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Preface & Introductions to *Saints, Sinners, and Sisters: Gender and Northern Art in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*

Jane L. Carroll
Dartmouth College

Alison Stewart
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, astewart1@unl.edu

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Published in *Saints, Sinners, and Sisters: Gender and Northern Art in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, edited by Jane L. Carroll and Alison G. Stewart (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. xvi–xxiv, 5–6, 71–72, 157–160. Copyright © 2003 Jane L. Carroll and Alison G. Stewart. Used by permission.

Preface

In the fall of 1993 a group of feminist scholars gathered in Boston for a workshop while attending a meeting of the Historians of Netherlandish Art. About 15 art historians, all female and all under 45 years old, began to discuss how to incorporate the extensive and exciting gender-based research in their field into courses which of necessity relied upon tradition-laden textbooks. A secondary problem was finding that scholarship, as it often appeared in newer journals of comparative studies, frequently not purchased by undergraduate institutions. By the end of the workshop the cry had gone up for a collection of essays that would showcase the diverse questions being asked by gender scholars dealing with Netherlandish and German art from the Medieval and Early Modern periods. The need for this volume was doubly acute as the two extensive anthologies by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, *Feminism and Art History* (1982) and *Expanding the Discourse* (1992),¹ had given little space to that geographical area before the twentieth century. With the goals of redressing the balance and highlighting the possibilities of new directions in our field, we began to gather a list of contributors during the following spring.

Our goal was to create an anthology that could be used as a supplemental reader by undergraduates and graduate students when studying Northern European art before the eighteenth century. We agreed with our cohort group that there was a need to excite students with the new questions being asked in traditional fields of study. The secondary purpose was to allow colleagues to assess the state of gender-driven scholarship in the art history of Medieval and Early Modern Northern Europe. As it progressed, however, this project became in our minds a celebration of the multiplicity and exuberance of the new production in our area despite institutional structures.

Saints, Sinners, and Sisters presents original essays addressing gender and art in pre-eighteenth-century Northern Europe. Familiar works or artists, such as Albrecht Dürer or Jan Steen, are the focus of several articles and these writings easily can be incorporated into introductory syllabi. Familiar topics, like the theme of domesticity in Dutch art, also can be found here, but the approaches taken tend to question traditional interpretations of such popular topics as the ill woman or the cook. In addition, it was our hope that the less familiar works included here could be integrated into classrooms to stretch definitions. With that goal in mind, we have included both works by less well-known artists like Jörg Breu or Sebald Beham, and works in less discussed media, such as ivories, gems, and tapestries.

Our hopes that gender scholarship would be incorporated into the mainstream has seen some success in recent years. Craig Harbison's supplemental extended essay, *The Mirror of the Artist: Northern Renaissance Art in its Historical Context* (1995), displays such first-generation feminist influences as the inclusion of Caterina van Hemessen and a discussion of Agnes van den Bossche's flag showing the Maid of Ghent.² As articles such as those gathered in this volume reach a larger audience, it is our hope that the issues of gender, sex, and class raised here and elsewhere also will become incorporated into textbook knowledge. In addition, this collection is a challenge to rising and established art historians in our field to build upon the precedent-setting feminist and gender studies represented here.

The focal points in most of our essays, as a glance at the contents makes clear, are women, although men are more present in the body of the texts than titles might suggest. The Contents page reveals also that all of our contributors are women. The predominance of women in Northern European gender studies dictated our selection of authors, and caused us to wonder about the limited number of men who choose to write about gendered subjects.

We extend to our essayists sincere thanks for their enthusiasm and patience. They have been our best boosters and most ardent supporters. As an editorial team, we have been lucky to have begun with a firm friendship cemented years ago as graduate students in Munich. Without that basis, so many of the obstacles we faced would have become insurmountable. It was a pleasant surprise to discover that our priorities—scholarly, academic, and personal were still in sync. Now, at the end of the project, we have added a deeper dimension to our friendship and defied the prophets who said that we would be tearing out each other's hair before the end of this venture. We are pleased to acknowledge that both the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and Dartmouth College gave assistance in the form of a publishing subvention, and thank them for those funds and support.

Finally, we need to thank our families who have never questioned our commitment (at least not entirely) to this project. They have stood by, assuming increased household duties, playing quietly (or quieter) when instructed, and making endless pots of tea. They have been sounding board and prop, and they have made the effort bearable by their love and laughter. This anthology belongs in large part to Klaus, Andreas, and Erika, and to Rich and Lexi.

