permanently removes the heads of Saints John and Paul, the artist-executioner adds a detachable head to his tormentor. The moment represented here is one of suspension, a pause between the two tasks. However, in undoubtedly his most gruesome drawing of the series, Guercino does not hesitate to explore the possibilities of depicting the executioner in the process of decapitating one of the saints. **(Fig. 13)** Having already struck the neck with his sword, which he has now abandoned on the ground, here the executioner uses his knife to sever the head completely, while blood spews out of the saint's mouth and wound. The intense focus on the victim's suffering turns this drawing into a Riberesque depiction of violence. Specifically, it recalls the Spaniard's red and black chalk drawing of *David and Goliath*, where the artist captures the force needed by David to sever the head, and also Goliath's helpless expression as he writhes in agony¹⁵.

Perhaps more than any other drawing of violence by Guercino, the Courtauld study of the *Assassination of Amnon* articulates most forcefully the inherent dialogue between the processes of executing subject and object. **(Fig. 14)** One of a series of preliminary drawings for a painting commissioned by the Bolognese patron Lorenzo Fiora-

vanti in 1628, the drawing represents Absalom's revenge on his half-brother Amnon for having raped their sister, Tamar.¹⁶ The speed and energy that radiate from the page echo the speed and aggression of the assassination, as the artist and the assailants both attack their subjects with respective pen and dagger. Even the sharp diagonal of the table's edge appears to be attacking Amnon. The vigorous handling of the medium itself intensifies the rapport between style and subject, suggesting that a violent theme calls for a violent manner of drawing.

The problematic relationship, though, between physical violence and its visual representation is further heightened in Ribera's *Inquisition scene*, currently in the Rhode Island School of Design Museum. **(Fig. 15)** The cast of this scene is restricted to three characters: the accused, suspended by his wrists in mid-air from a hoist, which acts as a visual framing device around the central action; the inquisitor, who interrogates the criminal; and the notary, who documents the proceedings. Unlike many of the artist's drawings depicting bound figures, this one does not represent a scene of execution but, rather, of torture. The particular method portrayed – known as *lo strappado* in Italian or *la garrucha* in Spanish – involves tying the hands of the accused behind his back, and then hanging him by his wrists from a rope on a hoist. Torture would begin immediately, as the gravitational pull of the person's body slowly caused his shoulders to become dislocated. In order to relieve himself of the pain, the man in Ribera's drawing attempts to heave his body upwards. As a result of his struggling, the figure's trousers have become loosened – indeed, he may be squirming to try and hold them up – but any attempt to save himself of further humiliation

is in vain, for he has lost all control of his bodily functions and defecates on the ground.

Like the suspended figure, the inquisitor and notary play a prominent part in the scene, performing their respective roles of speaking and writing. However, in contrast to the artist's drawing of the *Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew*, for example, where the executioner is stripping the skin from the saint's arm, here the inquisitor does not personally carry out the task of torturing the criminal. There is a physical separation between the interrogator and the accused, who is being tortured not by human hands but, rather, by the device of the *strappado* and the weight of his own body. As opposed to being equipped with the tools of an executioner such as a knife or sword, it is significant that in this drawing, the inquisitor is clutching a pen and paper, suggesting that like the secretary behind him, he, too, may note down some aspect of the interrogation. The seated monk-like figure, portrayed with the hint of a pen in his right hand, is no doubt a Notary of the Secreto, whose job it was to record meticulously every word muttered and gesture made during the trial process. In fact, the notary may not only write, but also draw what lies before him, thus creating an intimate parallel with the artist himself, who executes this image of torture.

The practice of documenting contemporary modes of violence in visual form was not limited to the sketchbooks of professional artists, but can also be observed in the margins of criminal testimonies¹⁷. The 2001 exhibition, *Giustizia e criminalità nello stato pontificio. Ne delicta remaneant impunita* at the Archivio di Stato in Rome, brought to light many official tribunal documents from the Seicento on which are crude-

ly scrawled images of torture and execution¹⁸. Of great significance for our purposes is the discovery that notaries also documented the *strappado* (Fig. 16). They wrote in books of two different formats: long thin ones for during the proceedings, and larger ones for recopying afterwards. They also executed two different types of drawings: rapid marginal sketches (during) and worked up drawings (after).

