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# Lucas Cranach's *Samson and Delilah* in Northern European Art

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LUCAS CRANACH'S SAMSON AND DELILAH  
IN NORTHERN EUROPEAN ART

By

Jacqueline Spackman

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

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LUCAS CRANACH'S SAMSON AND DELILAH  
IN NORTHERN EUROPEAN ART

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University of Nebraska, 2015

Advisor: Alison Stewart

This thesis explores images of Samson and Delilah in northern Europe in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. My research focuses primarily on Lucas Cranach's painting, *Samson and Delilah* of 1528-30, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. By examining prints and decorative artworks that include the Samson and Delilah narrative, it is my goal to understand where Cranach's painting fits into the larger art historical picture. Through examining the locations and suggested meanings of other works, I hope to establish that it is also possible to understand the intention and meaning behind Cranach's painting. I analyze the work within the context of social changes and attitudes of the sixteenth century in the North, particularly concentrating on attitudes towards women and the Reformation. I examine the prominence of the subject and how it functioned in a society continually concerned with sexual promiscuity and the possibility of the overthrow of the established sexual hierarchy.

I consider Cranach's *Samson and Delilah* as a reaction to popular print imagery of the same subject and its inclusion in Power of Women series. I argue that Cranach was able to take a subject and series of works that were popular in the print market and put it into a painting that would have been appropriate for his aristocratic and middle class patrons and buyers. I contend that the work quite

possibly was part of a larger series, or thought process, of Power of Women images, and that Cranach was particularly inspired by series of printmakers like Lucas van Leyden. My goal is to portray Lucas Cranach not only as an artist, but as a businessman who was conscious of subject trends in prints and was able to utilize these images in order to produce paintings that would successfully sell.



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## Introduction

*Samson and Delilah* (1528-30) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, is one of three paintings on the subject that Lucas Cranach and his workshop made during his lifetime (fig. 1). It measures 22 ½ x 14 7/8 inches (57.2 x 37.8 cm) and was painted on beech wood panel. The provenance of the painting was unknown until its purchase at a Sotheby's auction in 1961.<sup>1</sup> Little information exists for it thus its meaning and purpose are difficult to establish. In this paper I will explore the various forms Samson and Delilah subjects took in northern Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It is my goal to understand how Lucas Cranach's painting fits into the larger discussion of Samson and Delilah works, to understand the intended purpose of the original work, and to illuminate how the painting and its subject were understood and viewed by sixteenth-century northern Europeans.

This thesis is part of a continuing project on the work of Lucas Cranach and the women he depicted in his paintings, reading them in the context of the Protestant Reformation and attitudes toward women in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Northern Europe. Though some German scholarship on the subject has been consulted, I have mostly concentrated on what scholarship in English has to say about the subject. A further study of all scholarship on Samson and Delilah and Lucas Cranach in the German language would be helpful to expand these ideas.

The first chapter presents a brief biography of Cranach's life, with particular emphasis on his workshop practice during his time in Wittenberg. A presentation of Cranach's life and working habits aids in determining where *Samson and Delilah* fits in

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<sup>1</sup> Maryan W. Ainsworth and Joshua P. Waterman, *German Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1350-1600* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 59.

with his other work and gives a broader view of his goals as an artist and businessman. A concise historiography of Cranach scholarship in the twentieth and twenty-first century is also provided. Very little scholarship exists on Cranach's *Samson and Delilah*, and little is said about the figure of Delilah herself, or other clothed women in Old Testament biblical narratives. Through examining art historical studies of Cranach's other women, particularly his nudes, I intend to achieve a fuller reading of Delilah and the artist's approach in rendering women.

The second chapter concerns the New York painting by Cranach with an in-depth analysis of its composition, coloring, and figures. I consider the biblical narrative of Samson and Delilah and how Cranach's painting of the subject follows and strays from the biblical origins. I also examine various interpretations of the Samson and Delilah subject. An examination of sixteenth-century attitudes towards women is also addressed, with a particular emphasis on Luther's writings, to better understand how the subject would be read in sixteenth-century Lutheran Europe.

The third chapter presents other images of Samson and Delilah produced in Northern Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These other art objects allow for a comparison between what Cranach produced in the wider context of the art world. There is particular emphasis on how the Samson and Delilah subject fits with other Power of Women images made in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance in the North. I consider printed works by Lucas van Leyden and how his Power of Women series may have served as inspiration for Cranach. In this final section I present the possibility that Cranach's painting was produced as a part of a larger series of powerful women subjects.

## Chapter 1

In this chapter I discuss Cranach's life and workshop practices, and *Samson and Delilah*'s place within the chronology of Cranach's work. A biography and history of the time in which Cranach worked will provide a better context for examining the subject. Because no scholar has provided an investigation of Cranach's Delilah figures, a historiography of scholarship on his other women, both biblical and mythological, provides assistance in understanding this scene and the Delilah in particular.

### Cranach

Lucas Cranach (1472-1553) lived at a time in Saxony when many factors such as humanism, the Reformation, the expansion of the open market, and the influence of the Italian Renaissance were changing styles and the production of art. Little is known of the first thirty years of Cranach's life.<sup>2</sup> He was born in the town of Kronach (from which he gets his name) and was the son of painter Hans Mahler. Cranach is believed to have worked as a painter in his Franconian hometown until about 1498 and is recorded working in Vienna beginning around 1502. There, Cranach found himself in circles with humanist scholars from the University of Vienna. He painted portraits of the historian Johannes Cuspinian and the lawyer Stephan Reuss, two important university professors. Cranach appears to owe much of his artistic influence and his commissions to the

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<sup>2</sup> Facts of Cranach's biography are not always certain and have been smoothed in this chapter to provide for readability. There is still much uncertainty and controversy about his early life, especially before becoming court artist at Wittenberg.

humanists surrounding him.<sup>3</sup> Cranach's time in Vienna is also recorded in the later writing from Wittenberg of Philipp Melanchthon and Christoph von Scheurl who mention Cranach's short stay in Vienna.<sup>4</sup>

Cranach did not stay long among the Vienna humanists. In 1505 he began working as the court painter in service of the Saxon elector, Frederick the Wise, at the Saxon court capital in Wittenberg. For over four decades until his death he served the rulers of Saxony -- beginning with Frederick the Wise who was succeeded by John the Steadfast and finally John Frederick the Magnanimous. It is unclear why Cranach was chosen for the position of court painter for Saxony. It is possible he met Frederick earlier, while in the town of Kronach. In Vienna he may have attracted the attention of Emperor Maximilian, boosting his reputation in the eyes of the Elector.<sup>5</sup>

During the reign of Frederick the Wise (r. 1486-1525), the Elector employed Cranach to paint altarpieces and decorate the walls of his residences. At the Saxon Electorate Court, Cranach was required to meet broad demands. His works were a means of ensuring the princes' reputation, with many of his works serving as gifts from the Elector to important rulers such as the Queen of France and King Henry VIII of England. Cranach was not only appreciated for his talent as a court painter, but he was also an honored and recognized citizen of Wittenberg. On January 6, 1508 he was granted a coat of arms -- a winged serpent -- with which he began to sign most of his workshop productions. The coat of arms received from Elector Frederick the Wise honored Cranach's good services. He was appointed treasurer to the Wittenberg town council in

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<sup>3</sup>Max J. Friedländer and Jakob Rosenberg, *The Paintings of Lucas Cranach* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 15; Gunnar Heydenreich, *Lucas Cranach the Elder: Painting Materials, Techniques and Workshop Practice* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 267.

<sup>4</sup>Eberhard Ruhmer, *Cranach* (London: Phaidon Press, 1963), 7.

<sup>5</sup>Heydenreich, *Lucas Cranach*, 267; Friedländer, *The Paintings of Lucas Cranach*, 17.



1519 and the following year the Elector accorded him the privilege of apothecary, which included the apothecary's house in Wittenberg where he sold medicine, spices and wine. By 1524 Cranach also owned a bookshop and ran a printing press and paper mill with a fellow town councilor. At his bookshop Cranach sold books, along with his prints and the works of the reformer Martin Luther. Cranach served many times as a town councillor in Wittenberg between 1519 and 1544. He also served as mayor alternately with a colleague from 1537 to 1544. Cranach was clearly a prominent citizen of Wittenberg, both in influence and wealth. He was acquainted with powerful leaders, such as Emperor Maximilian who sent him to the Netherlands in 1508, and he also stayed at the court of Margaret of Austria, Governor of the Low Countries. In 1523 he received King Christian II of Denmark as a guest in his home. In 1528, according to tax figures, Cranach owned four houses and additional landed properties, making him the richest citizen in Wittenberg at the time he painted the *Samson and Delilah* painting in New York.<sup>6</sup>

### Patrons

Cranach's artistic skill and studio were not as much use to John the Steadfast (r. 1525-1532) who succeeded Frederick in 1525. Cranach was employed to paint small panels of secular subject matter and many portraits for the new Elector, and he also had the opportunity under John the Steadfast to produce many works for other dignitaries and princes, especially Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg. Cranach's work for the Cardinal began around 1520 and lasted until 1527, and included religious imagery and many portraits. In fact, according to Ruhmer, no artist painted as many pictures of the Cardinal as Cranach. Under John Frederick the Magnanimous (r. 1532-1554), with whom Cranach

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<sup>6</sup> Heydenreich, *Lucas Cranach*, 267; Ruhmer, *Cranach*, 15-16.

formed a close relationship, he was commissioned to paint an increasing number of large, specifically Lutheran, altarpieces.<sup>7</sup> According to Ozment, Cranach freely associated with his noble acquaintances and was treated as one of their own. His career soared as his reputation as court painter, diplomat, and entrepreneur spread throughout Saxony and the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>8</sup>

Cranach's relationship with Martin Luther is also an important consideration in understanding much of his art production. As a result of the Reformation religious painting was transformed. In 1517 Luther presented his 95 theses in Wittenberg, and shortly after Luther and Cranach developed a close friendship. Cranach made many portraits of Luther, his wife, and his parents. He was also acquainted with and painted other leading Reformers, such as Philipp Melanchthon, and he is known as a painter for the Reformation. Like other painters of the time, Cranach also served Catholic religious leaders like Albrecht of Brandenburg, Luther's archenemy.<sup>9</sup>

Following the model of many other northern artists with an emphasis on craftsmanship and workshop production, Cranach utilized a type of art making that not only allowed him to create numerous paintings, prints and interior decoration for the court of Saxony and Martin Luther, but it also allowed him to create work to sell on the open market. With the open market, instead of artists producing work strictly from commissions and patrons, artists were able to make art products of their own devising and then sell them, either out of their workshops (many workshops had an area to display

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<sup>7</sup> Friedländer, *The Paintings of Lucas Cranach*, 17; Ruhmer, *Cranach*, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Steven Ozment, *The Serpent and the Lamb: Cranach, Luther, and the Making of the Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 79; Ruhmer, *Cranach*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Luther became the godfather to Cranach's daughter in 1520 and Cranach stood godfather to Luther's first son Johannes in 1526. Though Cranach worked for Cardinal Albrecht at the same time, working for a Catholic patron was not as much of a contradiction as some have believed in the past. Ruhmer, *Cranach*, 26-27.

and sell works) or at art fairs, like the fair at Leipzig.<sup>10</sup> At times Cranach's workshop was devoted almost completely to the decoration of castles at Coburg, Lochau, Altenburg, Wittenberg, Weimar and Torgau. The workshop was also responsible for seeing that buildings in Wittenberg were properly painted and that interior walls were decorated. Under Cranach's leadership, the workshop was responsible for painting the facades of houses, towers, and gates as well as chandeliers and gilded deer horns. It also framed silk embroidery, supplied curtains, and painted tables, benches and chests, and provided designs for glaziers, carpet weavers, lamp makers, locksmiths and goldsmiths. Supplying decorative features for court celebrations, tournaments, court journeys and military engagements, and providing crests and emblems for weapons and designing court dress were also important responsibilities of Cranach's workshop.<sup>11</sup> Outside the court, the workshop furnished other Saxon town and village churches with altarpieces. Cranach also profited from a merchant class that was increasingly able to purchase and commission artwork.<sup>12</sup>

Early twentieth-century writers, like Ruhmer, note that after Cranach's move to Wittenberg his work increasingly became less the achievement of an individual artist and became merged into the collective output of a workshop that functioned almost mechanically.<sup>13</sup> With the open market in Germany, Cranach was not confined to depicting images pleasing to his wealthy patrons. Rather he produced panel paintings and prints with an eye for what could sell more widely on the open market, either through his bookstore or at art fairs, for example the international fair in Leipzig. Toward the end of

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<sup>10</sup> Susie Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 157-158.