Jane L. Carroll and Alison G. Stewart, 2003

Notes

1. See Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, New York, 1982; and their second volume, *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, New York, 1992.
2. See Craig Harbison, *The Mirror of the Artist: Northern Renaissance Art in its Historical Context*, New York, 1995, p. 21 for the discussion of Caterina van Hemessen, and pp. 64–65 for thoughts on Agnes van den Bossche.

Introduction

The message has been clear through the centuries. On the tympana of medieval churches and in Hollywood films, women are portrayed as either good or bad, saintly or sinful. This volume takes issue with such bipolar readings and offers a third alternative to the traditional dualistic view of women that permeates the literature on Northern European art of the Medieval and Early Modern periods. While some of these essays examine women within the traditional dichotomies, others demonstrate the range of possibilities available to females in Northern society. By widening the sight lines, we reveal that Northern Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque art depicted women in a myriad of roles that revealed the various possibilities of their lives. With those additional images comes a more complex and nuanced understanding of early European women and the possibilities open to them.

Thus our book is divided into two sections: “Saints and Sinners” and “Sisters, Wives, Poets.” The first section of the book offers new essays within the traditional dichotomy, while the second section points toward new directions for study including women as nuns, wives of artists, and poets. We hereby throw down the gauntlet to art historians of Northern European art, as well as to those of other times and places, to challenge the old dualistic view of women and expand on it, so that women—and thus gender—are understood in a more expansive manner.

We have chosen a thematic rather than chronological arrangement for this book because it showcases our approach. Yet because we are mindful of the importance of these essays for teaching, we have placed a chronological list of the essays after the Table of Contents. That inventory offers a breakdown by period as well as country. Because so much information about early women can be gleaned from the art works they made or used, or that represent them as their subjects, we have also included articles focusing on gems, ivories, or tapestries, as well as the more studied art historical media of prints and paintings.

The two sections of the book are preceded by concise introductory essays which detail themes and summarize the major points. The essays allow us to offer reflective comparisons of theses and information. It is our hope that these summaries will increase the ease with which students and teachers, and specialists and non-specialists, can use the volume. The summaries were primarily written with students in mind as such features can help them approach new material.

Within our two sections, the topics cover areas such as devotional imagery, witches, artists' workshops, love sickness, and peasant festivals, demonstrating both a greater understanding of past art historical practices concerning women, and an appreciation of new directions for the future. For example in the first section, "Saints and Sinners," Carol Schuler (ch. 1) and Pia Cuneo (ch. 2) both address images of Lucretia, but from different perspectives. They demonstrate how the same subject matter could be manipulated to carry several messages, both political and religious. These essays explain how Lucretia images, despite their sensual appearance, became female Passion iconography—thus proving that most depictions of women should not be so strictly categorized as pure or sinful. Susan Smith's and Linda Hults's essays (chs. 4 and 5) are also placed in succession. Each author discusses the female gaze and audience reception in strikingly similar ways despite disparate subject matter: courtly images on fourteenth-century ivories and an engraving of witches by Albrecht Dürer from 1497. A chronological arrangement of the essays would destroy the synergy resulting from the close placement of these related essays.

The "Saints" portion of the first section begins with examinations of "good" women who are positive leaders, either politically, emotionally, religiously, or domestically. Their images, by and large, are the exempla used by society to uphold standards, as discussed first through the Roman matron Lucretia, who sacrificed herself and her virtue through suicide. Schuler examines images of Lucretia from a Late Medieval perspective to challenge traditional iconography. Cuneo follows with an examination of Lucretia within the history and politics of the early sixteenth-century Bavarian dukes. The essay by Martha Moffitt Peacock (ch. 3) moves into the arena of positive images of domestic women, without elevating them to secular sainthood.

The second portion, "Sinners," encompasses studies that touch upon "bad" women through the power of women's sexuality. Smith (ch. 4) examines women, sexuality, and the Gothic gaze in ivory mirror decorations used and gazed at by women. In a spinning bee woodcut, Stewart (ch. 6) treats the cultural perception of females' behavior as outside acceptable boundaries, as also found in Hults's essay on Dürer's *Four Witches* (ch. 5). These women sin either by gazing seductively at men, by succumbing to seduction, or by lusting after the devil. Although the six essays in this first section and the information they contain are new, the general approach of good versus bad women is well established in the literature, as delineated for example in H. Diane Russell's and Bernadine Barnes's well-known catalogue, *Eva/Ave: Woman in Renaissance and Baroque Prints* (1990). This good-bad female dichotomy continues to have merit and be developed in recent publications like Christa Grossinger's *Picturing Women in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (1997),¹ which embellishes the two categories by studying them within social classes. However, it is possible to broaden these views and seek other categories for women, both within this bi-polar framework and without. Broadening these views is the goal of this volume.

