**Susanna and the Elders (6th century BC)**

One hot afternoon Susanna is enjoying a bath in her husband’s private garden. As she bathes, two elders who were watching her from the bushes reveal themselves, demanding that she give in to their advances. When Susanna refuses, they threaten to accuse her of adultery. Susanna continues to deny them and is arrested and taken to trial. Although Susanna asserts her innocence, no one believes her word over the elders’. Susanna is sentenced to death but right before she is taken away the prophet Daniel arrives. He questions the men separately and easily proves that they are lying, thus proving Susanna’s innocence.

This story takes place 2,500 years ago yet is disturbingly relevant today. Even in the wake of the #metoo movement, women are routinely ignored and disbelieved when they speak up about sexual assault. It is clear from the story that Susanna did nothing to encourage the despicable behavior of these men and that her reputation as a righteous woman was well known. Still, the judges and mob did not even think to question the story of the men because of their political and religious standing in the community. Had Daniel not spoken up on Susanna’s behalf, the elders would have gotten away with it as men continue to do to this day.

This morality tale has been the subject of many works of art and music, exploring Susanna’s bravery, the elders’ wickedness, Daniel’s involvement in the trial, and other aspects of the story. Jaquet de La Guerre’s telling of the story ends with Susanna’s decision to resist the men and instead face death and an admonition by the narrator to be like Susanna and resist evil at whatever the cost.

**Susanne (1708) by Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre (1665-1729)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Contre le saison trop ardenteSusanne, d’une eau Claire empruntoit la fraîcheur;Et cachez pour la voir, deux Veillards qu’elle enchante,D’un regard attentive irritoient leur ardeur.Indiscrette Jeunesse,Qui suives les Amours,Ne croyez pas que la viellesse,Contre-eux vous garde aucun secours.Celuy qu’Amours entraîne,Dans son jeune printemps,Traîne toûjours sa chaîne,Jusqu’à ses derniers ans.Les beautez de Susanne animent leur audace,Ces odieux Amants osent se découvrir,Leur amour, joint à la menace,Veut l’effrayer ou l’attendrir.Cedez, il faut vous rendre,À nos ardents desirs;Pourrez-vous vous defender,Des plus charmants plaisirs?Soulagez nôtre peine,Ou dés ce meme jour;Redoutez une haine,Egale à notre amour.Ils doivent l’accuser d’une ardeur criminelle,Que la Loy punit de la mort;Pour vaincre sa vertu rebelle,C’est de ce piege adroit que se sert leur transport.Inhumains, est-ce ainsi que vois prétendez plaire?Susanne, quell peril! Helas! Qu’allez-vous faire?Vous rendrez-vous à leur courroux,Pour éviter la mort,La meriterez-vous?Non, dit l’Heroïne constant,Vous pouvez me faire perir;Mais s’il me faut mourir,Je mourray du moins innocente.Que la meme ardeur nous anime,Un coeur innocent ne craint rien;Non, pour luy le jour n’est un bien,Que quand il en joüit sans crime. | To combat the sweltering season,Susanna borrows the coolness of a clear stream;and, secretly viewing, two old men enamored of her,arouse their desire with a watchful eye.Indiscreet youththat trails after love,Do not believe that agewill give you any respite.He who is hooked by lovein his youthful springtimedrags that chain forever,until his final years.Susanna’s loveliness inspires their boldness;these odious lovers dare to expose themselves.Their desire, combined with threats,seeks to intimidate or pursuade her.Yield; you must surrender yourselfto our most burning desire;could you possibly ward offthe most enticing pleasure?Ease our yearnings,or from this day onfear a hatredequal to our love.They propose to accuse her of a criminal passion,which the Law punishes by death;to conquer her recalcitrant virtue,this is the clever trap which will serve their purpose.Monsters, is this how you seek to please?Susanna, what danger! Alas! What will you do?To surrender yourself to their debaucheryin order to avoid death;do you deserve this?No, says the faithful heroine,you can put me to death;But if I must die,At least I will die innocent.For the same fervor animates us both,an innocent heart fears nothing;no, for such a heart no day is goodexcept when it is lived without sin. © Pamela Dellal |