<sup>11</sup> Heydenreich, *Lucas Cranach* 268-269.

<sup>12</sup> Heydenreich, *Lucas Cranach*, 269; Friedländer, *The Paintings of Lucas Cranach*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Ruhmer, *Cranach*, 10.

the fifteenth century, artworks were progressively manufactured speculatively for the open market with artists anticipating what sorts of images would sell. Yet, artists were not always free to explore purely artistic problems and were subject to external demands. The standardized quality of workshops became important. Regulation and control within the workshop were essential ingredients for these artists' designs. Cranach is an example of how a master painter could do very well and become wealthy. To be successful artists' workshops needed to be well organized, standardized and versatile, and have control over the competition. Artists' shops were stocked with a variety of images of different sizes and subjects. Christoph Scheurl, a university professor in Wittenberg, described Cranach's studio in the following manner:

There are in fact so many and such great masterpieces that every time I come to you, which is often enough, I am at a loss to know what to look at first, something new appearing every day. Wherever one turns, in every nook and cranny there is a picture.<sup>14</sup>

These images painted on wood panel or printed on paper, were available for the growing number of middle-class patrons walking into the workshop off the street. Workshops increasingly became commercial businesses oriented toward economic survival producing products that would sell.<sup>15</sup>

The wooden supports for Cranach's panel paintings demonstrate the regularized production of his paintings. Standardized works could be produced quickly and more cheaply. The wooden panels of Cranach's workshop have been divided into six different lettered sizes by Heydenreich that were preferred in the Cranach workshop beginning around 1520 until around 1535. The Samson and Delilah panel is an example of the panel

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<sup>14</sup> Heydenreich, *Lucas Cranach*, 269-271.

<sup>15</sup> Craig Harbison, *The Art of the Northern Renaissance* (London: Calmann and King, 1995), 63-64, 68.

‘C’ format, measuring 57.2 x 37.8 cm (22 ½ x 14 7/8 in.).<sup>16</sup> It is likely, therefore, that he produced numerous paintings for sale to a general market without being commissioned. Cranach may have sold the paintings from the workshop or on the open market. On both commissioned and non-commissioned art, Cranach’s signature of the serpent with wings had great importance because it represented a guarantee of quality. Its inclusion most likely would have been important for gifts made in the Cranach workshop for dignitaries outside the Saxon court, for commissions from outside the Saxon court, and work made for the open market.<sup>17</sup> Cranach must have had many painters, engravers and other craftsmen employed over the four decades he worked as court painter, however the understanding today of the painters working in Cranach’s workshop is very fragmented. Cranach’s sons Hans Cranach and Lucas Cranach the Younger both worked for their father, with Lucas Cranach the Younger eventually taking over the workshop.<sup>18</sup>

The *Samson and Delilah* painting has been attributed to Lucas Cranach the Elder, though it is unclear whether his hand personally touched it. The painting is unlike many of Cranach’s other images of seductive women in that it was only treated three times in the Cranach workshop, unlike those of Judith, Lucretia, and Venus that were produced repeatedly. It leads one to question whether this painting was created for the open market, or as a separate commission, and what was the popularity of such an image.

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<sup>16</sup> Heydenreich, *Lucas Cranach*, 42.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 280.

## Historiography

As Helmut Nickel noted in 1981, scholars have often treated Cranach with disdain, because he never achieved the mastery of classical art as did Albrecht Dürer, the renowned German artist from Nuremberg. This “scorn” against Cranach was provoked by the artist’s incredible productivity and working speed that resulted in his producing hundreds of paintings through his large workshop. Cranach has also been understood as a superficial painter best known not for artistic innovation, but for his efficient workshop that produced “frivolous nudes” and portraits.<sup>19</sup> In this section I evaluate scholarship that explores Cranach’s female images. A study of Cranach’s representation of Delilah has not yet been realized, therefore it is necessary to examine how Cranach’s images of women – presented both as temptresses and powerful women – have been discussed, in order to explore the purpose and meaning of *Samson and Delilah* in the Metropolitan Museum.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s publication, *German Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, presents the most complete analysis of the painting in the twenty-first century, and offers a few possibilities for its greater meaning and importance. Ainsworth suggests that the painting was possibly part of a series of paintings representing the Power of Women *topos* either as a warning against divulging secrets or as a foil to another painting of Samson by Cranach. These various possibilities will be explored in the third chapter while considering the context of events happening in northern Europe and the changing attitudes toward women.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Helmut Nickel, “‘The Judgment of Paris’ by Lucas Cranach the Elder: Nature, Allegory, and Alchemy,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 16 (1981): 117.

<sup>20</sup> Ainsworth, *German Paintings*, 61-62.

Steven Ozment, a historian of the Protestant Reformation, explores the relationship between Cranach and Martin Luther, and the religious associations of Cranach's work in his book *The Serpent and the Lamb* of 2011. He focuses both on how new theology shaped Cranach's art and how Cranach and Luther's attitudes toward women affected the art produced. Two chapters of Ozment's book discuss Cranach's depiction of biblical and mythological women. He concentrates on how Protestant teaching increasingly focused on relationships between husbands and wives. Ozment argues that both Luther and Cranach encouraged the institution of marriage. He provides a positive interpretation of Cranach's women. He believes, quite implausibly, that Cranach actually came to appreciate women in a more profound way after his marriage around 1511, noting that women begin to appear not as "soulless art objects" but rather as convincing female individuals in their own right. However, this attitude of Cranach's is not apparent when considering his images of women, who especially after 1510 start to all look the same. There is no evidence that he had respect for women, only that he appreciated red-haired women and the nude form. Ozment interprets representations of Delilah, Salome and Judith as examples of womankind's sexual prowess over strong and logical men, and as images that encourage marriage because they show what can happen to men when faced with tempting women. His explanation of images like Samson and Delilah, Salome and Herod, and Judith and Holofernes is that they provide moralizing messages about love and marriage.<sup>21</sup> Though it is difficult to read any ideas of marriage with these types of images, it is evident that they do demonstrate an underlying fear of tempting women and reveal what can happen to logical and powerful men if they fall under their spell.

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<sup>21</sup> Ozment, *The Serpent and the Lamb*, 174, 248.

Similarly, Elke Anne Werner, Mark Evans, and Susan Foister, writing in 2007, also explore ideas of morality and sexual restraint and how they affected Cranach's output. Werner examines the veils of Cranach's Venus figures and explores the images in the context of a culture that she states was concerned with sexual promiscuity. She uses social history, the history of ideas, and an iconographic approach to the figures and notes the contrast between the clearly erotic effect of Cranach's nude pictures, especially the *Venus and Cupid* of 1509 in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, and their moralizing meaning (fig.2). Werner sees a need to legitimize the "special interests" of Cranach's clients on moral and religious grounds, which was accomplished by adding text to the painting. Like Ozment, Werner includes Martin Luther -- who many scholars cannot resist bringing into the discussion of Cranach given their close friendship -- on the concern for morality, noting his theological statements about paintings. For Luther, making a painting for pleasure or decoration was acceptable, but he was more worried about images of saints being worshipped than pleasurable images of classical nudes being enjoyed.<sup>22</sup> Though Luther's theology most likely had a direct influence on Cranach's religious paintings of the 1520s and 30s, I believe most scholars too readily read Lutheran morals and theology into all of Cranach's work. Though it seems Cranach was a religious man, it is also evident that he was a businessman, equally concerned with making money as with making a moral statement.

Evans' essay, included in the same collection of articles on Cranach edited by Bodo Brinkmann in 2007, also examines Cranach's early *Venus* in the Hermitage, noting that the artist presents a sensual image of a nude goddess while the Latin inscription at

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<sup>22</sup> Elke Anna Werner, "The Veil of Venus: A Metaphor of Seeing in Lucas Cranach the Elder," in *Cranach*, ed. Bodo Brinkmann (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2007), 101-102.



top provides a moralizing message: “Resist with all your might the lascivious Cupid, so that Venus does not take possession of your darkened heart.”<sup>23</sup> Evans further looks to Cranach’s involvement with humanist figures at the University of Wittenberg and Vienna, noting how the painting’s sentiments of the folly of love represent the Christian humanism to which Cranach was exposed.<sup>24</sup>

Susan Foister, writing about Cranach’s Eve figures, also notes the importance of Luther for the artist’s works. Portrayals of Eve, like the *Venus* of 1509, offer male viewers the opportunity to delight in the depiction of a nude female while providing a moralizing image and acknowledging the perceived ability of women to “lead men astray from the path of Christian virtue.”<sup>25</sup>

Though Werner, Evans and Foister do not directly discuss Cranach’s depiction of Delilah, it is evident that they believe Cranach provided a moralizing tone – attributed to his time with Martin Luther and humanists in Wittenberg and Vienna – to some of his paintings of women. It is possible these same readings can be applied to *Samson and Delilah*, to be discussed in the second chapter. Other scholars have concentrated on a more formal and iconographic approach to Cranach’s women, particularly his nudes. Examining this avenue of scholarship offers a new perspective on the figure of Delilah. Although she is not nude, as many of the female figures discussed, some of the same intended purposes can be read in the New York image.

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<sup>23</sup> Mark Evans, “Lucas Cranach and the Art of Humanism,” in *Cranach*, ed. Bodo Brinkmann (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2007), 54-55.

<sup>24</sup> Evans, *Art of Humanism*, 54.

<sup>25</sup> Susan Foister, “Before the Fall: Adam and Eve and Some Mythological Paintings by Cranach,” in *Temptation in Eden: Lucas Cranach’s Adam and Eve* (London: Courtauld Institute of Art Gallery, 2007), 48.

Formal and iconographic analyses have been the most widely used methodologies for scholars discussing Cranach's work and in the twenty-first century when scholars have often combined these methodologies with others such as social history and psychological analysis. A formal analysis of female nudes and a comparison with other artistic styles contemporary to Cranach began with Max Friedländer and Jakob Rosenberg's important and now standard monograph *The Paintings of Lucas Cranach*, published in 1932 in German and in 1978 in English. Though an early publication the Friedländer-Rosenberg book is still used by scholars and understood as one of the foundational publications within Cranach scholarship.

Friedländer and Rosenberg, Ruhmer, and Clark have often discussed Cranach's work in association with the classical style in Italy, noting that Cranach's style would never attain the "classical maturity" of the art of the Italian Renaissance. Many scholars consider Cranach's *Venus and Cupid* of 1509 in the Hermitage Museum as "almost" achieving the classically inspired style with its apparent use of the sfumato of Leonardo da Vinci and its classically inspired female form. Friedländer and Rosenberg compare the figure of Venus to classical nudes of Italy, noting that it "aspires to monumentality in the spirit of classical sculpture," while formally having a "sullen," dark quality, "like a barbarian idol."<sup>26</sup> These authors note that after 1509, Cranach's work started to "fizzle out," changing to a style very different from his early classical forms.<sup>27</sup> In the second and third decade of the sixteenth century Cranach's figures become thinner and more elongated and are often described as Mannerist. His females all begin to take on the same facial features. Friedländer and Rosenberg's understanding that Cranach's later figures

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<sup>26</sup> Friedländer, *The Paintings of Lucas Cranach*, 21.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

did not measure up to the artist's early depictions of the nude Venus demonstrate the preference art historians have given to forms from and deriving from classical Greek and Roman art.