The image of Ribera as an observer of reality – as opposed to the caricature of him as a sadistic personality – carries more weight when considering his torture drawings within a wider contemporary context of recording violent scenes not only textually, but also pictorially. Unlike the tribunal documents, however, which detail every aspect of an individual's trial, in Ribera's *Inquisition scene*, despite the specificity of the torture device portrayed, the identity of the criminal, the exact nature of his crime and the particular institution that is judging him remain to be clarified.

Given Ribera's geographical movements from Spain to Rome and eventually Naples, the *strappado* was certainly a form of torture which he would have been able to see. In his 1634 publication, *Il forastiero*, the lawyer Giulio Cesare Capaccio writes of the different types of torture and execution exhibited outside the Tribunale della Vicaria, listing the horrific sights and sounds to which he exposed himself when going there daily, only 'per curiosità'.¹⁹ Though the *strappado* is not explicitly mentioned in Capaccio's text, it does, however, appear in a painting of the Vicaria by an anonymous seventeenth-century artist²⁰. This work gives us an insight into the violent scenes of everyday life that Ribera and his contemporaries would have witnessed. The *strappado* was designed not only

to torture physically, but also to expose and shame publicly the accused by raising him high above the ground for all to see. Beyond its expression of power, it was equally intended to strike fear in the masses by sending out a message of warning: *that person up there could be you*.

The bound figure: bodies lofty and low

Of all the sacred and secular representations of bound figures by Guercino and Ribera, perhaps the most archetypal case study is that of Saint Sebastian. A Roman soldier sentenced to death in the fourth century for his conversion to Christianity, Sebastian was shot with arrows – his first attempted execution – then miraculously restored to health, but was later fully martyred by being beaten to death²¹. Images of Sebastian were frequent during the Seicento, as he was often invoked during times of plague, and he was also a popular subject when studying the nude male body. Guercino’s version in the Courtauld Gallery’s collection depicts an idealised saint and an idealised martyrdom (Fig. 17). Drawings of Sebastian by Ribera typically represent the figure with his armpit exposed, revealing his vulnerability, as in a striking red and black chalk study from the Gere collection²².

In Guercino’s drawing, however, the armpit is concealed by a drooping head. The form of the tree echoes the body of the saint, and different strokes of the pen are employed to evoke different textures: fine, light lines create the smooth surface of the skin, while broad, heavy lines articulate the rough texture of the bark.

Guercino here portrays the suspended moment during the saint’s attempted martyrdom, after he has been shot by two arrows, and just before he is

pierced by a third which sails through the air. Like his drawings of Saints John and Paul, this image of Sebastian depicts the violence that has already occurred, leaving the spectator in anticipation of the inevitable violence to come. The motif of the flying arrow also recalls the flying devil with pitchfork in Guercino’s *Diablerie* drawing, and the effect achieved is analogous to a still frame in a movie, suggesting a highly cinemagraphic conception of the scene²³.

A contrasting interpretation of the bound man theme can be found in Ribera’s red chalk drawing of a *Man tied to a tree, and a figure resting*, also in the Courtauld Gallery (Fig. 18). Here, the artist fully exploits his mastery at depicting an unidentified elderly saint in a complicated pose with twisting limbs. Like Guercino, Ribera rhymes body-parts to tree-parts: torso to trunk, limb to branch. He also pushes the boundaries of mimetic representation, demonstrating what drawing can achieve that cannot be done in nature. The position of the central figure is difficult, if not anatomically impossible to recreate, and the artist has exaggerated the proportions of the body, elongating his extended arm and leg. When considering Ribera’s artistic practice, it is important to recall that he followed the Caravaggist mode of representation by working after the live model. However, the status of Ribera as a ‘follower’ of Caravaggio is fundamentally problematic, for the two artists diverged sharply in their attitude towards drawings. Caravaggio’s painterly ‘realism’ involved translating nature directly onto canvas, sidestepping the preliminary drawing on paper in order to avoid perfecting a composition or figure.²⁴ A prolific draughtsman throughout his career, Ribera thus complicated the Caravaggist mode of

‘realism’ by not only painting after life, but also drawing after life.