**Cleopatra VII Philopator Queen of the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt (69 BC-30 BC)**

Cleopatra was quite the force to be reckoned with in ancient Egypt, she was intelligent, witty, and ruthless. She was proud and resolved in her right to the throne and was determined to keep her power in whatever way she could. She was engaged in various conflicts and power struggles throughout her life, and made enemies with Octavian after aligning herself with Mark Antony

After her defeat by Octavian, Cleopatra refused to be taken prisoner as that would mean experiencing the humiliation of being paraded as a prisoner in the Roman triumph. For the final time Cleopatra took control of her destiny and took her own life. Even when stripped of her power, she refused to have her life dictated by others.

These excerpts from Hasse’s opera take a look at Cleopatra’s state of mind leading up to her death. She holds no fear of death, instead reflecting proudly on the way she has lived her life.

**From Marc’Antonio e Cleopatra (1725) by Johann Adolf Hasse (1699-1783)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Morte col fiero aspetto** orror per me non ha, s’io posso in libertà morir sul trono mio, dove regnai. L’anima uscir dal petto libera spera ognor, sin dalle fasce ancor sì nobile desio meco portai.**Lascia, Antonio,** deh lascia di sì teneri accenti il mesto sfogo. Patimmo già quando dell’Asia il trono illustrato splendea dalle nostre armi e da’ trionfi nostri; tra le pompe e tra gl’ostri di prospera fortuna su l’ali del favore le dolcezze gustai d’un dolce amore. Or infelici siam, tutta già piove sovra del nostro capo di sdegnato destin l’ira crudele. D’inutili querele vano è lo sfogo. Altro a noi far non resta che con anima forte gir gloriosi ad affrontar la morte.**Quel candido armellino** per non macchiar la spoglia al rischio sta vicino, né de fuggir s’invoglia, ma lieto al cacciatore abbandonar si sa. Pria ch’un superbo impero macchi il mio regio onore, di morte il volto fiero non mi spaventerà. | **The ferocious face of death** holds for me no terror, if I may only die in freedom upon the throne on which I reigned. My soul hopes to escape, free from my breast; since early childhood do I bear this noble wish within me.**Stop, Anthony,** oh stop lamenting over such tender sentiments. We have lived to see the illustrious throne of Asia shining with our weapons and trophies; amidst pomp and majesty I enjoyed, on the wings of favoured fortune, the full sweetness of love. Now we are in distress, a cruel fate rains upon our heads in a rage of evil. Our lamenting is in vain. Nothing remains for us than with brave hearts, with honor, to prepare for death.**The white ermine** does not wish its coat to be stained, it defies danger, and does not flee, rather yields joyously to the hunter. Ere a proud power my royal honour does besmirch, will the grim face of death hold no terror for me. Translation: Earl Rosenbaum |

**Joan of Arc (c.1412-1431)**

Joan of Arc grew up in a small village in France in the 15th century. At the age of 13 Joan, a devout Catholic, began to experience holy visions telling her to drive out the English and that she was destined to save France. By 17 Joan had donned men’s clothing and led the French army to victory in the battle of Orléans. With her military strategy and inspirational boldness, Joan turned the tide of the Hundred Years’ War in France’s favor. Her military career lasted only a year before she was betrayed and captured by the English.

The English accused Joan of heresy, witchcraft, apostasy and more. Throughout the trial she astonished the court and people with her steadfast faith and intelligent responses. As they were unable to disprove the legitimacy of her visions she was charged with cross dressing and sentenced to death.

Joan’s life and experiences fall in line with the medieval archetype of “holy transvestite”. Despite the social and political risks that came with such an experience, Joan was steadfast in her divinely appointed right to wear men’s garments and ultimately was burned at the stake for exercising that right.

Amy Beth Kirsten’s “Saviour” designs a soundscape and scene of the visions Joan of Arc experienced in the moments before her death. You may hear the murmuring of the crowd, crackling of the fire, and Joan calling out for Jesus. The text comes from the poem “Les Roses de Saadi” by Marceline Desbordes-Valmore.