Friedländer and Rosenberg note that Cranach deliberately sought "beauty," after 1505, and in particular the beauty of the female. The beauty Friedländer and Rosenberg refer to here is the classical beauty of the *Venus and Cupid* of 1509, which is noted to be influenced by Italian models, that through humanism and a new interest in classical forms, emphasized the nude human figure. As the scholars discuss Cranach's female figures beginning in 1520, they note that the figures change and are not shaped from life or classical models, and are therefore not as fine.<sup>28</sup> This evaluation shows the art historical notion that began with Johann Joachim Winkelmann of Greek and Roman classical forms as the most ideal of art forms.

Cranach became "intensely interested," according to Friedländer and Rosenberg, in the naked human form after 1520, searching the Bible, history, and mythology for opportunities to portray the nude. The scholars note that it was demands of the Saxon court, Cranach's relations with Luther, the teachings of humanists and the spirit of the University of Wittenberg that shaped Cranach's career, determining the content of his work. Yet, when discussing his female nudes, particularly those beginning in the 1520s, Friedländer and Rosenberg mostly stick to formal analysis, noting that for Venus, Eve, and Lucretia figures Cranach used slender, elongated, sometimes excessively tall forms, with stylistic similarities to Mannerism in Italy in the beginning decades of the sixteenth century, similar to artists such as Jacopo Pontormo. Friedländer and Rosenberg note "the same atmosphere of innocent coquetry emanates from all his [Cranach's] smooth, soft

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 21-23.

beauties, with their sinuous contours...” and they also discuss the female figures’ “dainty and pleasing” forms.<sup>29</sup> Throughout Friedländer and Rosenberg’s monograph, Cranach’s women are referred to as “beauties.” Within this early scholarship, Friedländer and Rosenberg use formal analysis that alludes to the erotic nature of Cranach’s figures. Though the scholars do not explicitly comment on the erotic character, their language suggests that they do in fact view the artist’s nudes as pleasing, not only for Cranach’s patrons, but for the viewer (or art historian) today.

The erotic nature implied, and tiptoed around, as if not to offend the reader, by Friedländer and Rosenberg, can also be found in Kenneth Clark’s book *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* from 1956. Clark concentrates on the importance of patron’s taste in the nude figures Cranach made. Clark argues that the personal and seductive nature of Cranach’s nudes demonstrates how taste and morals had changed in the post-Reformation period of the 1520s and 30s, with its growing “appetite for provocative nudity spreading through Protestant states of Germany.”<sup>30</sup> Clark’s language examining the female nudes is reminiscent of Friedländer and Rosenberg’s, using the terms “desirable bibelots” and “naked charmers” for the women represented.<sup>31</sup> Clark discusses the images of women as objects, decorative ornaments that are pleasing to the eye. Like Friedländer and Rosenberg, Clark uses a formal language while considering these nudes, referencing their “sinuous line and shallow, internal modeling.” He specifically notes what he believes to be Cranach’s erotic intention with these images and calls the paintings “aphrodisiac art.” He further notes that these nudes are as much to our taste today as they would have been

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), 332.

<sup>31</sup> Clark, *The Nude*, 332

during Cranach's time.<sup>32</sup> Clark seems to take Cranach's nude images a step farther than Friedländer and Rosenberg. He begins to examine how buyers in the sixteenth century would have experienced the art. Clark discusses the nude images as objects, but does not really see a problem with this. He still does not consider the larger context, and why certain subjects and women were depicted in this way.

Eberhard Ruhmer, a German art historian, used similar language for Cranach's nude figures in his monograph on Cranach of 1963. Ruhmer mentions that nude imagery arose from the humanist and "life-loving" atmosphere of the princely courts in Germany and the rest of Europe. He describes Cranach's nudes as having a "voluptuous sensuality" and "alluring, dreamy softness," their forms having a "catlike softness, a certain feline charm." He also notes, "somehow one is always reminded of mannequins displaying lingerie."<sup>33</sup> In his formal language, Ruhmer, like Friedländer, Rosenberg, and Clark, alludes to the erotic nature of Cranach's nude figures as prompting a feeling of desire in men of the sixteenth-century, but the nudes' erotic nature is something that translates to twentieth-century ideas of beauty and sensuality as well. These scholars, all male art historians, indicate through language they use that they themselves seem to be seduced by these female "beauties."<sup>34</sup> However, the erotic nature of the nudes is not fully considered, as if it is tactless to discuss them in the mid twentieth-century in art historical discourse. Even though these scholars note the erotic nature of the nudes, they do not consider the intended purpose of the nude paintings, nor consider them as serious artworks. Were they meant to excite, to be displayed on walls in a private area of a home, were they a larger

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 334

<sup>33</sup> Ruhmer, *Cranach*, 20.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Carter notes this seduction of scholarly writers in his article, "Cranach's Women: A Speculative Essay," *Australian Journal of Art* 9 (1989): 44-77.

part of court taste in the sixteenth century, or did they have connections to the attitudes surrounding the religious and humanist environment of the North? The above-mentioned scholars also do not question who Cranach's audience was. Were his nude paintings made for aristocratic and wealthy middle-class males, or were they also popular images for female customers? We can ask these same questions of Cranach's *Samson and Delilah*. Though Delilah is not in the nude, she is still presented in a pleasing way, within a context of a beautiful woman using her wiles against a man and often associated with love and lust. It is possible that some of these same correlations of the erotic can be placed on her.

This discussion of eroticism in Cranach's female figures should extend beyond his nude women of Venus and Lucretia to his images, based in the Bible, of powerful (sometimes) clothed women using their sexual wiles to make men helpless. Cranach shows Delilah, Salome, Eve, and Judith (all Old Testament women) as sexual temptresses who defy the sexual hierarchy of their own time (and also the sixteenth century), where women were meant to be submissive to stronger and more logical men. Like Cranach's nude Venuses and Lucretias, these images of biblical women were also popular subject matter in Cranach's workshop. Jane Davidson Reid, in her article "The True Judith" of 1969, discusses Cranach's Judith figures in terms of their eroticism. The clothed temptresses (Judith, Delilah, Salome) have rarely been discussed by scholars before Reid, possibly because the elongated, slender, clothed forms were not as interesting for art historians who praised the classical nude figures of the Italian Renaissance. Reid notes a "false eroticism" that has mingled with the legend of Judith in Cranach's paintings, as seen in *Judith Victorious* of c. 1530 in the Jagdschloss Grünewald, Berlin (fig. 3). The

young woman's fingers are delicately, almost erotically, entwined in the hair of the severed head. Reid feels there is a "disturbing sense of young girls, half-seduced into being painted as dolls" who are juxtaposed with the "staring masks of the defeated male."<sup>35</sup> Indeed there is an underlying sensuality in Cranach's images of Judith, where beautiful young women in pristine courtly dress playfully run their fingers through the curly hair of Holofernes. The severed head provides a stark contrast to the otherwise calm, almost aloof Judith, who gazes at the viewer with dreamy eyes, inviting them into the scene.

It is not until 1989 that Michael Carter's article "Cranach's Women: A Speculative Essay," fully considers the erotic nature of Cranach's nudes and their greater purpose. With a background in fashion, costume and ornamentation history, Carter examines the hats, jewelry, and veils worn by Cranach's nudes as accoutrements that turn the women into erotic objects for the pleasure of the courtly men in the sixteenth century. Carter gives a concise historiography of how art historians have discussed the artist's erotic images in the past. He notes that the language of past publications attempted to approach sexual arousal "to become an equivalent for erotic touching and looking."<sup>36</sup> Carter explores art's psychological and physical effects on its viewers, using ideas from Freud to understand how these images were consumed by sixteenth-century men, and how male art historians have become entranced by them. Carter argues that Cranach's nudes were made to induce sexual arousal, and he suggests that these images are an early developmental form of pornography. As proof, Carter examines the mode of production utilized in making the images (the repetitive nature of the workshop), the nature of the

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<sup>35</sup> Jane Davidson Reid, "The True Judith," *Art Journal* 28, no. 4 (Summer, 1969): 381-382.

<sup>36</sup> Carter, "Cranach's Women," 52-53.

images, and the uses to which their owners put them, noting that “erection and masturbation have been the most appropriate response” to Cranach’s nude women, because of their effect of causing arousal, demonstrated by past art historian’s language.<sup>37</sup>

Unlike previous scholars, Carter limits the role of the artist, noting that Cranach may not have been aware of what he was producing, only that his images were popular among his court patrons and for the open market. The fact that many of these nudes, like the *Venus and Cupid* of 1525-27 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig.4), are placed in front of a black background and wear sixteenth-century accoutrements, and are at the center of the viewer’s gaze could point to their purpose as being simply naked bodies for the visual and physical pleasure of the buyer (fig. 4). The Venus figures are not presented in an environment signifying a classical theme.<sup>38</sup> Rather, the mythological stories of Venus and Cupid, and Lucretia, are reduced to nude figures; they are given titles and poses that reference a classical subject, but they are presented as displays of their naked form. Carter argues that the modern genre of porn, images that produce the physical response of arousal, is also apparent in considering the “catalogue-like logic” present in the works and that they were produced in a workshop that generated hundreds of paintings for patrons and the open market.<sup>39</sup> Carter believes these images would be clearly associated with, and located within, the male private domain, although he gives no documentary evidence as to where these images actually hung. He believes it is the male sexual fantasy of the provocative woman that fills these images.

Carter places a lot of emphasis on how the modern-day art historian has discussed these figures, noting that their responses and language demonstrates that these images

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 67



cause arousal. However, reactions of male art historians are not solely sufficient to determine the use of these images. Until more information is available about who bought nude images and where they hung, it is difficult to understand how they were used in the sixteenth century. Also, Carter does not perhaps give the artist enough credit in understanding the use of his images and their ability to stimulate arousal. Could it also be possible to understand the nudes as fulfilling the desires of the artist as well? Cranach filled his workshop with the same image of a young red-haired woman. Though there was probably a common model that workshop assistants drew from, it may also be plausible to view this image of woman as Cranach's own personal desire or an ideal of beauty at the time.

The accessories of Cranach's female nudes and their association with the eroticism of the images have continued to play an important role in understanding his works into twenty-first-century scholarship. Werner discusses the accoutrements of Cranach's figures, specifically the veils of Cranach's Venus figures, focusing on Cranach's in the Städel Museum, Frankfurt (fig. 5). For Werner, the veil both masks and unmasks while drawing the viewer's attention. Instead of covering the figure, the veil directs our gaze towards what the filmy fabric attempts to hid. The materiality of the veil's paint contrasts with the smooth surface of the figure. The veil therefore intervenes between the levels of reality (the picture) and the imagination of the viewer.<sup>40</sup> Werner uses formal analysis in looking at the materiality and painterliness of the veil of Venus and combines it with her psychological perspective of the veil that both draws attention to and reveals the female form for the male gaze, while interrupting that power through its materiality.

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<sup>40</sup> Werner, "Veil of Venus," 99-103.

Though Delilah in Cranach's painting at the Metropolitan Museum is clothed, in a landscape setting, and included with the figure of Samson, some of the same ideas can be assumed for her as those that have been discussed for the nude female form. Delilah is presented as a body that was lusted over by Samson and that eventually led to his ruin. Like the *Venus and Cupid* of 1509, there may be a moralizing message to the painting, about what can happen when men are trapped by sexually tempting women. In the second chapter that follows, the narrative and reception of Samson and Delilah will be further discussed within the context of sixteenth-century attitudes towards women. By examining the biblical story and its relation to Cranach's painting, how this painting would have been viewed in the sixteenth century becomes more evident.

## Chapter 2

This chapter will discuss the biblical text of Samson and Delilah compared with Cranach's visual interpretation of the subject, and emphasize the differences in the story from text to image. I also examine the reading of Samson and Delilah and the broader attitude toward women in sixteenth-century discourse, with particular emphasis on the writings of Luther. Examining northern views of Samson and Delilah sheds light on how Cranach's image may have been understood by sixteenth-century viewers. I continue with an exploration of contemporary interpretations of Samson and Delilah and how these explanations allow us to read Cranach's image in the twenty-first century. Though twentieth-century readings are often placed on past images, they do not always provide an accurate understanding of sixteenth-century attitudes.

