

011 Anne of Austria

Anne came into my imagination as I struggled with hearing the extensive reports of Harvey Weinstein's history of predation and assaults on women.

Was there nowhere women could be safe? How could we protect ourselves, short of staying home barefoot and pregnant? And even that didn't work. Chastity belts? ... I was off and running.

My research revealed plenty of myth and lore regarding the use of chastity belts through the ages, particularly during Medieval times. Recent findings indicate that reports of this bizarre practice may be mere fabrication. But it does make me think about men trying to protect their women from warring invaders and even invited lovers. By locking up the "good parts," the Crusaders could keep their property from being soiled. The same men could venture forth to convert heathens, wage war -- and commit mass rape in foreign lands.

To me, Anne also represents the use of rape as a weapon of war. Does deliberate humiliation, severe injury, shame and bastard offspring justify and insure the winning of a war? We could ask the victims (many of them children) in Rwanda, Congo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Myanmar, Iraq, South Sudan, and Syria.

Anne wears her chastity belt with a bustier that one might find in a modern S&M sex shop. She embodies the historical lack of choice on one hand, and the titillation of control and submission on another. This figure, with her obvious helplessness and inability to protect herself, purposefully muddies our feelings about the boundaries of sexual choice and power.