**Fire (from Savior) (2016) by Amy Beth Kirsten (b. 1972)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| J’ai voulu ce matin te rapporter des roses;Mais j’en avais tant pris dans mes ceintures closes Que les nœuds trop serrés n’ont pu les contenir.*Jésu, Jésu…*Les nœuds ont éclaté. Les roses envolées Dans le vent, à la mer s’en sont toutes allées. Elles ont suivi l’eau pour ne plus revenir.*Jésu, Jésu…*La vague en a paru rouge et comme enflammée. Ce soir, ma robe encore en est toute embaumée... Respires-en sur moi l’odorant souvenir.*Jésu...? Can you hear me? Won’t you come?*Pleur alors, fille braveque ma voix te fasse pleurer, enfant fidèle, *Jésu won’t you come?* | This morning I wanted to bring you roses,But I had put so many in my fastened sashThat the knots, too tightly tied, could not hold them.The knots burst open. The roses, taking flight In the wind, were all carried off into the sea. They flowed with the water, never to return.They made the waves appear red, as though on fire. This evening, my dress is still perfumed with them... Inhale their fragrant memory upon me.Weep now good daughter, let my voice Make you weep faithful child.Translation by Hai-Ting Chinn, 2017 |

**Try Me, Good King (2001) by Libby Larsen (b. 1950)**

Divorce, behead, die, divorce, behead, die. This grade school memory game is how I first came to know about the six wives of Henry the VIII, King of England from 1509 to 1547. Since then, I’ve been fascinated with the personal consequences of power that befell the Tudor family and the circle of political intrigue of both church and state which caused such a wrenching in the private lives of the seven people—Henry and his six wives.

Try Me, Good King is a group of five songs drawn from the final letters and gallows speeches of Katherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, and Katherine Howard. Henry’s sixth wife, Katherine Parr, outlived him and brought some domestic and spiritual peace into Henry’s immediate family. Although her written devotions are numerous, and her role in the story of the six wives of Henry VIII is that of a peaceful catalyst. In these songs I chose to focus on the intimate crises of the heart that affected the first five of the six wives. In a sense, this group is a monodrama of anguish and power.

I’ve interwoven a lute song into each song, including John Dowland’s “In Darkness Let Me Dwell” (Katherine of Aragon and Katherine Howard), Dowland’s “If My Complaints” (Anne Boleyn), Praetorius’ “Lo, how a Rose E’er Blooming” (Jane Seymour), and Thomas Campion’s “I Care Not for these Ladies” (Anne of Cleves). These songs were composed during the reign of Elizabeth I, and while they are cast as some of the finest examples of the golden age, they also create a tapestry of unsung words which comment on the real situation of each doomed queen.

Two other musical gestures unify the songs, firstly, the repeated note, which recalls the lute and creates psychological tension. The second device I created is abstract bell-tolling, which punctuates each song and releases the spiritual meaning of the words.

* Libby Larsen

**Katherine of Aragon (1485-1536)**

**Queen from June 1509 to January 1533**

*Katherine of Aragon, formerly Queen of England, to King Henry VIII, 7 January 1536*

“My most dear Lord, King, and Husband,

The hour of my death now drawing on, the tender love I owe you forces me…to commend myself unto you and to put you in remembrance of the health and welfare of your soul.…you have cast me into many calamities and yourself into many troubles. For my part, I pardon you ev’rything and I wish to devoutly pray God that He will pardon you also. For the rest I commend unto you our daughter, Mary, beseeching you to be a good father unto her.…Lastly I make this vow, that my eyes desire you above all things, above all things.…”

Katherine of Aragon died of cancer 3 years after her marriage to Henry was annulled. She was 50 years old.

**Anne Boleyn (c.1502-1536)**

**Queen from January 1533 to May 1536**

*Letter from Anne Boleyn, Queen of England, to Henry VIII, 6 May 1536;*

*Excerpts from two letters from Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn;*

*Anne Boleyn’s speech at her execution, 19 May 1536*

“Try me, good king,… and let me have a lawful trial and let not my…enemies sit as my accusers and judges.… Let me receive an open trial for my truth shall fear no open shame.… Never a prince had a wife more loyal in all duty,…in all true affection, than you have found in Anne Bulen.… You have chosen me from low estate to be your wife and companion.… Do you not remember the words of your own true hand? ‘My own darling…I would you were in my arms…for I think it long since I kissed you. My mistress and my friend.…’ Try me, good king.… If ever I have found favor in your sight-if ever the name of Anne Bulen has been pleasing to your ears-then let me obtain this request…and my innocence shall be known and…cleared.