### The Biblical Samson and Delilah

The story of Samson and Delilah derives from the Old Testament book of Judges. Although Delilah is often understood in commentary and images in the Middle Ages and Renaissance as one of the villains of the Bible, little is known about her. She is important because she defeated the extraordinary hero of Israel, the strongman Samson, a Nazarite, who conquered the Philistines in many battles.<sup>41</sup> Delilah was a woman of unknown origin, though the biblical story leads one to understand she was not a Nazarite like Samson, and was therefore a foreign woman, the "other." The Bible communicates her

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<sup>41</sup> Nazarites were known as a group especially devoted to God. For men, their identity was marked by long hair and abstinence from alcohol. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 77.

name, which is significant because the women in Samson's other stories go unnamed.<sup>42</sup> The Bible also states that she "dwelt in the valley of Sorec" and that Samson "loved" her, a fact significant because the text never says he loved his wife or the harlot in Gaza he encounters (Judg. 16:4).<sup>43</sup> The Philistine princes gave Delilah the task of enticing Samson and discover what made his strength great: "Deceive him, and learn of him where his great strength lieth... we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver" (Judges 16:5). Delilah attempts three times to discover what gives Samson his strength, simply by asking him, and three times Samson gives her a false answer. First he declares if he "shall be bound with seven cords made of sinews not yet dry, I shall be weak like other men" (Judg. 16:7), then "if I shall be bound with new ropes, that were never in work, I shall be weak like other men" (Judg. 16:11), and finally "If thou plattest the seven locks of my head with lace, and tying them round about a nail fastenest it in the ground, I shall be weak" (Judg. 16:13). Each time, Delilah has Philistines waiting nearby and after Samson is bound she cries out "the Philistines are upon thee, Samson" (Judg. 16:9, 12, 14). Samson never loses his strength, but Delilah is persistent and gets the truth of Samson's strength on her fourth try: "The razor hath never come upon my head... if my head be shaven, my strength shall depart from me, and I shall become weak, and shall be like other men" (Judg. 16:17). After learning his secret, Delilah has Samson "sleep upon her knees" and calls a barber who "shaved his seven locks" (Judg. 16:19).

Once she has taken away his strength, the Philistines seize Samson, put out his eyes, bind him in chains, and lock him in prison. However, Samson's hair regrows and he

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<sup>42</sup> There are three other women that make an appearance in Samson's story, his mother (who was barren until an angel came to her saying she would bear a son), his Philistine wife, and the harlot in Gaza (Judg. 13:1-5; 14:1-20; 16:1)

<sup>43</sup> Bible verses are taken from the Douay-Rheims translation of the Old Testament. The Luther translation of the Old Testament, published in 1534, consists of similar language in the Samson and Delilah story.

later regains his strength, shakes the pillars of a house, and ends up dying, killing more Philistines at his death, than he killed in his life (Judg. 16:30).

### Cranach's *Samson and Delilah*

The moment Cranach has chosen in the New York painting is when Delilah has found the source of Samson's strength. The biblical text and Cranach's image do not necessarily match. In the painting, Samson lies with his eyes closed on Delilah's lap. Delilah sits on a tree stump, leaning slightly over Samson. Her eyes look downward, slightly closed, concentrating on the task before her with scissors in hand. At left lies the jawbone of an ass with which Samson slew a thousand men (Judg. 15:15); this is one of the objects that usually identifies Samson. Delilah gently cuts Samson's hair with a pair of scissors or shears, the ends of which merely poke out behind Samson's head. While this detail is not part of the biblical story (according to the biblical text Delilah does not do the shaving herself), Delilah cutting Samson's hair is the prominent way the subject was portrayed, especially in Northern European art.<sup>44</sup> The cutting of the hair is the most important, and powerful, part of the scene because it is the moment when Samson's strength is taken away. By having Delilah do the deed, she is emphasized as the villain who causes the capture of the hero Samson.

In the background, emerging from the bushes are the Philistines, who arrive to seize Samson after his strength has been taken away. The bushes separate the soldiers from Samson and Delilah, though a slight gap in the foliage offers a path that leads to the reclining couple. The tree and bushes that surround Samson and Delilah are ripe with fruit; the apples bring to mind the tree of knowledge, alluding to Eve's temptation of

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<sup>44</sup> Many northern prints depict Delilah cutting the hair of Samson, including the Master of the Housebook (figs.14-15), Master E.S. (figs.11-13), and Lucas van Leyden (figs.20-22).

Adam.<sup>45</sup> The Philistines all have individualized faces and clothing. Some wear the armor of soldiers and carry spears, and a few wear metal helmets and others red caps. The middle figure is set apart by his long beard, older appearance, and his distinct, wide-brimmed, red hat. He appears to be the only soldier not carrying a weapon. A gap above the surrounding bushes reveals a distant castle in the background on a hill. Cranach included his mark, a serpent with elevated wings, on the tree stump at the lower right of the painting, the mark of his workshop, but the painting bears no date.

Delilah wears a contemporary red Saxon dress that looks to be of a soft velvet material falling in folds along her feet. One small white slipper with three black lines peeks out from the folds of her gown. Delilah's accoutrements – the gold and red hair cap and jeweled choker necklace – are similar to accessories Cranach used in other paintings, for example, in *Judith Victorious* (fig. 3) and *Venus* of 1532 (fig. 5). Delilah mirrors the figures of Lucas Cranach's other women created in the 1520s and 1530s, not only in her accessories and clothing, but also in the shape of her face and features. For instance the female figures in his *Lot and His Daughters* of 1528 in Vienna are very similar, down to the small white slipper (fig.6).

In Cranach's New York painting, Delilah's light colored skin is visible only in her face, her upper chest and left hand. Her smooth, light flesh is contrasted with Samson's rougher skin, which is much darker, almost orange, when compared with Delilah's. His veins bulge out, most prominently in both calf muscles. His fingernails and toenails are dirty along with the rest of his skin, which contrasts with Delilah's soft, clean and pale hands. Samson twists at a somewhat awkward angle, one arm lying across Delilah's lap with that hand resting on Delilah's knee, his head resting in the crook of his arm,

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<sup>45</sup> Ainsworth, *German Paintings*, 59.

seemingly unaware of Delilah's actions. Samson's other hand grasps his own knee, which is bent. Samson also wears contemporary dress of Saxony, a blue tunic with velvet or satin sleeves. His bare legs are shown at odd angles with his right leg seemingly growing out of the left. His feet wear simple sandals, tied with bows.

The *Samson and Delilah* by Cranach in New York is small and painted on a beech wood panel. Throughout his career, Cranach painted on a wide range of wooden panels of different sizes and formats. During his first decades at the Wittenberg court, Cranach frequently ordered panels of varying size and format, adjusting dimensions according to the composition or the client's request. By the third decade of the sixteenth century Cranach's workshop began using standard formats for panels and adjusted the design to conform to predetermined vertical and horizontal parameters. Heydenreich rightly suggests that the standardization of formats allowed efficient production for certain themes painted without a specific commission and sold on the open market, possibly through Cranach's studio or at fairs. Having predetermined measurements meant that Cranach did not have to have a carpenter specially make a panel every time he received a commission. *Samson and Delilah* fits into Heydenreich's panel format "C" (51-59 x 34-40 cm) of Cranach's panel paintings, the third of six sizes.<sup>46</sup> Its beech wood panel is unusual for European panel painting. Limewood, oak and fir seem to be more commonly used. Cranach is atypical in his preference for beech wood and he used this species of wood frequently, particularly for his small-format paintings, from 1520 to the mid-1530s. The use of this wood type coincides with the implementation of standard sizes of panels.

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<sup>46</sup> Heydenreich, *Lucas Cranach*, 42-46. The smallest of the six sizes of panels measures about 18.5 x 14 cm, the largest measures 149 x 112 cm. Panels vary slightly in size within each of the six groups.

Heydenreich and other scholars have offered no explanation for this wood preference of the artist.<sup>47</sup>

### Interpretations of the Biblical Story

The Book of Judges in the Old Testament is named for the judges in the book who are often considered epic heroes, of which Samson is one. Even though Samson lived the life of a sort of “wild man” and was often tempted by women, both Jews and Christians recognized Samson as an instrument of divine will.<sup>48</sup> He is a strongman who fights for God. He is also an example of how even the strongest and the wisest can be tempted by evil, or in this case, women. For Samson, women are sources of deception, betrayal, and destabilization.<sup>49</sup> Delilah is that dangerous woman, who through trickery, relentless pestering and seduction, destroys what made Samson different, making him “like any man.”<sup>50</sup>

For Mieke Bal the story of Samson and Delilah is the model of woman’s perceived wickedness in our culture. It demonstrates that no matter how strong a man, he will always be helpless against woman’s designs of enchantment.<sup>51</sup> Delilah is the third woman Samson falls for after his Philistine wife and the harlot in Gaza. She does not have a specified social status nor is she defined in the Bible in relation to men, for she is neither a respectable wife nor a despicable prostitute. According to many twentieth century scholars, she is also a Philistine, therefore a foreigner. Delilah’s wickedness is

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>48</sup> Madlyn Kahr, “Delilah,” *The Art Bulletin* 54, no. 3 (Sept. 1972): 282.

<sup>49</sup> Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 154.

<sup>50</sup> When Samson tells Delilah the truth about his strength, he notes that if his head is shaven he will “become like other men” (Judg. 16:17).

<sup>51</sup> Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 38.



emphasized by the fact that not only does she deceive Samson, but she does so for money (eleven hundred pieces of silver), indicating Delilah's evil, and consequently women's untrustworthiness.<sup>52</sup>

Susan Niditch convincingly notes that Delilah is the typical expression of the stereotypically seductive and dangerous foreign woman. The alien sexual partner is a representation of the tempting "otherness" of the female body. But, she notes, the constant presence of danger is at the heart of the attraction for Samson. He, in turn, is seduced by the threat of danger, which he feels confident he will always be able to deflect. Every time he gives Delilah a false answer the Philistines approach him. His three answers inch closer and closer to divulging the real secret. Samson's capture has less to do with Delilah's capacity to deceive than with Samson's own audacity in believing he is invincible.<sup>53</sup>

Unlike the other women in Samson's story, there is greater emotional involvement with Delilah. Samson "loved" Delilah (Judg. 16:4). Some feminist psychoanalytical approaches explore the connection between love and surrender. The thought is that to love maturely is to surrender fully, to become infant-like and trusting. Samson's situation has been described as a return to infancy. Once he finally gives in to Delilah's persistent questioning he regresses to the basic condition of male powerlessness, infant with mother, as he falls asleep on Delilah's lap.<sup>54</sup> Though Samson's position on Delilah's lap, illustrated in the Biblical text and Cranach's *Samson and Delilah*, indicates that he has completely surrendered to her, I suspect it is not connected

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<sup>52</sup> Bal, *Lethal Love*, 49-50.

<sup>53</sup> Niditch, *Judges*, 167-169; Susan Niditch, *Text and tradition: the Hebrew Bible and Folklore* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 50, 53-54.

<sup>54</sup> Niditch, *Judges*, 167-169.

to a state of infancy or a pieta position as Bal suggests, but to feelings of love and trust. Samson's pose seems to suggest physical closeness, and affection for Delilah.<sup>55</sup>

Samson has also been described as having similarities to a "wild man" or "nature man." He therefore plays into the medieval notion of the wild man who is brought into society by a woman and made "like other men." Gregory Mobley notes that there are many similarities between the biblical Samson and the medieval wild man. Samson's hair, uncut since birth, is his signal trait. Samson's power over beasts throughout his story in Judges is also a wild man characteristic. Also, Samson usually works without tools – he tears the lion apart and uproots the city gate of Gaza bare-handed (Judg. 14:6; 16:3). When he does require a tool, it is drawn directly from the animal world, such as the jawbone of an ass with which he slew a thousand men (Judg. 15:15). Samson's relationships with culture (the communities of Philistines and others living around him) also connect with the medieval wild man type, particularly his being drawn to culture by women and then humanized by a woman; the cutting of his hair makes him like other men (Judg. 16:17).<sup>56</sup> Cranach's Samson is not the wild man described here or in the biblical text. Though he carries the jawbone of an ass, he is well dressed and wears a shirt of sumptuous fabric. Cranach's figure also seems to lack the long hair that is implied with the figure of Samson, who did not cut his hair until the moment Delilah clips his locks. The artist's representation of the strongman makes it appear that Samson could be anyone, even the wealthy client purchasing Cranach's painting.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Bal, *Lethal Love*, 58.