If our first section works to expand the categories within traditional labels, our second section, "Sisters, Wives, Poets," breaks away from the customary dichotomous divisions for females. In those five essays women develop their own iconography for power or piety, and assume roles usually thought beyond their scope. Here, for example, the Empress Richildis is found posing as the classical Omphale, wife of Hercules, in an essay by Geneva Kornbluth (ch. 7). Here too are capable women depicting themselves as nuns at their looms or as managers of artists' workshops in the essays by Jane Carroll and Corine Schleif (chs. 8 and 9). In "Sisters, Wives, Poets" women are presented in a diversity of roles, but most importantly they are presented as active in ways not widely acknowledged today for those times, thus expanding our definitions of women's responsibilities and realigning them historically. This realignment includes viewing women as poets and within the reigning medical understanding of them in essays by Linda Stone-Ferrier and Laurinda Dixon (chs. 10 and 11).

Any discussion of women's roles in the Medieval and Early Modern periods leads to a dialogue concerning appropriate female behavior. From those explorations emerged three themes: lust, power, and control. All the articles published here touch upon one or more of those leitmotifs. Power and control of women was often the subtext of a visual work, even when its more prominent theme concerned lust, as in Stewart's and Smith's essays.

Binding the anthology together is the cultural framework which informed the research and gave context to the moral standards and gendered expectations present in the works of art. Although no methodological litmus test was applied to contributors, their essays tend to be contextual, emphasizing the literature and history of their chosen period as an aid to understanding visual art's nuances. Perhaps a result of expanded context is the increasing belief in multivalent imagery, with meanings dependent upon an audience comprising both genders and encompassing both makers and their subjects.

Thus Cuneo examines not just the morals to be gleaned from Lucretia's story, but she also discusses the political interests of the painting's owner, Duke William IV of Bavaria, and how the classical story and the sovereign's interests were linked in the court's mind. Similarly, contemporary reforms play important roles in understanding the art discussed in two articles, whether the reform of the Dominican Order and its emphasis on devotional work explained by Carroll or the reform of popular festivals within the Lutheran Reformation discussed by Stewart.

Contextualizing also can mean stressing localized attitudes such as those towards witchcraft pivotal for Hulst, and those found in seventeenth-century Netherlandish medicine explicated by Dixon. Both authors emphasize the viewer by stressing that a multiplicity of meanings can be drawn from each viewer's understanding of iconographic traditions and their own experiences. Thus a desire to blur traditional boundaries, as in Schuler's discussion of half-length images of Lucretia, and to reject the one-to-one correspondence of image to meaning results

in leaving the import of any individual work deliberately fluid and open to multiple interpretations.

An even more complete interpretation requires an awareness of the viewer's gaze. Whenever possible, each contributor has worked to clarify the intended audience's gender, class, or politics to contextualize reception. Thus Hulst, for example, believes that Dürer directed his witchcraft print toward patrician or middle-class learned males, paralleling visual rhetoric to the discursive strategy of the *Malleus Maleficarum* by Heinrich Kramer and Jakob Sprenger (Cologne, 1489).

But consideration of the gaze does not limit itself to the direct communication of locked glances. Manipulation of the viewer's relationship to the subject also must be taken into account. For example, the "averted gaze" of the women depicted in seventeenth-century Dutch art is central to Peacock's discussion of meaning where she contrasts that glance to the gaze of those who owned and viewed this art. Peacock makes clear that perspectives alter as the gender, class, education, and religion of the viewer shifts. In a similar fashion, the gaze plays a key, albeit dual, role in Smith's essay on Gothic ivory mirrors. There the female gazes into the mirror to primp in preparation for the male gaze, while the carved figures on the mirror valve warn of the active gaze which evokes lust. The gaze has increasingly been acknowledged by scholars as holding power, and the awareness of how it is manipulated internally and externally in art is one of the most fascinating contributions to recent scholarship, including our volume.

Often the male gaze is examined because of the dominant role played by men as patrons or possessors of art. Yet as Dixon's essay indicates, what affects women also affects men—a truism finding increasing currency in Northern European gender scholarship both in this anthology and in works such as Zirka Filipczak's exhibition catalogue, *Hot Dry Men, Cold Wet Women: The Theory of Humors in Western European Art 1575-1700* (1997).² It is our hope that the essays gathered here will stimulate and encourage other scholars to investigate gender in a truly comprehensive manner, especially in the fields of Medieval and Early Modern Northern European art.