Good Christian people, I come hither to die,… and by the law I am judged to die.…I pray God save the King. I hear the executioner’s good, and my neck is so little.…”

After 3 years of marriage, Anne Boleyn was convicted of high treason and beheaded. She was around 30 years old.

**Jane Seymour (c.1508-1537)**

**Queen from May 1536 to October 1537**

*Jane Seymour, Queen of England, to the Council, 12 October 1537;*

*“Tudor rose” (Anonymous)*

“Right trusty and Well Beloved, we greet you well…for as much as be the inestimable goodness…of Almighty God, we be delivered…of a prince,…

I love the rose both red and white.

To hear of them is my delight!

Joyed may we be,

Our prince to see,

And roses three!”

Jane Seymour gave birth to a long-awaited son but died a few weeks after giving birth from complications. She was 29 years old.

**Anne of Cleves (1515-1557)**

**Queen from January 1540 to July 1540**

*Anne of Cleves, Queen of England, to Henry VIII, 11 July 1540*

“I have been informed…by certain lords…of the doubts and questions which have been…found in our marriage.… It may please your majesty to know that, though this case…be most hard…and sorrowful…I have and do accept [the clergy] for my judges. So now,…the clergy hath…given their sentence, I…approve.… I neither can nor will repute myself for your grace’s wife…yet it may please your highness to take me for your sister, for which I most humbly thank you.…

Your majesty’s most humble sister,

Anne, daughter of Cleves.”

Anne of Cleves was 25 years old when she married Henry. The only wife to escape with her life, dignity, and social standing intact, she died when she was 42, outliving every other wife, including Katherine Parr.

**Katherine Howard (c.1523-1542)**

**Queen from July 1540 to February 1541**

*Recorded at her execution by an unknown Spaniard, 13 February 1541*

“God have mercy on my soul. Good people, I beg you pray for me. By the journey upon which I am bound, brothers, I have not wronged the King. But it is true that long before the King took me, I loved [Thomas] Culpeper.… I wish to God I had done as Culpepper wished me, for at the time the King wanted…me, [Culpeper] urged me to say that I was pledged to him. If I had done as he wished me I should not die this death, nor would he.… God have mercy on my soul. Good people, I beg you pray for me.… I die a Queen, but I would rather die the wife of Culpeper.”

Katherine Howard was beheaded after only a year and a half of marriage to Henry. She was 19 years old.

**Mary Queen of Scots**

The claim to the throne of England was a tumultuous one, beleaguered by complicated family lines, Henry VIII’s lack of male heirs, and tensions between Catholic and Protestant powers. Mary Queen of Scots had originally been promised to Edward VI (who did not survive to adulthood) but Henry VIII changed his mind over her family’s pro France actions. After a myriad of political conflicts resulting in failure to secure the throne in both France and Scotland, Mary came to England seeking refuge. Many Catholic English supported Mary’s claim to the throne of England over their Protestant queen Elizabeth I. Seeing her as a threat to the throne Elizabeth I kept her locked away for eighteen and a half years. After many plots and attempts of escape, Mary was convicted of treason and sentenced to death. During her trial she presented a spirited defense and denied all charges, proclaiming her innocence up to the end.

Carissimi’s fiery cantata hears Mary’s last word of defense and assertion of innocence as she prepares herself and her ladies-in-waiting for her death.