Exemplified by Guercino’s *Accademia del nudo*, one type of drawing that was widely practiced in Italy during the seventeenth century was the so-called ‘academy’ drawing, an exercise that entailed studying the nude body and depicting the model in various positions. Given that Ribera’s sketches of bound male saints have been loosely related by scholars to these ‘academy’ drawings, visual evidence suggests that the Courtauld sheet may also, in part at least, have originally been an ‘academy’ drawing, in the broadest sense of the term.²⁵ If the page is rotated horizontally, it becomes apparent that Ribera may have started to draw this figure from a posed model lying on the ground. The gesture of the arm beseeching outwards can equally be read as reaching upwards when the page is turned, and this raised arm can be found in a number of related works, such as the gesture of Bartholomew in Ribera’s painting in the Palazzo Pitti.²⁶ Likewise, the angle of the back is analogous to that found in pictures of *Saint Sebastian tended by the Holy Women*.²⁷ Although the position of the figure’s left arm does not suggest a model resting on the ground, it seems that Ribera may have worked after life only in part, at once imitating and manipulating the human form. A potential painted source for the Courtauld sheet may well have been Domenichino’s fresco of the *Flagellation of Saint Andrew*, which Ribera could have seen in the Oratory of Sant’Andrea at San Gregorio Magno in Rome.²⁸ This suggestion would lend further weight to an implied reference to Saint Andrew in the drawing: the sinewy arm of the man intersects the blasted branch of the tree to create an X-shape, suggestive of the X-shaped cross on which

Saint Andrew was crucified, and the beseeching gesture recalls the role of Andrew as preacher.²⁹

The problematic question of orientation, however, is not limited to the Courtauld sheet. Scholars have long debated on the correct orientation of Ribera’s *Ixion*, which now hangs vertically in the Prado, but which may have been designed as a horizontal composition like its pendant, *Tityus*, the direction of the signature further supporting this theory.³⁰ Moreover, the study sheet for *Tityus* or *Prometheus* in the British Museum indicates that Ribera may have rotated the page as he was experimenting with different positions of the figure.³¹ Given these related examples in paint and on paper, it seems that Ribera may not have conceived his bodies under torture solely from a fixed position.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the Courtauld drawing, however, is the ambiguous relationship between the bound man and the seated figure. Ribera’s rendering of the latter is so subtle that the clue seems to lie in his pose and the object on which he is sitting. It may be argued that this figure is not simply resting, but actually defecating. The object on the ground appears to be a bucket or chamber pot, its rounded handle in profile at the back; the figure’s breeches seem to be loose and he may, in fact, be holding his shirttails in his hands. The arched back of the figure and his location at the base of the tree are comparable with the print of a defecating man from Jacques Callot’s *Capricci di varie figure* series, lending further support to this interpretation. **(Fig. 19)**

Scatological subjects are not out of character in Ribera’s torture drawings, as we have observed in his *Inquisition scene*. Despite the seriousness of the subject, its mocking tone becomes ap-

parent when relating the corpulence of the notary to the excretion of the accused, and when considering the irony of the situation: the inquisitor wants a confession and all he gets is shit. Likewise, Ribera's drawing of a *Man about to administer an enema to another man tied to a tree* puts a satirical spin on a scatological subject.³² The connection between defecation and humour had long since been made in the genre of caricature, for example the *Sheet of studies* ascribed to Agostino or Annibale Carracci, which depicts a putto defecating on an altar.³³ And bodily functions certainly did not escape the work of Guercino, as revealed in a *Satirical scene with three figures and a chamber pot* in the Morgan Library & Museum. (**Fig. 20**)

But how might this interpretation inform our reading of the Courtauld drawing? It seems that the inclusion of a defecating figure could allude to proverbial language.³⁴ Ribera's model for this figure may well have been an early example of a Spanish *caganer*, or figurine portrayed in the act of defecation, which appeared in nativity scenes in Catalonia and elsewhere in Spain, including Valencia and Naples, during the early modern period³⁵. Not only would such a motif have been suited to a religious scene, but also its allusion to the Spanish proverb, 'Dung is no saint, but where it falls it works miracles', is especially fitting to this sheet.³⁶ Furthermore, the visual opposition between the saintly man and the defecating figure recalls the fundamental play of opposites that defines the burlesque poetry of Francesco Berni. Ribera may have known Berni's poems, notably 'In lode dell'orinale', which elevates the low object of the urinal by recalling its worldly significance:

He who has no great natural gifts / and a lot of knowledge / cannot know what the urinal is / nor how many

things are inside it; / I mean, besides urine / there are nearly one hundred [...] And, first of all, I say it should be known / that the urinal is round / the better to hold more things: / it is made just like the world / for the fact that it has a circular shape / means that it has no ending or bottom: / everyone who knows how to build walls knows this / and every one who understands architecture / which teaches one how to measure things³⁷.