We are all aware of the gauntlet thrown down by Linda Nochlin in her 1971 essay "Why have there been no Great Women Artists?,"³ and the subsequent outpouring of scholarship prompted by her challenge. Her query came at much the same time that the historian Joan Kelly was asking, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?"⁴ That first group of feminist scholars was preoccupied with the establishment of a female canon—a priority which, of necessity, privileged those societies and periods with intact records and a written tradition. The result was an early feminist scholarship that focused on Italian Renaissance and post seventeenth-century art. Gendered assumptions of training, control and power underlie much of that early scholarship. In a similar fashion, certain types of art, such as painting or sculpture, were focused upon, leaving other art forms marginalized.⁵

A paucity of documents and visual evidence plagued scholars interested in feminist questions for Northern Europe in the Medieval and Early Modern periods. Without the “great women” available to other time periods, art historians of Netherlandish and German art were forced to ask different questions to address their feminist concerns. Instead historians of Northern art began to form questions about intended audience, use, and patronage which we mulled around among ourselves until the research began to appear in a flurry of articles in the late 1980s and the 1990s, such as Joan Holladay’s article “The Education of Jeanne d’Evreux” from 1994, or the essays in Cynthia Lawrence’s edited volume, *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe* (1997).⁶ Larger cultural questions concerning societal control of women began to appear in the 1980s in works such as *Saints and She-devils: Images of Women in the 15th and 16th Centuries* (1987), edited by Lène Dresen-Coenders among others.⁷ There the authors expanded upon the dichotomy between good and bad women.

Readers will notice that when this anthology’s essays were commissioned, art history was just beginning to understand “gender” as a study of both women and men. The intervening years have effected that change, however, and although women still serve as primary subjects for most of the articles in our volume, the definition has broadened. It is the interplay of men and women which became a leitmotif throughout this book. For example, Smith’s essay (ch. 4) offers a symbiosis in which women used carved ivory mirrors, but men gave them as gifts; women privately gazed into those mirrors just as men publicly gazed at women. Yet despite this dominant male gaze, some exceptional ivories indicate that these rules occasionally were broken and women could be the ocular aggressors.

An awareness of such interplay allowed gender scholars to evolve from those first feminist writings.⁸ Each succeeding group addressed the material found on Medieval and Early Modern Northern Europe with a different set of questions designed to elicit new answers from the sources available. Gender scholars turned to the works of social, cultural or religious historians which, in turn, gave birth to a second set of questions that made the art one of many sources used to explain women’s roles in their periods. The focus of so many earlier interpretations, based upon monographic or nationalistic assumptions, often ignored the cross-pollination of gender, class or ethnic group which produced the unique Northern cultures and their art.

In an attempt to unlock encoded gendered meaning, we have begun to cast aside anthropological acculturation as an explanation for the art forms we study. The passive assimilation of zeitgeist that this approach assumes has proven to be inadequate for explaining the nuances of political and aesthetic interdependence. The effect of the new scholarship presented here has been to broaden the discursive field by allowing fluidity of boundaries. Rather than focus exclusively on an individual creator or object, questions may focus on areas of cultural, conceptual, or gendered exchange. Those who do focus on a single work or artist often are

concerned with objects or people considered liminal by what has been the dominant culture.

By enlarging our field of study, the variety of approaches has continued to expand. The methodologies displayed in this anthology represent the richness of gender studies in Northern European art history. That very variety can be attributed to the divergent sources used to produce these essays. When reading the endnotes for the articles, we were struck by the frequent citing of historical, literary, or anthropological sources, rather than art historical material, demonstrating the current fluidity between fields. This widening scope demonstrates the increased importance of studying women outside of gendered isolation. While the body may provide gender influences, truly interesting conclusions about art works can be reached when the representations under study are not completely gender determinant, but instead are elucidated by the complex societies that created them. Yet it is still women who provide the organizational structure of this anthology, and decoding women's roles in the broadest sense remains our primary concern.

The writings collected in *Saints, Sinners, and Sisters* can be read as a complement to the historical and literary studies which appeared, for example, in the University of Virginia Press's Feminist Issues Series, the University of Tennessee Press's Middle Ages Series and New Cultural Studies, or the Medieval Cultures Series from the University of Minnesota Press. Our essays are the Northern equivalent of such recent offerings in Italian Renaissance studies as Paola Tinagli's *Women in Italian Renaissance Art* (1997) and *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, edited by Geraldine Johnson and Sara F. Matthews Grieco (1997). The breadth of issues tackled by our authors makes our collection of writings the art historical equivalent of such historical works as Nancy F. Partner's edited volume, *Studying Medieval Women: Sex, Gender, Feminism* (1993), or *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: The Emergence of Subjectivity* edited by Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan, and Dymphna Callaghan (1996),⁹ both of which place women inside a broader cultural context.