<sup>56</sup> Gregory Mobley, "The Wild Man in the Bible and the Ancient Near East," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116, no. 2 (Summer, 1997): 228-229.

<sup>57</sup> German paintings of the time showed contemporary dress and settings. So the contemporary costume here is not unusual.

Samson's uncut hair plays a significant role in the story of the hero's rise and fall. Long hair appears to have been an attribute of epic warriors in the Old Testament. Like circumcision, the hair is a body trait that serves to mark and define a man's identity as a member of one group or another, or as a special individual within one's own society. Samson's uncut hair identifies him as a Nazarite. For Samson, this is where his power lies and his betrayal will involve the secret about his hair.<sup>58</sup>

Samson and Delilah is the earliest narrative commonly associated with scissors. Stories like Samson and Delilah and other myths, such as Atropos from Hesiod's *Theogony*,<sup>59</sup> link scissors with women and also with acts of violence, fury, revenge or betrayal. Numerous depictions, like Cranach's New York painting, use the image of scissors in representations of Delilah cutting Samson's hair, even though the tool used to remove Samson's hair is generally translated as a "razor," and it is not Delilah who completes the act. By presenting a male-female conflict, painters turn the Samson and Delilah story into a sexually motivated meeting. The scissors themselves also carry possible implications of violence, castration, or death. The temptress motif often presents the woman who lured man on until her sensuous beauty fully captured and weakened him. Representing such a figure, Delilah not only moved Samson to tell her his secret but also, according to Burrows, symbolically castrated him through cutting of his hair, his source of power. The choice of scissors also may reinforce the theme of sexual betrayal because, as Santesso notes, the trade users of scissors were considered untrustworthy and immoral.<sup>60</sup> Though scissors and shears may have been linked with death or deceit

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<sup>58</sup>Niditch, *Judges*, 143-144.

<sup>59</sup> Atropos was one of the Three Fates who ended the life of mortals by cutting their thread with shears.

<sup>60</sup> David J. Burrows, Frederick R. Lapidus, and John T. Shawcross, *Myths and Motifs in Literature* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 423; Aaron Santesso, "William Hogarth and the tradition of Sexual Scissors,"

because of mythological or historical characters like Delilah and Atropos, it is unclear whether society linked scissors and Samson's story with castration. While the link between castration and cutting Samson's hair is common in twentieth-century discussion, it is unclear whether this connection existed in sixteenth-century ideas on the subject. What is clear is that Delilah represented the sixteenth-century notion that powerful or deceitful women could cause the downfall of strong and logical men.

#### Martin Luther – on Samson and the Role of Women in Protestant Germany

Martin Luther has little to say on the story of Samson and Delilah, however, he often reveres the figure of Samson for his strength and godliness. Luther is even compared to the biblical hero by other churchmen. In the few instances that Luther mentions Samson, his view of the figure is positive. In the *Table Talk*, which contains a series of informal conversations between Luther and his students and colleagues, compiled after his death, Luther is asked what the difference was between Samson and Caesar, or anyone of strong mind and body. Luther answered that Samson's physical strength was a result of the Holy Spirit within him. He noted, "I often reflect with admiration upon Samson; mere human strength could never have done what he did."<sup>61</sup>

Luther also references Samson in one of his treatises on temporal authority, where he explains the nature of such authority and its limitations and the responsibilities of the Christian subject. He explains that a man may use the sword for oneself and personal causes as long as it is not the intention to seek individual advantage, but to punish evil.

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*Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 39, no. 3 (Summer, 1999): 508; Adam Smyth, "What We Talk about When We Talk about Scissors," in *Ornamentalism: The Art of Renaissance Accessories*, ed. Bella Mirabella (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 300-301.

<sup>61</sup>Martin Luther, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, trans. William Hazlitt (London: G. Bell, 1890), 332.

Luther notes that Samson did not harass the Philistines to further his own cause, but to serve others and punish the Philistines. He says that “No one but a true Christian, filled with the Spirit, will follow this example... therefore first become like Samson, and then you can also do as Samson did.”<sup>62</sup>

In a late sixteenth-century sermon after the death of Luther, Georg Mueller, a professor at the University of Jena, presented a sermon on Luther as God’s chosen instrument. Mueller justified his praise of Luther by pointing to the Scripture’s praise of kings, prophets, judges, and others whom God used to accomplish great things. Mueller compared Luther with Hercules and Samson, which highlighted Luther’s heroic role in overthrowing the papacy.<sup>63</sup> In the early seventeenth century, one of the most prominent Lutheran leaders of the time, the electoral Saxon councilor and court preacher Matthias Hœ von Hœnegg, preached sermons and wrote a treatise on Luther’s significance. He also compared the Reformer’s exploits against the pope with the exploits of Samson and David.<sup>64</sup>

Martin Luther also commented on Delilah in his writings as well. In his commentary on Ecclesiastes 7:26 Luther notes that Samson, an “outstandingly noble man,” was seduced by Delilah, whom he calls a “wicked woman.” He further notes that if men give in to such women, “everything goes wrong.”<sup>65</sup> In his *Letter Concerning Private Mass*, Luther employs Samson in his ridicule of the papacy, Luther mentions how the papacy rests on two pillars, like the house of the Philistines in Samson’s time (Judg.

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<sup>62</sup> Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed,” in *Luther’s Works* American Edition (55 vols.; ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann; Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress, and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-86), 45: 104.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, Hero: Images of the Reformer, 1520-1620* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 116.

<sup>64</sup> Kolb, *Images of the Reformer*, 130.

<sup>65</sup> Martin Luther, “Ecclesiastes,” in *Luther’s Works*, AE 15: 131.

16:23) and speculates what would happen if God had made himself a Samson over the papacy, a Samson who would tear down both pillars. Here Luther also mentions Delilah, whom he calls the “whore Delilah,” who is the “holy, beautiful monkery” who shaved off Samson’s hair. He warns that those who are wise in the World of God should run away from the snares of “domineering women,” but not from the female sex.<sup>66</sup>

Luther does not extensively discuss Delilah, however, he broadly comments on the role and place of women throughout his writings, especially in regard to marriage and their place within the home and community. Examining his attitudes towards women can present us with a sense of what he and other sixteenth-century Germans may have thought about Delilah. According to Luther, women and men were equal spiritually, but in every other respect women should be subordinate to men. Luther’s ideas about women were connected to his ideas about sexuality. Luther regarded sexual desire as extremely powerful in both men and women. In some of his writings, as in his comments on Eve, women’s sexual nature is at the heart of their being. Prostitutes and other young women were criticized for enticing young men into sexual relationships. In Reformation propaganda the harlot was the woman who upset the gender order by placing powerful women over men. Her sexual power was seen as dangerous and evil. By analogy, all powerful women could be seen as threats to order. In other works Luther concentrated on male sexual desire and sexual activities, where women are principally desired objects, rather than acting subjects. Luther believed that the power of lust made chaste living

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<sup>66</sup> Martin Luther, “A Letter of Dr. Martin Luther Concerning His Book on the Private Mass,” in *Luther’s Works* AE 38: 233.

impossible for all but a few individuals. He notes that sexual activity should be channeled into marriage, and resulted in the best Christian life.<sup>67</sup>

Luther believed that it was in the nature of humans to have sexual feelings. Since it was a force that could not be denied, it should be properly directed into marriage. Marriage was a woman's highest calling and the way she could fulfill God's will. Luther is noted as saying "A woman is not created to be a virgin, but to bear children"<sup>68</sup> and "Let them bear children to death; they are created for that." Unmarried women were not trusted because they were fighting their natural sex drive, and in the sixteenth century women's sex drive was believed to be much stronger than men's. Single women also disturbed the divinely imposed order, which made woman subject to man. Like his contemporaries, Luther believed women to have strong sexual desires. Protestant territories passed marriage ordinances that stressed wifely obedience and proper Christian virtues. Lyndal Roper argues the Reformation narrowed women's choice by removing the option of an independent religious vocation and it also limited the range of acceptable female identities. With the advent of the Protestant Reformation lay female confraternities were forbidden and women's public ceremonial role was greatly diminished. Luther believed women's "natural" sexual desire was inextricably linked to motherhood. His account of "natural" womanhood thus labels as unnatural women whose sexual desires are not directed towards men, marriage and children.<sup>69</sup> In the same commentary on Ecclesiastes where Luther mentions Delilah, he discusses the role of

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<sup>67</sup> Susan C. Karant-Nunn and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 137; Lyndal Roper, "Luther: Sex, Marriage, and Motherhood," *History Today* 33, no. 12 (December 1983): 34-35.

<sup>68</sup> Karant-Nunn, *Luther*, 140; WA 11: 398-99.

<sup>69</sup> Merry E. Wiesner, "Nuns, Wives, and Mothers: Women and the Reformation in Germany," in *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe*, edited by Sherrin Marshall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 12-14; Roper, "Luther," 35.

women, to be under the power of their husbands. Women, according to Luther, were created for the “special purpose” of rearing children.<sup>70</sup>

By examining Luther’s writing on women in general and his few comments on the biblical Delilah, it is evident that he did not have a positive attitude towards Delilah. She does not fit into Luther’s definition of a “natural” woman. She is not a wife, nor a mother, and therefore a woman not defined by a man. She could be seen as functioning as a prostitute in that she accepts money in order to deceive Samson who claims to love her. Delilah also upsets the gender order. She has the power over Samson. This is indicated in Cranach’s *Samson and Delilah* painting by her position over Samson. She leans over the sleeping strongman who is unaware of her actions. Cranach also presents Delilah as a sensuous woman. The line of her bodice lies low over her slightly exposed chest and breasts, and her luxurious clothing calls attention to her graceful figure.

Before the Reformation there was also a fear of beautiful women and what they could mean to unassuming men. Andreas Meinhard in his *Dialogus* of 1508 mentions these dangers as he describes the town of Wittenberg. Meinhard taught at the University of Wittenberg, beginning around 1504. His *Dialogus* was written to advertise the school where enrollment had been declining since its opening. His aim with the *Dialogus* was to publish a pamphlet that promoted the school, and also served as instruction to students in learning colloquial Latin. In the *Dialogus* Meinhard exaggerates the merits of Wittenberg and its ruler Frederick the Wise, to whom the publication was dedicated. The work is composed as a dialogue between Meinhard and Reinhard, who walk through the town of Wittenberg, describing its streets and the inside of the Castle Church and the Castle at

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<sup>70</sup> Martin Luther, “Ecclesiastes,” in *Luther’s Works* AE 15: 131.



Wittenberg. Meinhard refuses to walk down streets where beautiful women sooth the air with their “sweet and melodious songs,” comparing doing this to rushing into danger. He notes the many lures of love and how it traps men, “so that not only are the ignorant enthralled, but also very often the most prudent are deprived of their reason.” Here he brings forward the very wise and strong biblical figures of David, Solomon, and Samson who were all conquered by love. Cranach’s New York painting includes the same idea of the intelligent and powerful man (in this case Samson) who is defeated by love.<sup>71</sup>

The next chapter presents the popularity of the subject of Samson and Delilah in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, and discusses art objects depicting the theme in order to consider how Cranach’s New York painting fits within the tradition of representing Delilah and other women who held power over men.