Like Berni's poem, Ribera's Courtauld sheet combines the serious and the satirical, the high and the low, revealing how his 'torture drawings' do not fall neatly within one category and are open to a multiplicity of interpretations.

Conclusion: the bottom line?

This essay has juxtaposed a wide range of works on paper by two of the greatest seventeenth-century European artists. Though not intentionally seeking to set them up in opposition to each other, the present study has, nevertheless, identified certain points of disparity as well as commonality between their depictions of violent subjects.

Both Guercino and Ribera demonstrate a shared interest in the intersecting processes of drawing and torture in their representations of violence on paper. Ribera is consistently preoccupied with portraying the moment *during* the torture, when the victim is in the process of *enduring* physical pain. Although Guercino does represent figures such as Marsyas and Bartholomew as they are being flayed alive, he ultimately tends to suspend the violence of a scene by focusing on the moment immediately preceding or following the action, sometimes conflating both on the same sheet. While most of his drawings were preparatory for painting commissions, drawings were not

simply stages in a longer creative process for Guercino, but also works of art in their own right. This is indicated by the fact that he carefully preserved them in his studio for instructional and documentary purposes.

Just as the author's manuscript provides a window into the laboratory of the writer, so, too, does the draughtsman's sketchbook provide a window into the laboratory of the artist, shedding light on his process of creation. Yet, the extent to which an artist's drawings are a direct reflection of his personality remains a question of considerable debate.

I would argue that, like Guercino, Ribera did not necessarily have to be a sadist in order to produce his images of violence, and I would tend to

agree with Manuela Mena, who ends her 1992 essay on Ribera's drawings by stating that 'the idea of Ribera as an unbalanced personality, prone to cruelty, is a superficial explanation for works that are indisputably well within a tradition that culminates in the eighteenth century with the Venetian capriccio'.³⁸ As Guercino and Ribera's works testify, this tradition of exploring violent subjects in paint and on paper had its roots firmly planted in the Seicento. If Guercino is regarded as the 'Rembrandt of the South', he may equally be considered, in certain instances, the 'Ribera of the North'.

**Fig. 1**

Nude figure of a youth lying on his back, with his left arm and leg raised, by Guercino. 1618.

Pen and brown ink, brush with brown wash. 228 x 239 mm
(The Courtauld Gallery, London).

**Fig. 2**

Apollo flaying Marsyas, by Guercino. 1618.

Oil on canvas. 185 x 200 cm
(Palazzo Pitti, Florence).

**Fig. 4**

Apollo and Marsyas, by Jusepe de Ribera. 1637.

Oil on canvas. 182 x 232 cm
(Museo di Capodimonte, Naples).

**Fig. 3**

Apollo flaying Marsyas, by Guercino. 1618. Pen and brown and black ink and brown wash. 194 x 265 mm

(The Royal Collection, Windsor Castle).

**Fig. 5**

Apollo and Marsyas, by Jusepe de Ribera. c.1637.

Pen and brown ink. 100 x 120 mm
(Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica, Rome).

Fig. 6
Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew, by Guercino. 1635. Pen and brown ink, brush with brown and grey washes. 234 x 256 mm
(The Courtauld Gallery, London).

**Fig. 7**

Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew, by Jusepe de Ribera. 1649?.

Pen and brown ink, with brown wash, over traces of black chalk.
177 x 132 mm
(The Morgan Library & Museum, New York).



Fig. 8
Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew, by Jusepe de Ribera. 1624.
 Etching and engraving, 314 x 241 mm
 (The British Museum, London).



Fig. 12
Martyrdom of Saints John and Paul (with paper correction open),
 by Guercino. 1630–2. Pen and brown ink and brown wash,
 with faint traces of greyish wash in the brown. 188 x 229 mm
 (Mahon Collection, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).