The framework for the majority of our essays could more accurately be called cultural studies than art history, yet the focus of each article remains the visual art which originally prompted the questions. By expanding the scope of our examination, we contribute not just to the understanding of art, but help complete the comprehension of Northern society. That cultural vision prompts us to probe women's roles in the Medieval and Early Modern periods, so that we can better understand how to read the images of women and men that have come down to us, beyond the traditional "saint or sinner" understanding found in much of earlier scholarship.

Notes

1. H. Diane Russell and Bernadine Barnes, *Eva/Ave: Woman in Renaissance and Baroque Prints*, ex., cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1990; Christa Grossinger's *Picturing Women in Medieval and Renaissance Art*, Manchester, 1997.
2. Additional evidence of men's broadening role in gender studies was the volume of *Art Journal* entitled *How Men Look: on the Masculine Ideal and the Body Beautiful*, vol. 56, no. 2 (Summer 1997). See especially Alison McNeil Kettering's article "Gentlemen in Satin: Masculine Ideals in later seventeenth-century Dutch Portraiture," 41-47.
3. Linda Nochlin, "Why have there been no Great Women Artists?," *Art News*, vol. 69, no. 9 (Jan 1971), 22-39 and 67-71.
4. Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, eds., Boston, 1977, 137-64.
5. One need only look at the ground-breaking exhibition catalogue, *Women Artists 1550--1950*, by Anne Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1976, to uncover the lacunae for Northern European art.
6. Joan A. Holladay, "The Education of Jeanne d'Evreux: Personal Piety and Dynastic Salvation in her Book of Hours at the Cloisters," *Art History*, vol. 17 (Dec 1994), 585-611. Cynthia Lawrence, ed., *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors and Connoisseurs*, University Park, PA, 1997.
7. Lène Dresen-Coenders, Petty Bange, Ton Brandenburg, et al., eds., *Saints and She-devils: Images of Women in the 15th and 16th Centuries*, London, 1987.
8. The evolution from feminist to gender studies can be marked when the 1976 exhibition catalogue, *Women Artists 1550--1950* (n. 2), is compared to an article like Linda Hults's "Baldung and the Witches of Freiburg: the Evidence of Images," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 18 (Autumn 1987), 249-76.
9. Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation and Identity*, New York, 1997; Geraldine Johnson and Sara F. Matthews Grieco, eds., *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, New York, 1997; Nancy F. Partner, ed., *Studying Medieval Women: Sex, Gender, Feminism*, Cambridge, MA, 1993; and Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan, and Dympna Callaghan, eds., *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: The Emergence of Subjectivity*, New York, 1996.

Introduction to Part I: Saints

Virtue and the good woman come in many packages across the centuries examined in this anthology. Perhaps most startling is the fact that virtue comes at times wrapped in sensuality. The three essays in this section by Carol Schuler, Pia Cuneo, and Martha Moffitt Peacock all tackle the problem of the woman as role model and positive exempla, but the variety among their conclusions testifies that the same theme could be manipulated to reflect a personal message. All three articles present images which touch upon purity, dedication or sacrifice, whether it be at the sixteenth-century Bavarian court or in depictions of seventeenth-century Dutch housewives. In the longevity and consistency of the virtuous woman's image can be found the roots of many of our present ideas on gender.

Schuler (ch. 1) and Cuneo (ch. 2) handle a common subject, Lucretia, yet the widely disparate interpretations they present illuminate that the theme of the good woman was far from formulaic. The two types of Lucretia images represent public versus private art and politicized versus personalized messages; these differences reveal the duality of sixteenth-century women's roles. They also display the versatility of the theme and thus help to explain its popularity.

The intermingling of sin and saintliness is the age-old problem addressed by Schuler as she discusses the half-length images of Lucretia, shown naked or partially draped against a neutral background. In these early sixteenth-century works, her physicality and sensuality are stressed through a close-up format that Schuler convincingly argues was borrowed from the Late Medieval devotional imagery of the Man of Sorrows. The co-opting of that traditional religious format for an overtly sexual figure intertwines purity and sensuality in unexpected manner.

These Lucretias of eroticized virtue reveal a private, probably male, vision that contrasts with Cuneo's more public and political images showing Lucretia in her narrative context. Cuneo's essay explores a panel painted by Jörg Breu the Elder for Duke Wilhelm IV of Bavaria and Duchess Jacobäa of Baden in 1528. This panel stresses Lucretia's suicide as the foundation of the new Roman republic, a theme Cuneo situates within the political ambitions of Duke Wilhelm and his attempt to overthrow Emperor Charles IV. Here sexuality and history become political propaganda. By focusing on the consequences of Lucretia's rape, her suicide, and the oath to avenge her death, Breu can present his female protagonist as chaste, loyal and beautiful, thus the perfect Renaissance woman. But the action and the power reside with the male relatives, who are the painted parallel to Cuneo's posited audience of politically savvy courtiers. To those viewers it was Lucretia's self-annihilation which was central to the work's message that historical precedent could justify political power.