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<sup>71</sup> Andreas Meinhard, *The Dialogus of Andreas Meinhardi: A Utopian Description of Wittenberg and Its University, 1508*, trans. Edgar C. Reinke (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1976), 5-8, 309-310.

### Chapter Three

Lucas Cranach's *Samson and Delilah* emerged from a tradition, particularly in printmaking, of displaying the image of Samson and Delilah within the context of power of women over men. Cranach's painting appears to borrow elements from prints and other visual works of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Though the provenance of the painting is unknown and the meaning and purpose is unclear, I believe that the painting could have been part of a larger series of Power of Women images produced by Cranach's workshop between 1528 and 1530. While I assert that the painting perhaps served as a pendant to another Cranach painting, it was also possibly created as a part of a larger series of Power of Women scenes, made for a wealthy patron, for private decoration or contemplation within the home.

#### Samson and Delilah in literature and early art

The subject of Samson and Delilah was depicted numerous times in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This Old Testament story was depicted in the decorative arts, and prints and paintings beginning in the Late Middle Ages continuing into the Renaissance. Images of the couple were used not only to illustrate the biblical story in manuscripts and printed editions of the Bible, for example in versions of the Bible Historiale, but it was also a popular subject of *Weibermacht* or the Power of Women *topos*. The earliest representations in manuscript illumination of the story were illustrations of the Old Testament intended to make the biblical history clear and interesting. The episodes of Samson were repeated in manuscript illuminations and later in printed versions of the Bible, for example in the thirteenth-century illumination

depicting the narrative of Samson in the Pierpont Morgan Library (fig.7), and in the French *Bible Historiale* from around 1415 (fig. 8). In both images, Samson places his head on Delilah's lap as she cuts away his hair. Delilah sits on a chair, elevated above Samson, as in the Cranach painting.

By the middle of the thirteenth century, pictures were often used to support typological interpretation and began to replace the narrative illustrations just seen. Old Testament imagery was used to prefigure events in the New Testament. Especially with the introduction of the *Biblia Pauperum* in the beginning of the fourteenth century, the events of Samson's life were increasingly appreciated as parallels to the life of Christ. This typology is evident in the floor tiles of Jan van Eyck's *Annunciation* of c. 1434 in the National Gallery of Art, Washington (fig. 9). Samson's story is used to prefigure events in the life of Christ. Scenes on the floor tiles include David beheading Goliath (prefiguring Christ's victory over the Devil), Samson destroying the Philistine temple (prefiguring the triumph of Christ over sin) and the Death of Samson (prefiguring the Crucifixion). These are Old Testament events in the deliverance of the Jewish people, which anticipate the salvation of humanity through the coming of Christ. The image of Samson and Delilah is also represented in the tile on the bottom far left. This subject often suggests the Entombment of Christ. Indeed the whole painting represents a relationship between the Old and New Testament and the idea of passing from old to new. This relationship is displayed in the single, stained-glass window of Jehovah (possibly referring to the former era, the Old Testament), while the lower part of the

building is dominated by triple windows that signify the Trinity (possibly referring to the New Testament).<sup>72</sup>

The story of Samson and Delilah was widespread throughout Europe, and familiarity with the narrative must be assumed for many generations. The subject was not only present in visual culture, but was also a popular motif in literature. In the book *The Knight of the Tower (Der Ritter vom Turn)*, published in German at Basel in 1493 by Michael Furter, Delilah's betrayal of Samson provided an example for moral instruction for young women. The Chevalier de la Tour-Landry composed the original in 1370 as an attempt to improve the minds and morals of his daughters by using known examples of justified misfortunes, for example the Fall of Man, Samson and Delilah, or the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. The text parallels Delilah's deceit of Samson with Judas's betrayal of Christ. Albrecht Dürer designed woodcuts for the German version and four-fifths of the woodcuts in the book can be ascribed to him. The woodcut illustrating Samson and Delilah presents a scene similar to the subject in manuscript illumination (fig.10). Delilah sits over the sleeping Samson and clips his hair with scissors. The image of Samson and Delilah also appeared in Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools (Narrenschiff)* published at Basel in 1494.<sup>73</sup> Petrarch also acknowledges Samson as "prey to female fraud," in his fourteenth-century *Triumph of Love* poem, noting that Samson takes care to please his fancy, appearing more strong than wise in the lap of the "traitress."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character* vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 137-138.

<sup>73</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 28-29; Kahr, Delilah, 286-287; Sebastian Brant, *The Ship of Fools*, trans. Edwin Zeydel (New York: Dover, 1944), 180.

<sup>74</sup> Francesco Petrarch, *The Sonnets, Triumphs, and Other Poems of Petrarch*, trans. Thomas Campbell (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1909), 331.

The subject of Samson and Delilah was represented throughout the European continent by French manuscript illuminators, as noted above, German printmakers and Italian painters. Andrea Mantegna produced a small monochrome painting on linen of Samson and Delilah in the National Gallery of Art, London, an imitation of a marble relief, from around 1500 (fig.11). This image bears similarities to Dürer's woodcut in *The Knight of the Tower*. Delilah is seated in a similar setting, to the side of a large tree by a wall, and in the same position, above Samson. In both images Samson reclines in her lap in similar collapsed pose, with one knee slightly bent, hands at his sides. Delilah also uses related gestures, her fingers delicately lifting Samson's locks, with the other hand holding a pair of shears. It is possible that Mantegna was inspired by the German print, which had made its way to Italy, or that Dürer and Mantegna drew from a common model which no longer exists. The Italian painter Francesco Morone of Verona also painted the subject of Samson and Delilah on panel in 1500 and 1510 and Titian used the subject in his design for a woodcut by Nicolo Boldrini.<sup>75</sup> The existence of the subject in Italian paintings and their connections with German prints demonstrates that the subject of Samson and Delilah was prominent both in Northern Europe and Italy. It also presents the possibility that similar models of the subject were seen by artists in different regions. However, the small number of paintings in existence demonstrates that Cranach was exceptional in his treatment of the subject in painting.

The majority of images showing Samson and Delilah are found in Germany and the Netherlands in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, often in printed work, but also in the decorative arts such as ivories and metalwork. The subject appears in a variety of forms and took on a range of meanings. As shown above, images of Samson were

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<sup>75</sup> Kahr, Delilah, 287

often understood as images that prefigured the coming of Christ and the New Testament, for example in the *Biblia Pauperum*. Images of Samson and Delilah were also often shown in conjunction with an image of Samson slaying the lion, as foil images, displaying both the strength and weakness of men. Delilah cutting Samson's hair was also presented as a warning against the divulgence of secrets and placed in appropriate areas, such as in town halls at Nuremberg and Augsburg. Finally the Samson and Delilah narrative was shown with other images of women in power. These Power of Women or *Weibermacht* series became very popular throughout northern Europe in the later Middle Ages. All these various meanings will be explored in this section, to better understand where Cranach's New York painting fits in.

### The Power of Women

The story of Samson and Delilah has a tradition of being included in the Power of Women *topos*, which brought together themes in literature or art that referenced the wiles of women, the power of love, and the trials of marriage, using well-known figures from biblical history, ancient history or romance. This *topos* singled out the most notable men in history, such as Aristotle, Virgil, Solomon, David and Samson, to prove the sexual power women were believed to hold over men. Disorderly women were presented in text and images to prove the incredible power of deceit and temptation that women possessed, which no man can resist, despite his mental, physical or moral faculties and viewed superiority. The theme of the woman who challenges the established gender hierarchy – of men as the greater sex – through her deception and sexual wiles was depicted in

countless artforms throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance.<sup>76</sup> However, the Power of Women *topos* first appeared early in the patristic period. Saint Jerome (d. 420) included women as sexual temptresses in several of his letters. Saint Ambrose (d. 397), Saint John Chrysostom (d. 407) and other patristic authorities followed Saint Jerome in constructing their own forms of the Power of Women *topos* as proof of the dangers that lie in male lust and in men's attraction to women.<sup>77</sup>

In the new social and cultural environment of the Early Modern period, the Power of Women *topos* grew in popularity. The rigid contempt against women and marriage within the church gave way to an interest in Christian marriage, which became an institution that could offer social control and manage sexuality. The order of the household became more important to civil authorities who looked at it as a model for ordered society. Therefore regulating private morality became just as important as controlling public morality. Powerful, disorderly women were still viewed as captivating figures in this changing atmosphere, and the Power of Women theme was soon adapted to attend to these new issues.<sup>78</sup>

Throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, the *topos* lent itself to a variety of interpretations according to times or the intent of the artist. Power of Women themes could be represented as either mild, humorous mockeries of the battle between the sexes or as strong statements against all involvement with women. In medieval art, figures or couples whose stories exemplified woman's power over man were used to

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<sup>76</sup> Susan L. Smith, *The Power of Women: A Topos in Medieval Art and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>77</sup> Smith, *Power of Women*, 20, 26-27.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

decorate utilitarian objects and textiles, and as sculptural ornament.<sup>79</sup> Some examples of Power of Women imagery appeared on ivory products produced for secular use by women, such as mirror cases, combs, and ivory boxes, dating from the end of the fourteenth century and into the sixteenth century. Imagery on these products drew from the Bible, Arthurian romances and other romance literature. Narratives of Samson in particular were popular images for this medium and many appeared on carved ivory boxes, which were the most lavish and expensive of secular ivory products. Mirror cases were the most numerous and have survived more than any other form of secular ivory. One mirror case of Samson and Delilah, made in Germany at the beginning of the sixteenth century, includes a scene of Delilah cutting Samson's hair (fig.12). Mirror cases are thin discs carved on the face, often with scenes of lovers. The back was devised so that a polished metal disc could be added to serve as a mirror. This work shows that the subject was not just reserved for display, but for utilitarian objects as well.<sup>80</sup>

Power of Women subjects were also found on armory and shields. Frederick the Wise had a suit of armor ordered for Emperor Maximilian which depicted *Weibermacht* images of Samson and Delilah, Judith with the head of Holofernes, the Idolatry of Solomon, and Phyllis and Aristotle.<sup>81</sup> The inclusion on male armor may have been a warning to the man wearing the armor that even the mightiest and most intelligent of men (in this case Emperor Maximilian) can be seduced or tricked by women. The presence of Power of Women images is a warning of how easily one's masculinity (one's dominance

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<sup>79</sup> Ellen S. Jacobowitz and Stephanie Loeb Stepanek, *The Prints of Lucas van Leyden and His Contemporaries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 102-103.

<sup>80</sup> Peter Barnet, editor, *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 64, 70-71.

<sup>81</sup> Adelheid Straten, *Das Judith-Thema in Deutschland im 16. Jahrhundert: Studien zur Ikonographie--Materialien und Beiträge* (Munich: Minerva, 1983), 73.



and superior position over women) can be taken away. The inclusion of Samson and Delilah on the Emperor's armor also may indicate the subject matter was popular for wealthy male buyers of the sixteenth century.

The insertion of Power of Women themes, particularly the story of Samson and Delilah, demonstrates their popularity not only for visual appreciation on prints and paintings, but also on objects used every day. Mirror cases showing allegories of love were appropriate decoration for mirror cases, which could be intended gifts from an admirer of either sex. The fact that it is on an ivory mirror case, an object used by women more than men, may also suggest that Power of Women imagery was not just for male viewers, but intended for women as well.<sup>82</sup>

Power of Women subjects, including those of Samson and Delilah, were also featured in murals and other decorative arts of town halls. Koepplin and Falk note that Cranach's *Samson and Delilah* of 1529 in Augsburg was probably a commission by the town council for the town hall, possibly for the council chamber (fig.13).<sup>83</sup> The theme would have fit well within a town hall setting to suggest the importance of not divulging secrets, especially to women, and men keeping hold of their power. The Augsburg *Samson and Delilah*, measuring 117.2 x 81.9 cm, is much larger than Cranach's *Samson and Delilah* in New York at 57.2 x 37.8 cm, which would have made it appropriate for a town hall setting. The idea that an image of Samson and Delilah represents the necessity for men to not reveal their secrets is also visited by Sebastian Brant in his book *Ship of Fools*. The section "Of fools that can not keep secret their own counsel" includes a

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<sup>82</sup>Barnet, *Images in Ivory*, 75.