Fig. 9
Martyrdom of Saints John and Paul (verso), by Guercino. 1630–2.
 Pen and brown ink, brush with brown wash. 239 x 310 mm
 (The Courtauld Gallery, London).



Fig. 10
Martyrdom of Saints John and Paul (recto), by Guercino. 1630–2.
 Pen and brown ink, brush with brown wash. 239 x 310 mm
 (The Courtauld Gallery, London).

Fig. 13
Martyrdom of Saints John and Paul, by Guercino. c.1631.
 Pen and brown ink, brush with brown wash. 207 x 302 mm
 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).

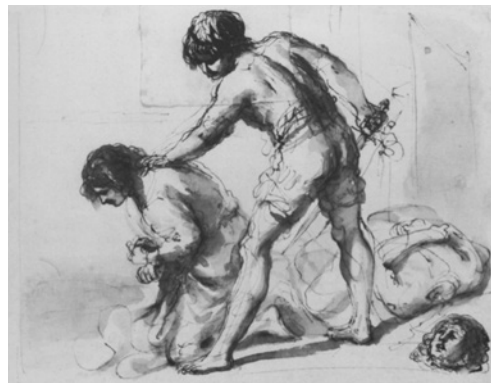


Fig. 11
Martyrdom of Saints John and Paul (with paper correction closed),
 by Guercino. 1630–2. Pen and brown ink and brown wash, with
 faint traces of greyish wash in the brown. 188 x 229 mm
 (Mahon Collection, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).



Fig. 14
Assassination of Amnon, by Guercino. 1628. Pen and brown ink,
 brush with brown wash. 200 x 263 mm
 (The Courtauld Gallery, London).



Fig. 15
Inquisition scene, by Jusepe de Ribera. After 1635.
Pen and brown ink, and brown wash. 208 x 165 mm
(Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence).



Fig. 17
Saint Sebastian, by Guercino. c.1642.
Pen and brown ink, brush with brown wash. 194 x 229 mm
(The Courtauld Gallery, London).



Fig. 16
Tribunale criminale del senatore. reg. 1339, c. 26v–27r. 2 April 1596.
(Archivio di Stato, Rome).



Fig. 18
Man tied to a tree, and a figure resting, by Jusepe de Ribera. c.1630.
Red chalk. 241 x 150 mm
(The Courtauld Gallery, London).



Fig. 19
Capricci di varie figure, by Jacques Callot. c.1617.
Etching. 55 x 80 mm
(The British Museum, London).



Fig. 20
Satirical scene with three figures and a chamber pot by Guercino.
Undated. Pen and dark brown ink. 191 x 318 mm
(The Morgan Library & Museum, New York).

Notes:

This essay derives from my Ph.D. dissertation, ‘Violence and corporeality in the art of Jusepe de Ribera’ (The Courtauld Institute of Art, 2012). I would like to thank Deborah Swallow for encouraging me to write the piece, Sheila McTighe for her invaluable suggestions, and Edina Adam for editorial advice. I am also grateful to Orietta B. Adam, Francesco Gonzales and Suzanne Marriott for coordinating the publication.