By the seventeenth century, the Netherlandish female ideal had expanded beyond chastity to include domesticity prominently. Martha Peacock (ch. 3) explores those images of women in the home that were popular from the middle of the century, focusing on the prints created by Geertruydt Roghman. Peacock argues that, because she was a woman, Roghman offered a more respectful image of the housewife. Departing from earlier interpretations' strongly moralizing tone concerning such domestic imagery, Peacock looks to historical context and gender only to discover that married women ruled the home. Thus depictions of female domesticity should be understood as recording capable management of woman's dominion, and the averted gaze of many of those women may be interpreted as a housewife preoccupied with her own thoughts, rather than indicating modesty. Peacock's essay updates the traditional ideal of woman as virtuous by bringing her out of the Christian and classical world and into the secular one most women inhabited and controlled. Significantly, it was a woman artist, Roghman, who accomplished that shift.

Introduction to Part II: Sinners

Sin is seductive and bad women entice. Thus attraction, lust, sexuality, and power are inextricably linked in any discussion of male-female relationships during the Medieval and Early Modern periods. The three essays in “Sinners” present one or more of these aspects in terms of society’s expectations of women in more liminal and purely secular roles. Beginning in late Gothic times, as women began to explore new roles in response to cultural shifts, men expressed increasing fear that their female counterparts were escaping patriarchal control. Each of our authors has examined an attempt by artists to lay bare the problems surrounding women in certain situations where they are seen as lustful or bad—Susan Smith concentrates on the female and courtship, Linda Hults focuses on witches, and Alison Stewart analyzes the female gatherings in the spinning rooms of Nuremberg. “Sinners” presents us with women who lust through their gazes, women who lust for the devil, and women who lust due to laziness. In exploring these themes, Smith ingeniously looks anew at the gaze, while Hults and Stewart look at newly invented subjects.

Smith (ch. 4) investigates carved ivory mirror cases, or valves, owned by well-to-do lay women. As objects whose unique function is to solicit the act of looking, mirrors invite the beholder to experience that act as a self-conscious activity. In contrast to Laura Mulvey’s now classic “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” which employed a psychoanalytical approach for women as the subject of the voyeuristic male gaze, Smith explores Gothic ivory mirror cases within the context of literary subjects that parallel the imagery shown on the valves, such as courtship and its related metaphors of pursuit and battle. It is important to note that male authors of contemporary didactic literature censured a woman’s active looking as leading women into sexual trouble if not strictly controlled. Thus the majority of mirror cases depict maidens with lowered eyes that signify a woman’s chastity. Yet Smith mentions that a few ivories are noteworthy for their deviation from the norm and their delineating women with either active gazes, a mutually empowered gaze or a direct gaze at the beholder. These differing gazes bring Smith to the interesting conclusion that the depicted female gaze controls the ocular encounter, either ignoring or dominating its male counterpart, and thus the self-assertive potential of women’s looking is acknowledged.

Powerful women and male control also play a part in Hults’s essay (ch. 5) on Dürer’s print, *The Four Witches*. Drawing on interpretations of earlier scholars, including Erwin Panofsky’s classic book on Dürer from 1943, Hults preserves the allusion to Venus and the Graces without the interrelated Neoplatonic meanings.

Hults extends Mark Meadow's thesis that Dürer shifted the arena of signification from the domain of the image to the mind of the beholder, thus allowing the print to speak not only to gender, but also to artistic invention. The gendered allusions concern female power, which was held to be derived from female sexuality. Thus the witch, the sexually voracious partner of demons, became a threat to male authority, provoking massive witch hunts in Europe, especially after 1560. Dürer's use of Venus imagery reinforced contemporary women's carnality and its link to witchcraft. As proof of her thesis, Hults offers the *pudica* pose which directs the viewer's gaze to Venus's unseen pubic area, the symbolic source of her power. By exploring the nefarious associations of the *pudica* Venus in the Renaissance, Early Modern descriptions of female genitalia, and contemporary attitudes toward women's speech, Hults shows that witches and the carnal lust they embody were inextricably woven into sixteenth-century Nuremberg's understanding of women, a connection made earlier in the *Malleus Maleficarum* (*Hammer of Witches*, Cologne, 1486).

