

Artemisia

3 October 2020 – 24 January 2021
The National Gallery, London

English translation of Artemisia's letters to her lover Francesco Maria Maringhi

The letters were first transcribed and published by Francesco Solinas in 2011 and a revised edition will appear shortly (F. Solinas (ed.), *Lettere di Artemisia*, Rome 2020). Artemisia's erratic punctuation and grammar have been retained to reflect the Italian original as much as possible.

In 2011, a group of letters written by Artemisia to her Florentine lover Francesco Maria Maringhi was discovered. Mostly exchanged once the couple were living in different cities, the small selection displayed in the exhibition offers a glimpse into Artemisia's most intimate thoughts and feelings. Having taught herself to read and write, her letters are full of grammatical mistakes and phonetic spellings. Nevertheless, Artemisia communicates with equal fervour about the urgent return of her belongings, the loss of her son Cristofano, and her yearning for her distant lover. Her strong personality comes sharply into focus, forcing us to adjust any preconceptions we might have of her as a victim. Instead, a witty, passionate woman emerges, determined to control her own destiny and gain the respect she deserves.

All these letters are preserved in the Archivio Storico Frescobaldi, Florence © All rights reserved.

Florence, undated (1618–19)

*To the Illustrious Signore Francesco Maringhi
Florence*

My dearest heart

I should like for Your Lordship to come here as soon as possible, as I wish to travel to Bologna, and yet I should first like to speak to Your Lordship, and if it is Your Lordship's wish that I should come to you, please do not leave the house tomorrow, as I do not want to wait and increase my suffering. I shall sign off here and bid you farewell.

*Your Lordship's affectionate
Artemisia Lomi*

Rome, 25 March 1620

*To the Most Illustrious Signor Francesco Maria Maringhi,
my most honoured master, may God preserve him.
Florence*

My Lord

*Such is my desire to see you that I am on the point of coming to you with the pretext of the painting, but I also pray that Your Lordship may have my possessions returned to me so that I may set my house in order as it was before. Now, if you wish me to come to you and if you love me, I will see to it. I pray that your Lordship will address this letter to *hotesio pilota* [presumably a pseudonym], otherwise I fear they will be taken away, now do as you wish. I would love to see you, and I believe that Your Lordship would love to see me, but you will see me very different to when I left: indeed you will not recognise me now I am twice as large. I shall be changed in body and Your Lordship in soul, and thus we will have created Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and it will not be good for us. Give me your answer as soon as you can and may God preserve you. From Rome, the first day of the year sixteen hundred and twenty, your affectionate servant, Artemisia Lomi.*

// reverse //

I have taken the inventory and do not know [missing text] who I know was the one who found it now Your Lordship [missing text] and do not give anything to anyone.

Rome, 11 April 1620

To the Illustrious Signore Fortunio Fortuni [the pseudonym they assumed in their correspondence] may God preserve him in Florence

*Comfort of my life,
I have received two letters from Your Lordship, causing me much distress to hear that Your Lordship was put to great trouble on my account, although it is a matter of much distress to me that I was unable to come to a solution such that my possessions did not have to be sold, and I myself do not know what Love led me to do, but since I have been left with nothing, I shall remain here living like a hermit. I now see that fortune has turned her back on me, as she is robbing me of all things dear and useful to me, and for proof, consider that God has taken my son away from me, it is now five days since he died and I have been dying of grief. It has occurred to me that the love that Your Lordship felt so strongly for me is beginning to leave you, because I see that you cannot take the time to write to me, you only send me two lines and yet if you loved me it would never finish. It is enough that Your Lordship tells me that you feel worse than ever. Farewell, and if hearts could be seen, we would see great things, and believe me*

// reverse //

Signor Mar.[inghi], that it is my lot to suffer so very greatly and not yours, since Your Lordship has directed your flames [of passion] elsewhere. I believe that Your Lordship has substituted yours with mine, and I wish I were permitted to give my explanations to Signor Bellerofonte [Maringhi's acquaintance Bellerofonte Castaldi], who would also acknowledge how much greater my suffering is than yours. Enough, things could not be worse for me. Your Lordship, who is my only cure, my heart is close to death, remember she who loves you so much. Farewell and an end to both good and ill, which have brought me both distress and joy, from Rome on the 11th April 1620.

*Your Most Illustrious Lordship's,
Most Affectionate Servant
Fortunio Fortuni*

Rome, 26 June 1620

To the Illustrious Signore Fortunio Fortuni may God preserve him in Florence

*My heart,
I have received from your Lordship one of those [letters] that are my comfort and bring me back from death to life, and were you aware of the joy that I feel, I am sure that if it's true that you love me you would equally feel joy. Your Lordship tells me that you know no other woman besides your right hand, envied by me so much, for it possesses that which I cannot possess myself, and then you thank me for having offered you my house. Oh, my dear life! You do me wrong, as you well know that I am yours so long as I still draw breath. The only thing that destroys me is not seeing you near me, and rest assured that I await you as one awaits God's grace, that I am resolved not to engage in that pursuit except with you, and if you do not come, I would never ever want to break my celibacy. But I leave you, my soul, to think about the state I am in, I cannot control my feelings in my heart when I receive letters from you. I have held fast so far, but find it hard to take heart for the future, as I know what state I am in. I would urge you with all my heart not to use that portrait of mine, doing that impossible thing that*

// reverse //

remember you promised not to do but which perhaps Your Lordship does. I would only remind you that it is a great sin, and I want you to remember that I love your soul as much as your body, so my darling thank me if you love me. Nothing more to say and may God preserve you, on this day the twenty-sixth of June.

Completely wholly Your Lordship's, Artemisia Lomi