- ¹ Guercino acquired his nickname following a childhood accident; Ribera’s was given to him in Italy.
- ² For particularly scathing comments by John Ruskin, see G. Finaldi and M. Kitson: exh. cat. *Discovering the Italian Baroque: the Denis Mahon collection*, London (The National Gallery) 1997, pp. 8–10, and N. Glendinning and H. Macartney, eds.: *Spanish art in Britain and Ireland, 1750–1920: studies in reception in memory of Enriqueta Harris Frankfort*, Woodbridge 2010, p. 204.
- ³ J. Brooks: exh. cat. *Guercino: mind to paper*, Los Angeles (J. Paul Getty Museum) and London (The Courtauld Gallery) 2006, p. 16, n. 2.
- ⁴ M. Mena: ‘Drawing in the art of Ribera’ in A.E. Pérez Sánchez and N. Spinosa: exh. cat. *Jusepe de Ribera, 1591–1652*, New York (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) 1992, p. 196 and Z. Véliz: *Spanish drawings in the Courtauld Gallery: complete catalogue*, London 2011, p. 228.
- ⁵ G. Finaldi: ‘Aspects of the life and work of Jusepe de Ribera 1591–1652’, Ph.D. diss. (The Courtauld Institute of Art, 1995), p. 266; ‘Dibujos inéditos y otros poco conocidos de Jusepe de Ribera’, *Boletín del Museo del Prado* 23, no. 41 (2005), p. 29; ‘Jusepe de Ribera: the iconography of pain in his drawings’ in F. Solinas and S. Schütze, eds.: *Le Dessin napolitain*, Rome 2010, pp. 75–80. For the most recent study on violence in Ribera’s drawings, see S. Vincenzi: ‘Violence physique et atteintes corporelles dans l’œuvre desinée de Jusepe de Ribera (1591–1652)’, M.A. diss. (Université de Nice, 2011).
- ⁶ J. Brown: exh. cat. *Jusepe de Ribera: prints and drawings*, Princeton (The Art Museum) 1973, pp. 146–7.
- ⁷ Finaldi, *op. cit.* (note 5), pp. 267–8, n. 133; p. 43, n. 24; p. 80, n. 21.
- ⁸ Brooks, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 4; C. Malvasia: *Felsina Pittrice* II, Bologna 1841, p. 272: ‘Natura piacevole, allegra, e di conversazione gustosissima, d’applicazione indesessa, sincerissimo, inimico della bugia, cortesissimo, umile, compassionevole, religioso, casto.’
- ⁹ Ovid: *Metamorphoses*, trans. F. Justus Miller, London and Cambridge, Massachusetts 1946, VI 388: ‘crur undique manat’.
- ¹⁰ N. Turner: exh. cat. *Guercino: drawings from Windsor Castle*, Fort Worth (Kimbell Art Museum), Washington (National Gallery of Art) and New York (The Drawing Center) 1991, p. 26.
- ¹¹ J. Voragine: *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints* II, trans. W. Granger Ryan, Princeton 1993, pp. 109–16.
- ¹² Brooks, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 62.
- ¹³ For further discussion, see E. Payne: ‘Skinning the surface: Ribera’s executions of Bartholomew, Silenus and Marsyas’ in M. Kapustka, ed.: *Bild-Riss / The Image Split*, pp. 85 - 100, forthcoming in 2013.
- ¹⁴ Voragine I, *op. cit.* (note 11), pp. 336–8.
- ¹⁵ *David and Goliath*, by Jusepe de Ribera. c. 1625–30. Red and black chalk. 258 x 423/425 mm (Private collection, New York. Promised gift to The Hispanic Society of America, New York).
- ¹⁶ 2 Samuel 13:1–29.
- ¹⁷ Finaldi acknowledges such documents in his Ph.D. dissertation: Finaldi, *op. cit.* (note 5), pp. 263–4, n. 123. They are also noted in R.M. San Juan: *Rome: A City Out of Print*, Minneapolis 2001, p. 251.
- ¹⁸ M. Calzolari *et al.*: *Giustizia e criminalità nello stato pontificio. Ne delicta remaneant impunita*, Rome 2001.
- ¹⁹ G. Capaccio: *Il forastiero*, Naples 1634, pp. 624–7.
- ²⁰ *Tribunal of the Vicaria*, by Anonymous Neapolitan. 17th century. Oil on canvas. 140 x 100 cm (Certosa and Musco di San Martino, Naples).
- ²¹ Voragine I, *op. cit.* (note 11), pp. 97–101.