**Lamento della Regina Maria Stuardo (1650) by Giacomo Carissimi (1605-1674)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Ferma, lascia ch'io parli, sacrilego ministro! Se ben fato­ inclemente a morte indegna come rea mi destina, vissi e moro innocente, son del sangue Stuardo e son Regina. Perche bendarmi i lumi?S'io mirai tanti giorni, ho petto ancora da mirar l'ultim'ora, e s'io gl'apersi al cielo,saprò ben senza velo alla vita serarli.  Ferma, lascia ch'io parli!Ma che dirò pur troppo?  Oggi favella a mio prò l'innocenza, e di si rea sentenza a Dio s'appella. Vilipesa innocenza,s'una Regina a te salvar non lice, cui l'invidia fa guerra a chi ricorrer deve in Inghilterra un mendico, un vassallo, un infelice? Vilipesa innocenza, vattene pur da me, torna alle stelle, ch'io con anima intrepida e serena sarò fra tante squadre a Dio rubelledi mia tragedia e spettatrice e scena.A morire! Per serbar giustizia­e fede più non vaglion le corone, che di stato la ragione anco la verità sa far mentire.A morire! Versarò dal collo­ il sangue, ma non già da'i lumi­ il pianto che sebene io resto­ esangue la costanza al mio duol mesce elisire.Voi mie care Donzelle, che m'inchinaste al soglio, et or piangenti mi seguite a'i tormenti, compatite i miei casi, e s'io lassa rimasi  spogliata d'ogni ben, d'ogni fortuna,  non per questo morendo gl'oblighi miei tralascio;partitevi l'amor con cui vi lascio. Soffrite costanti la dura mia sorte, e s'invida Morte  stillandovi­ in pianti a voi mi toglie, o fide­ancelle in terra, con sempiterno riso  v'abbraccierò compagne in Paradiso.Mira Londra, et impara le vicende mondane e tu ch'all' Anglicane schiere dai legge o Jezabelle altera, di giustizia severa aspetta i colpi, e se per farti in brani mancheranno­ alle belve artigli e morsi serviranno di cani i tuoi rimorsi. Sì, sì sfogati, assali, scarica su'l mio capo a cento, a mille del tuo furor gli strali! Vibra senza pieta su questo petto esangue strazi, scempi, flagelli, atrocità! Lascia ch'un mar di sangue m'inostr’ il nero manto; fulmina pur, che tanto straziarmi non saprai, quant' io soffrire:  A morire!Qui tacque, e forte, e ­invitta al suo destin s'arrese la Regina Scozzese, ne guari andò ch'un colpo indegno e rio divise ­il Corpo, et unì l'alma a Dio. | Hold, let me speak, sacreligous minister!If indeed inclement fatehas destined me to a shameful death as a criminal,I lived and died innocent;I am of Stewart blood and a Queen.Why should I bind my eyes?If I have seen so many days, I have the heart yetto see the last hour, and if I have opened them to heaven,I know well, without any veil, how to close them to life. Hold, let me speak!But what more can I say?  Today innocencespeaks on my behalf,and calls upon God for such a cruel sentence.Contemptible innocence!If a Queen cannot turn to you for salvation,with whom envy makes war,to whom in England shall goa beggar, a servant, an unhappy one?Contemptible innocence,leave me, return to the stars,so that I, with a spirit brave and serenebefore such forces rebellious to God,May be both a witness and subject of my tragedy.To die!To preserve justice and faithcrowns are no longer any worth,since instead reason andeven truth know how to lie.To die!I will gush forth blood from my neck,but not yet from my eyes tears;for though I remain bloodless,my constancy with mix elixir with my grief.You, my dear Ladies-in-waiting,that knelt at my throne, and now weepingfollow me to torment, sharing my lot,if I am left here stripped of every good, of every possession, not for this, dying,will I abandon my obligations;share the love I leave with you.Suffer in constancy my hard fate,and if envious Death takes me from youdissolving you in tears, o faithful servants on earth,with an eternal smileI will embrace you in Paradise.Behold, London, and learn the ways of the world;and you, who gives the laws to the English people, o second Jezebel, await the blows of severe justice;and if the wild animals lack talons and teeth to shred you to tatters, your own remorse will serve as hound.Yes, yes, fume, assail, unleash upon my head a hundred, a thousand times the darts of your fury!Hurl down without pity upon this bloodless breasttorment, havoc, scourges, atrocities!let a sea of blood adorn me with a black shroud;rage away, since I will not know what torture I suffer:  To die!Here she fell silent, and strong, and unconqueredthe Scottish Queen arrived at her destiny;nor went much farther before a cruel and unworthy blowdivided her body and united her soul to God.translation © Pamela Dellal |