Twenty-five years after Dürer's *Four Witches*, Nuremberg was still struggling to control its female population. Stewart (ch. 6) presents the *Spinning Bee*, a woodcut by Dürer's pupil Sebald Beham, as an attempt to control unchristian activities in Nuremberg's spinning bees. Beham's women dance, socialize with men, or fend off male sexual advances rather than spin. Beham's emphasis on female sexuality parallels contemporary re-evaluations of popular festivals and the spinning bees' festival-like activities under the new Lutheran authorities in Nuremberg. In fact, Beham invents a new visual vocabulary for spinning to underscore its hypothesized sexuality. The raucous, exaggerated tone of the work is reminiscent of contemporary popular literature, including carnival plays, and suggests an audience drawn across class boundaries. Just as popular writings delighted in the sexual antics of spinning bees and their participants, so too Nuremberg's town fathers criticized the spinners' lack of accountability and called for these women to be placed under male control. Luther may have inspired the town council's condemnation when he recommended that women remain in their homes as housewives, thus simultaneously restricting female options and freedom. As in the other two essays, Stewart confronts the dynamic tension between freedom and control. The "sinful" women discussed in this part of *Saints, Sinners, and Sisters* thus push traditional female boundaries of expected behavior.

Introduction to Section 2: Sisters, Wives, Poets

Women's roles in the Medieval and Early Modern periods were almost as diverse as they are today and extended well beyond the traditional good-bad duality seen in the literature. If the arts and literature seemed to focus on the extremes of female character, saint or sinner, the reality was far more nuanced. Artworks do exist that highlight those less-discussed aspects of women's lives, and it is those subjects that are examined by Genevra Kornbluth, Jane Carroll, Corine Schleif, Linda Stone-Ferrier, and Laurinda Dixon in "Sisters, Wives, Poets." Whether it is an empress claiming power, nuns weaving, artists' wives managing workshops, or maidens being lovesick, these essays indicate that women were active in more areas than have been acknowledged to date. In this final section, the good-bad dichotomy explodes, revealing that women need to be explained and explored within a much larger range of possibilities than traditionally have been offered.

Kornbluth (ch. 7), for example, discusses a now-destroyed Carolingian seal depicting a woman's profile and inscribed with the name of the owner, "Richilde." The female ownership of this ring contradicts the common belief that early Medieval women did not employ seals, while giving rise to the intriguing possibility that women could design a seal to fit their desired self-image. Kornbluth suggests that this seal matrix was used by the Empress Richildis, the wife of Charles the Bald, and that Richildis chose the profile of Hercules' wife, Omphale, as her emblem. Thus the seal ring, which was used to impress wax, served to identify any communication it accompanied as coming from the powerful wife of the Emperor. Indeed, Omphale, the legendary Queen of Lydia, has been rendered even more impressive for she wears the lion skin of Hercules. In that fashion the four figures of Omphale and Hercules, and Richildis and Emperor Charles the Bald, are conflated.

In addition, Kornbluth notes that images of Hercules with the lion skin were displayed on the throne probably made for Richildis's husband, making Richildis's connections with Omphale an extended conceit. As queen, Richildis's seal offered tangible proof of her power as she executed her responsibilities, such as running the palace household or presiding over a judicial court in the emperor's absence. Yet the Empress's influence was circumscribed and delegated, leaving Kornbluth with the intriguing thought that Richildis may have found a delicious irony in her comparison to Omphale who wielded power over the mightiest of her day.

Self-presentation also plays a role in Carroll's discussion (ch. 8) of Dominican nuns who produced a series of Late Gothic tapestries during the reform of

their Order. Responding to the movement's call for a return to practical work as well as intense prayer and inner devotion, the sisters produced an unprecedented number of artworks in Southern Germany. Their production often contains unusual iconography, including two self-portraits.

Carroll asks why self-portraiture was acceptable, and concludes that because it is the act of working (rather than likeness) which is stressed, the small figures represent a type of devotional image. The anonymous women at the loom also remind the audience of the monastic hands that created the project, and thus function as a type of signature. In addition, the self-portraits were positioned within scenes which were selected and arranged to stress the female religious' rededication to personal piety. These chosen subjects were, of necessity, constructed from a religious vocabulary reflecting the gendered religious experience of both designer and viewer. Thus the scenes reveal a mystical desire for a personal relationship with holy figures, especially the incarnated Christ and Mary. Such a hoped-for connection may have been indicated when the portrait of a nun-weaver was set into the folds of the Virgin's gown, and thus conflating signature, self-depiction, devotional image, and exhortation into a single form unique in tapestry history.