<sup>83</sup> Dieter Koepplin and Tilman Falk, *Lukas Cranach: Gemälde, Zeichnungen, Druckgraphik : Ausstellung im Kunstmuseum Basel, 15. Juni-8. September 1974* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1974), 574; Bruno Bushart, *Kostbarkeiten aus den Kunstsammlungen der Stadt Augsburg* (Augsburg: Himmer, 1967), 60.

woodcut of Samson and Delilah. He also acknowledges the “noble Samson” who was the strongest man ever born, who if he had kept his secrets may not have died as he did, after being captured by the Philistines, and causing the deaths of many with his own death.<sup>84</sup>

Other examples of the Samson and Delilah theme can be found within a civic setting. A bench constructed for Tallinn Town Hall in Estonia contains a wooden sculpture of Samson and Delilah, as well as other Power of Women images. Delilah is displayed trimming Samson’s hair above the image of Phyllis riding Aristotle.<sup>85</sup> In 1521 Albrecht Dürer provided a similar image of Samson and Delilah when he was commissioned by the Nuremberg city council to provide designs for an interior wall painting for the town hall. The drawing that exists today in the Pierpont Morgan Library is thought to represent part of the artist’s plan (fig.14). It includes three medallions with images of the Power of Women: David and Bathsheba, Samson and Delilah, and Phyllis and Aristotle. Samson and Delilah and Power of Women images in general were not uncommon in town hall decoration and highlight the weaknesses and temptations faced by all men serving in the council. These images serve perhaps as reminders to officials of their human failings, and possibly, warnings not to trust women into their council.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Brant, *Ship of Fools*, 243-244.

<sup>85</sup> T. Böckler, *Tallinna Raekoda* (Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1964), 49-53.

<sup>86</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art and Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg. *Gothic and Renaissance Art in Nuremberg 1300-1550* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1986), 329.

### Samson and Delilah in prints

In the second half of the fifteenth century into the early sixteenth century in northern Europe, interest in the Power of Women theme arose among printmakers, including designs for woodcuts and in engravings.<sup>87</sup> Power of Women scenes in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries typically were presented in a conventionalized manner with figures in foreground spaces. In the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with printmakers like Lucas van Leyden, this approach increasingly developed to favor a more complex pictorial treatment based on developments centered on more three-dimensional figures and expanded space. Instead of containing only the two most important figures (for example Samson and Delilah), scenes began to include more figures and background components.<sup>88</sup>

Master E.S. and the Master of the Housebook were two northern engravers in the late fifteenth century who depicted a number of Power of Women scenes, including Solomon's Idolatry, Aristotle and Phyllis, the Fall of Man, and Samson and Delilah. Their works seem to stem from the Power of Women tradition but both present fairly simple scenes, with just the figures of Samson and Delilah in the foreground. The two engravers depicted the subject of Samson and Delilah with pendant engravings of Samson killing the lion. This arrangement gives the subject meaning beyond the dangers of women, presenting the concept of the strengths and weaknesses of men. Master E.S., who dominated the second generation of German engraving in the fifteenth century, produced his *Samson and Delilah* of 1463 along with the pendant engraving *Samson Slaying the Lion* (figs. 15-16). Höfler suggests that these two sheets may have formed a

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<sup>87</sup> Jacobowitz, *Lucas van Leyden*, 102-103.

<sup>88</sup> Smith, *Power of Women*, 200.

pair given the same sheet format of 9.5 x 6.7 cm and 9.3 x 6.4 cm. In both prints the figures wear courtly dress; only the scissors Delilah uses to cut Samson's hair indicate the scene is not a courtly romance. Delilah overpowers Samson who sleeps on her lap. Her body appears larger than Samson, who looks dwarfed next to her. The pendant with Samson killing the lion is minimally rendered compared with its mate, with no additional background or landscape. Samson also looks quite different in the two prints. The Samson in the lap of Delilah sports no beard and appears quite young. In contrast, Samson killing the lion appears mature, with a full beard. His physical strength in one image is contrasted with his mental as well as physical failings in the other. The scene of Delilah cutting his hair demonstrates his helplessness against the power of tempting women. The act of cutting also leaves him weak physically.<sup>89</sup>

Master E.S. gives a similar view of Delilah in his *Samson and Delilah* engraving of c. 1460-65 (fig.17), thought to be produced slightly later than the first pair. The same wind sweeps away Delilah's veil, and she wears a similar headdress and gown. Again, both figures wear fine clothing. Samson looks like a child in this engraving as well: he does not have the attributes that are assumed for Samson the strongman of the Bible; his jawbone weapon is nowhere to be seen. He is far from the "natural" or "wild" man of the Samson in the Bible. Indeed, Master E.S.'s version of the story seems more an image of courtly love than of vicious deceit. Samson has thin limbs, with delicate facial features and fingers. This body type conforms to the Late Gothic figure style of Master E.S., who often approached subjects with good-natured humor similar to his counterpart, the Housebook Master. Unlike Master E.S.'s earlier Samson and Delilah, this engraving

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<sup>89</sup> Janez Höfler, *Der Meister E.S.: Ein Kapitel europäischer Kunst des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2007), 103.

has no pendant, although it was created around the same time as two other works depicting Samson battling the lion.<sup>90</sup>

In two drypoint engravings, the Master of the Housebook followed the example of Master E.S. in contrasting Samson's great physical strength with his mental weakness (fig.18-19). The works of both Masters represent a departure from the view of Samson as the prefiguration of Christ. These artists approach Samson as what Jane Hutchison has called the "polarization of soul and body." The inclusion of Samson killing the lion in both instances emphasizes the strong man, so powerful he can kill a lion bare handed, but who is powerless against a woman. In both Master's prints no Philistines wait for Samson to lose his strength. What is emphasized is Delilah's action and Samson's inability to stop it. The setting is minimal with rocks and a bit of foliage. The figures of Samson and Delilah are the only important figures.<sup>91</sup>

With these works in mind, Cranach's *Samson and Delilah* may be seen as a pendant to a heroic depiction of Samson like the pairings these previous engravers present, similar to Cranach's *Samson Slaying the Lion* of 1528-30 in the Klassik Stiftung, Weimar (fig.20). The sizes of the two paintings are similar – *Samson and Delilah* measures 57.2 x 37.8 cm and *Samson Slaying the Lion* 56.7 x 38 cm – and both fit into Heydenreich's "C" format of Cranach's panel sizes. Both paintings were made around the same time, using beech wood for the panels. They are painted in a similar style, with similar colors and brushstroke quality, and with the same leafy foliage dominating the backgrounds. The figures of Samson are also comparable. Each wears the same tied

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<sup>90</sup> Alan Shestack, *Master E.S.: Five Hundredth Anniversary Exhibition* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1967), 56; Höfler, *Der Meister E.S.*, 103; Linda C. Hults, *The Print in the Western World: An Introductory History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 47.

<sup>91</sup> Jane Campbell Hutchison, "The Housebook Master and the Folly of the Wise Man," *The Art Bulletin* 48, no. 1 (March 1966): 22-23.

sandals, and they have short curly hair and beards and facial features that are very much alike. Though the clothing is not the same, both have bare legs and are dressed in very fine, courtly attire of luxurious silky materials, and with bulging veins. The jawbone is used in both works to identify Samson and emphasize his strength. Both include a castle in the background and the landscape is rendered in similar deep green colors.<sup>92</sup>

### Lucas van Leyden and Cranach

The Power of Women *topos* became increasingly popular in the early sixteenth century with artists creating engravings and woodcut designs that included a whole series of Power of Women scenes. Lucas van Leyden (d.1533) treated the theme of woman's power over man more than any other artist of his time, and he depicted the subject of Samson and Delilah three times.<sup>93</sup> Two of these images are part of a larger series of *Weibermacht* woodcut prints. Lucas's earliest representation of Samson and Delilah, an engraving dated 1508, introduces several innovations to the subject matter (fig.21). Samson wears armor, but he has laid his shield and halberd on the ground, which emphasizes his defenselessness as he sleeps in the lap of Delilah who shears his long hair. She is at the apex of a pyramidal form. This shape conveys her power over the sleeping Samson and draws attention to her at the center of the composition. The action takes place in a rocky landscape setting, with the fully armed Philistine soldiers, who observe from the background, ready to spring forward. The artist seems to have chosen the moment of greatest suspense.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ainsworth, *German Paintings*, 62.

<sup>93</sup> Jacobowitz, *Lucas van Leyden*, 102-103.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 58; Kahr, *Delilah*, 289.

Lucas made two woodcuts of the subject, both part of a series of other woodcuts displaying *Weibermacht* imagery. *Samson and Delilah* of c. 1514 is included in his *Large Power of Women* woodcuts (fig.22). The series also includes Adam and Eve, Solomon's Idolatry, Herod and Herodias, The Poet Virgil Suspended in a Basket, and The Mouth of Truth. In *Samson and Delilah*, the artist chose a quiet, subdued moment. It is not one of active confrontation, but rather of secretive trickery. Delilah's form is larger than in the earlier engraving and is equal in size to Samson, who appears all the more vulnerable because of the leg awkwardly twisted in sleep. The Large Power of Women group was not published as a series, however there are many points of stylistic unity among them and there are often spoken of together.<sup>95</sup>

The popularity of these large woodcuts after Lucas's designs dealing with the Power of Women must have encouraged a publisher or printer to commission another group with the same theme, known as the *Small Power of Women* series c. 1517. As with the *Large Power of Women* group, there is not a uniform set of the smaller series, though they are often considered as a group because they are unified stylistically and iconographically in many respects. The major difference between the two series is in the size, and attitude toward the subject and the mood of the scene. The later woodcuts are lighter in tone. As seen in the *Samson and Delilah* print of c. 1517, Delilah is more voluptuous and seductive, as evidenced by her dress and younger facial features, implying more directly that lust is the cause of man's downfall (fig.23).<sup>96</sup> The smaller version of *Samson and Delilah* is very similar in composition and iconography to the

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<sup>95</sup> Jacobowitz, *Lucas van Leyden*, 104-105, 110.

<sup>96</sup> Jacobowitz, *Lucas van Leyden*, 164; Jan Piet Filedt Kok, *The New Hollstein Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, 1450-1700: Lucas van Leyden* (Rotterdam: Sound & Vision Interactive, 1996), 19.

print of 1514. Both scenes have a sort of military aspect with Samson's shield and weapon at his feet, and the army of Philistines ready to take him away, however the central theme still seems to be the power of Delilah over Samson.<sup>97</sup>

Cranach's *Samson and Delilah* in New York has many similarities to Lucas van Leyden's images of the Old Testament couple, particularly the woodcuts of 1514 and 1517. The painter may have been inspired in terms of his composition by the later prints of Lucas, who was a very popular printmaker whose prints sold throughout Europe while he was still living.<sup>98</sup> Cranach's painting, like Lucas's woodcut, has a military aspect, with the army of Philistines lying in wait behind the bushes preparing to take Samson away. Cranach's setting is also incredibly akin to Lucas's woodcut of 1514. Both include a townscape in the background, with a tree that hovers over the figure of Delilah. Cranach includes the jawbone that often identifies Samson, whereas Lucas's figures have, in one instance what appears to be a contemporary military weapon, and in the other a spiked club. Cranach's Samson seems to belong more to a wealthy class, with his garments made of sumptuous fabrics and tidy hair. Lucas van Leyden's Samsons, by contrast, have more of a military or "Wildman" aspect to them. Though they do not include the jawbone often identified with Samson, they present the figure more as the Bible describes him, strong and wild. Cranach gives a more romantic, courtly scene, which perhaps conforms to the tastes of those at the Wittenberg court of the Saxon elector.

These differences may occur because of the differing mediums used by the two artists. Whereas Lucas's images were prints, bought by a wide range of middle class

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<sup>97</sup> Jacobowitz, *Lucas van Leyden*, 176; Kahr, *Delilah*, 288-289.