- ²² *Saint Sebastian*, by Jusepe de Ribera. c. 1625–30. Red chalk, pen and brown ink. 173 x 120 mm (John A. Gere Collection, London).
- ²³ *Diablerie*, by Guercino. c. 1618–19. Pen and wash. 239/240 x 353/355 mm (Mahon Collection).
- ²⁴ Caravaggio did, however, score directly into his canvases with the back end of his brush to indicate the contours of his figures: K. Christiansen: ‘Caravaggio and “L’esempio davanti del naturale”’, *The Art Bulletin* 68, no. 3 (September 1986), pp. 421–45.
- ²⁵ Mena in Pérez Sánchez and Spinosa, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 200.
- ²⁶ *The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew*, by Jusepe de Ribera. c. 1628. Oil on canvas. 145 x 216 cm (Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence).
- ²⁷ *Saint Sebastian tended by the Holy Women*, by Jusepe de Ribera. c. 1621. Oil on canvas. 180.3 x 231.6 cm (Museo de Bellas Artes, Bilbao) and *Saint Sebastian tended by the Holy Women*, by Jusepe de Ribera. 1628. Oil on canvas. 188 x 156 cm (Hermitage, St. Petersburg).
- ²⁸ *Flagellation of Saint Andrew*, by Domenichino. 1608–9. Fresco. (Oratory of Sant’Andrea, Church of San Gregorio Magno, Rome).
- ²⁹ I am indebted to Hannah Ware and John Gash for these observations.
- ³⁰ A. Úbeda de los Cobos, ed.: exh. cat. *Paintings for the Planet King: Philip IV and the Buen Retiro Palace*, Madrid (Museo Nacional del Prado) 2005, pp. 236–7.
- ³¹ M. McDonald: exh. cat. *Renaissance to Goya: Prints and Drawings from Spain*, London (The British Museum) 2012, p. 186.
- ³² *Man about to administer an enema to another man tied to a tree*, by Jusepe de Ribera. Pen, brown ink and wash. 221 x 184 mm (Private collection, Munich-Vienna).
- ³³ *Sheet of studies*, by Agostino or Annibale Carracci. 1590s. Pen and brown ink. 176 x 165 mm (The British Museum, London).
- ³⁴ On proverbial imagery in early modern Europe, see S. McTighe: *The Imaginary Everyday: Genre Painting and Prints in Italy and France, 1580–1670*, New York and Pittsburgh 2007.
- ³⁵ I am grateful to David McGrath for this suggestion.
- ³⁶ *The Wisdom of Many Essays on the Proverb*, ed. W. Mieder and A. Dundes, Madison, Wisconsin 1994, p. 267: ‘El estiércol no es santo, mas do cae hace milagro’.
- ³⁷ F. Berni: *Il primo libro delle opera burlesche*, London 1721, pp. 47–8:
Chi non à molto ben del naturale, / E un gran pezzo di conoscimento; / Non può saper che cosa è l’Orinale, / Nè quante cose vi si faccin drentro, / Dico senza il servigio dell’orina, / Che sono a ogni modo, presso a cento. [...] E prima innanzi tratto è da sapere / Che l’Orinale è a quel modo tondo, / Acciocchè possa più cose tenere: / È fatto proprio com’è fatto il mondo, / Che per aver la forma circolare, / Voglion dir che non à nè fin nè fondo: / Questo lo sa ognun che sa murare, / E che s’intende dell’Architettura, / Che’nsegna altrui le cose misurare.
For the English translation, see M. Tafuri: *Venice and the Renaissance*, trans. Jessica Levine, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London 1989, p. 69.
- ³⁸ Mena in Pérez Sánchez and Spinosa, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 201.

PICTURE CREDITS

Lucretia by Guercino (Photographs by: Giacomo Gallarate) - Private Collection © Managed by The Sir Denis Mahon Charitable Trust

Portrait of Sir Denis Mahon by Francesco Gonzales (Photograph by: Mario Finotti) - Private Collection © Managed by The Sir Denis Mahon Charitable Trust

Manuscript of Handel’s Lucretia: Gerald Coke Handel Collection, accession no. 165. © Foundling Museum

All other images: As credited by the Authors in their respective essays in this catalogue.

TEXT CREDITS

© The Authors hold the copyright of their contributions.

Copyright © 2013

The Sir Denis Mahon Charitable Trust
All rights reserved

Acknowledgments

This publication was produced to accompany the exhibition
Guercino and Handel at the Foundling Museum, London
17 September 2013 - 26 January 2014

The Trustees of *The Sir Denis Mahon Charitable Trust*,
The Gerald Coke Handel Collection and the Foundling Museum would like to thank:

The Authors, Orietta Benocci Adam, Alec Cobbe,
Alfred and Ronald Cohen, Cristina Fava, Francesco Gonzales, Fausto Gozzi, Cinzia Lacchia,
Olimpia Marini Clarelli, Patrizia Rossi, Carlo Maria Scaciga, Nicholas Turner, Tim Warner Johnson,
and all the staff of the Foundling Museum and The Gerald Coke Handel Collection.

PRINTED IN THE MONTH OF AUGUST 2013
BY ITALGRAFICA SRL NOVARA (ITALY)