While nuns ran artistic workshops in convents during the fifteenth century, their power and audience declined with the advent of the Reformation. In the sixteenth century, it was artists' wives who assumed this role for workshops in their homes. Schleif (ch. 9) examines the case of Adam Kraft, the German sculptor working in Nuremberg ca. 1500, and weaves an interesting picture of Kraft's three wives, Margreth, Magdalena, and Barbara, and the kinds of work those wives provided in their family workshops. If an artist were to become a master, a wife was required. Her role was to oversee the business, including dealings with journeymen and apprentices, as well as with patrons and suppliers, though her duties might also embrace merchandising or physical labor. In return, wives were recognized in the form of gifts or gratuity at the time of payment. Schleif delineates the long history of scholarly denial concerning these wives' contributions, finding that Kraft's spouses were marginalized and often criticized in art historical treatises from the sixteenth century to the present.

During this same time, artists were increasingly viewed as "men of genius" or as part of a larger movement towards a virile national identity. Thus male artists were depicted as solely responsible for their own artistic production, while other members of the workshop, including the wife, fell into oblivion. Historical novels also helped to construct artists' wives as model middle-class housewives with duties confined to the domestic sphere and a nurturing role. By weighing the reality of wifely involvement in the workshops against the misconceptions put forth by previous scholars, Schleif reclaims for these women their important place in the world of sixteenth-century art.

The first three essays in "Sisters, Wives, Poets" focus on women who were involved in the design or execution of art. The final two articles look at women

who thematically dominate some subjects of seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting. Linda Stone-Ferrier (ch. 10), for example, focuses on Gabriel Metsu's unusual painting of the *Weeping Woman in the Blacksmith's Shop* to stress how visual interpretations have multiplied in the art historical literature of the last decade.

During the last two decades, Metsu's paintings of daily life have been described as both titillating and virtuous. Stone-Ferrier suggests that multivalence is possible without the overriding moralizing intention art historians often assume to be present in seventeenth-century Dutch art. Metsu's sympathy for weeping women, and his predilection toward their depiction, may have come from growing up with a widowed mother left with several children in a city plagued by poverty. Yet the painting also would have reminded literate seventeenth-century viewers of two famous women, one a miserly shrew from a well-known farce by Adriaen van de Venne, and the other the famous and highly praised Amsterdam poetess, Maria Tesselschade Visscher, who was blinded by a flying ember in a blacksmith's shop. Seeking alternative interpretations for this painting that avoid the "wives and wantons" dichotomy used by recent art historians, Stone-Ferrier points to the unique female genre roles evoked by Metsu's painting—miserly shrew, humanist poetess, and despairing mother—and thus expands the approaches to Dutch genre beyond bipolar categorizations.

Attitudes towards women in the young Dutch Republic, especially the views of the educated populace, also inform Dixon's study (ch. 11) of the *Doctor's Visit* by Jan Steen. Dixon explains how doctors reinforced gender stereotypes by selectively drawing on ancient medical beliefs to reinforce the patriarchal status quo. In this fashion women were kept in a passive, cloistered domestic sphere while men comported in the active world of business. Yet at mid-century women were seriously questioning the biological determinism of medical science.

The genre subject of the ailing woman, looking rather faint and seated in a chair while a doctor checks her pulse, traditionally was interpreted as a young woman weak from pregnancy. Such paintings became either moralizing sermons against unwed pregnant women, or satires aimed at quack doctors. Dixon, like Stone-Ferrier, rejects these moralizing explanations in favor of a contextual medical investigation that uses pre-Enlightenment anatomical literature as more than an iconographic source. It was artists, Dixon argues, who invented the female sickroom as a visual theme evoking the concept of the wandering womb and its accompanying malady, hysteria. In such cases, the woman was far from pregnant, but suffered from a restless womb thought to be aggravated by celibacy, reading too much, and certain intellectual activities. Doctors' antidotes included healthy activities such as housework and child rearing, making seventeenth-century physicians the moral guardians of women.

But lovesickness was not limited to women, as Dixon tells us in her discussion of another Metsu painting, *Woman at a Clavichord*. The man there is shown in a melancholic head-on-hand pose denoting hypochondria, a type of melancholia afflicting men, which the seventeenth-century medical theorist Thomas Sydenham compared to female hysteria. Dixon's observations on this work reinforce the need to examine gender issues in a more complex manner that embraces the ways in which women and men were understood in relation to each other. Interestingly, when Dixon contrasts hysteria with hypochondria, she finds that it is the negative aspects of the woman's disease which were stressed, while positive attitudes surround the male equivalent. Thus Dixon concludes that these paintings, and those like them, may have helped to communicate the patriarchal status quo by illustrating and defining the proper realms within which society wished each sex to flourish—the passive domestic sphere for women, and the active world of business for men.