<sup>98</sup> Bart Cornelis and Jan Piet Filedt discuss the popularity of Lucas van Leyden's prints throughout Europe in the sixteenth century in their article, "The Taste for Lucas van Leyden Prints," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 25, no. ½ (1998): 18-20.



people, and in greater numbers, Cranach's painting was likely for a wealthy buyer, and possibly displayed in a more upper-class setting. Although we do not know the provenance of Cranach's *Samson and Delilah*, it was likely made for a courtly patron or wealthy merchant. In his *Dialogus*, Meinhard provides a first-hand written description of paintings hung in the Wittenberg castle in 1508. Even though Meinhard wrote two decades before Cranach painted *Samson and Delilah*, he mentions similar subjects (he gives no titles) in the paintings of the castle. In the larger hall of the lords, Meinhard describes paintings of the labors of Hercules, one of which includes Deianira, who unwittingly killed Hercules with the shirt of Nessus<sup>99</sup> -- an example of how even the strongest of men succumbed to the love of women.<sup>100</sup> Also, in the bedchambers of the castle, Meinhard saw numerous historical themes that depict love. For example, in the bedroom of the prince, Lord John, Duke of Saxony,<sup>101</sup> a depiction of Pyramus and Thisbe could be seen, a subject that was often displayed with images representing different types of love, including Power of Women images. Meinhard also describes a painting in the courtly bedchamber of the biblical narrative of David and Bathsheba bathing, another popular Power of Women theme.<sup>102</sup>

Although Cranach's *Samson and Delilah* was created after 1508, it was very possibly part of a series of paintings made for the bedchamber or private area of a courtly patron, such as Frederick the Wise or John the Steadfast. Like Lucas van Leyden, who

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<sup>99</sup> Deianira was the second wife of Hercules who accidentally killed him with a poisoned shirt that was tainted with the blood of Nessus. When Hercules put it on it burned him so much that it caused him to throw himself into a lighted pyre.

<sup>100</sup> Meinhard, *Dialogus*, 258.

<sup>101</sup> Possibly John the Steadfast (1468-1532).

<sup>102</sup> Reinke notes that Lucas Cranach may have painted the myth of Pyramus and Thisbe, Meinhard, *Dialogus*, 351. Pyramus and Thisbe were figures from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* who were forbidden to marry, who end up committing suicide, recorded by Meinhard, *Dialogus*, 264; Smith, *Power of Women*, 174.

created a series of Power of Women images but as prints, Cranach could have produced a comparable series as paintings. His *Lot and his Daughters* of 1528 in Vienna (fig.6) and *Aristotle and Phyllis* of 1530, in a private collection, are similar in format to the New York painting.<sup>103</sup> *Lot and his Daughters* measures 56 x 37 cm and fits within Heydenreich's panel "C" format like *Samson and Delilah*, and was also painted on a beech wood panel. The New York and Vienna paintings bear many similarities: the same deep red velvety dress with gold trim and similar necklaces and hair caps. The same white slipper with black lines also peeks out of the folds of Lot's daughter's dress. Lot's tunic is painted in the same blue of Samson's garment. The grass and bushes around Lot and his daughters also resemble the foliage around Samson and Delilah in color and painting of the leaves and grass.

Cranach may have seen one van Leyden's Power of Women series, or at least the *Samson and Delilah* print, when he began to work on his own version of the subject. The compositions and the choice of figures are so comparable that this seems likely given that Lucas's prints were available for purchase at the annual German fairs, such as those at Leipzig or Frankfurt, where prints were sold to the wide variety of individuals who frequented them. The Frankfurt fair was the main event for European printers wishing to sell publications, and for dealers to purchase and sell books and prints. Lucas van Leyden's prints were available there in great quantities.<sup>104</sup> There is also further evidence of the Cranach workshop borrowing from Lucas's prints in Cranach the Younger's

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<sup>103</sup> There is no illustration available for Cranach's *Aristotle and Phyllis*, but the Metropolitan Museum noted the painting's similarities to the *Samson and Delilah*, Ainsworth, *German Paintings*, 60.

<sup>104</sup> In 1520 the Nuremberg educator and cleric Johann Cochlaeus wrote from the Frankfurt Fair, noting the scarcity of Dürer prints and the abundance of Lucas van Leyden prints. This correspondence shows an awareness of Lucas's prints, according to David Landau and Peter Parshall, *The Renaissance Print, 1470-1550* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 349.

painting of *Samson and Delilah*, c. 1537 in the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden (fig.24), where Samson wears military armor with bare feet possibly inspired by Lucas's print of 1508.

Cranach may have been influenced by other printmakers making series of Power of Women themes, for example the German artist Hans Burgkmair with his *Wieberlisten* (Women's wile) series of c. 1519. The print series includes Samson and Delilah, David and Bathsheba, and Solomon's Idolatry. Though his Samson and Delilah print (fig.25) does not resemble Cranach's painting as closely as Lucas van Leyden's prints do, Burgkmair's prints demonstrate that other artists and printmakers Cranach would have encountered were involved making Power of Women series.<sup>105</sup>

The similarity of Cranach's *Samson and Delilah* with other paintings made by his workshop around 1530 demonstrates, I believe, a series of paintings by Cranach. Although the paintings may not have all gone to the same patron, it seems likely that they could have been created for a private room, possibly a bedchamber, in the house of a courtly patron, Saxon or otherwise. Regardless of location and patron Delilah clearly served as a warning to powerful and intelligent men of the dangers of alluring women. It has also been made clear above that the Power of Women *topos* was popular throughout various levels of society, including the middle class and town council members, but especially with the courtly class, who acquired ivories and armor depicting the subject. These works included armor of the Emperor Maximilian with images of the power of women, and mirror cases given to both men and women. Cranach's New York painting of Samson and Delilah was influenced by Power of Women series, such as Lucas van

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<sup>105</sup> Burgkmair was a prominent woodcut designer in Augsburg in the early sixteenth century. He and Cranach had connections with Maximilian's court and knew of each other's work according to Landau, *The Renaissance Print*, 174-179, 187-190.

Leyden's prints, in creating his own images. Such prints, portable as they were, constituted important movers of ideas in the early sixteenth century, as shown here.

## Conclusion

Cranach worked at a turning point in sixteenth-century northern Europe when humanism and the Reformation in Germany started to change the type of art and subject matter being produced. The environment increasingly transformed from a patron- and church-led art world, to one of a growing art market where middle class and wealthy buyers played a vital role in the popularity of certain subject matter and mediums. Cranach learned to work within an art market that was slowly losing commissions of church altarpieces and images of saints. From the 1520s onwards in Germany, Switzerland, England and the Netherlands, Protestants sought to impose severe limitations on the use of works of art in churches. Destruction of religious paintings and statues, iconoclasm, was sweeping through parts of Protestant Europe. Protestant leaders wrote tracts on the dangers of images in churches, including Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, particularly his pamphlet *On the abolishing of the images, and that there should be no beggars among Christians*, published in Wittenberg in 1522, and later the writings of Huldrych Zwingli, leader of the Reformation in Switzerland, on the same subject. The discouraging of the ecclesiastical market for works of art in so many areas forced artists, like Cranach, into the service of private buyers on the open market while continuing to work directly with private patrons.<sup>106</sup>

Cranach had to navigate a changing society and changing popularity of subject matter. Although he continued to produce altarpieces and works for Catholic patrons, his output indicates that he was also catering to a group of buyers more interested in depictions of mythological nudes, biblical narratives representing beautiful women and

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<sup>106</sup> Carl C. Christensen, *Art and the Reformation in Germany* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1979), 13, 24; Emma Barker, Nick Webb, and Kim Woods, ed., *The Changing Status of the Artist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 103.

portraiture than in religious subject matter. His specialty in Lutheran religious works, pictures of nude Venuses and Lucretias, and narrative biblical images began a type of specialization that would continue to be prominent in Northern Europe and would become even more specialized in the decades and century to come.

Cranach also worked during the time when ideas of the artist as genius and creativity were beginning to arise in the North, even though artistic production continued to also be regulated by guilds and the demands of the market. Albrecht Dürer was one artist who seemed to exemplify early on in the North the Renaissance in terms of uniting skilled artistic practice with rational theories of art and perspective being promoted in Italy. While Dürer has been understood as a creative genius, and was conscious of his artistic status, Cranach has often been viewed as a superficial painter, who rapidly produced images of nudes, portraits, and religious imagery, creating more than one thousand paintings that come down to us today.<sup>107</sup>

Cranach bridges the gap between the artist as Medieval craftsman and artist as Renaissance genius. As an artist, Cranach demonstrates the business side of the creative world and the ability to make considerable money within the field. He also represents the image of artist, not merely as talented craftsman, but as a prominent town leader. As proprietor of a large workshop, we get the image of Cranach as an artist conducting a large orchestra of workers, all part of a machine rapidly producing paintings, not unlike Andy Warhol or Jeff Koons of the twentieth century. The style of Cranach's painting even existed well after his death through his workshop under the leadership of his son Lucas Cranach the Younger, as with Pieter Bruegel (1525-1569) and his sons who continued his painting style into the seventeenth century. The mark of Cranach, the

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<sup>107</sup> Barker, *Status of the Artist*, 104-105.

serpent with wings, became an important indicator of quality. It does not mean the hand of the artist touched it, but that it came out of the ideas and workshop of Cranach.

Though composing the design was mainly the responsibility of Cranach, many of the paintings that came out of the workshop were painted by assistants and journeymen.

Some sources have estimated that 90 to 95 percent of the oeuvre was painted by other workers, though this extreme number has been questioned.<sup>108</sup>

Lucas Cranach's *Samson and Delilah* in New York demonstrates the artist's knowledge of the popularity and the abundance of Power of Women themes in northern Europe during the Early Modern Period. He took a subject that was popular in prints and decorative arts and turned it into a painting that would have been appropriate in the home of a wealthy patron. The ideas behind the subject show a society that was still very much concerned with sexual power and the influence tempting women had over men. Samson was praised as a strong, intelligent, worthy male and served as a warning of how even the greatest of men could fall prey to the wiles of a beautiful woman. In his painting, Cranach presents an approachable, seemingly romantic, image of two finely dressed sixteenth-century figures. It is only the scissors that Delilah uses to cut Samson's hair and the army of Philistines that emerge out of the bushes, that lend any warning to the scene. It is a rather pleasing image, with its lush landscape and beautiful figures, but at the same time possibly serving as a warning against sensuous women.

Though Ozment has argued that similar scenes of biblical temptresses -- such as David and Bathsheba and Salome and Herod -- demonstrate the Lutheran ideas of morality and sexuality at the time, promoting marriage and warning of the dangers of single women, I believe the painting itself was not created with these thoughts in mind.

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<sup>108</sup> Heydenreich, *Lucas Cranach*, 295.

The subject of Samson and Delilah provided an opportunity for Cranach to paint a scene that does not appear to have been attempted before in northern painting. As a businessman, he acknowledged the success of Power of Women images of printmakers like Lucas van Leyden, and produced images that were popular both to patrons and to buyers on the open market. The incredible number of paintings that came out of his workshop is evidence that Cranach was not only concerned with crafting beautiful images, but making money by producing works that could sell.

It is very possible Cranach's *Samson and Delilah* was part of a larger series of Power of Women themes, all painted around the same time, coming out of the Cranach workshop. Cranach may have directly followed the example of Lucas van Leyden, understanding the popularity of this theme and creating other images such as *Lot and His Daughters*, *Phyllis and Aristotle*, *Salome and Herod*, and *Judith and Holofernes* for patrons and buyers. The subject of Samson and Delilah fits within themes of love, lust, sensuality, and betrayal that would continue to be popular throughout Early Modern Europe into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It has proven to be a subject that can adapt to varying religious views and attitudes of society. Northern artists continued to render the subject; however, the mildly sensual and romantic scenes of Cranach and Lucas van Leyden were transformed into more dramatic Baroque images with increased amounts of sexuality embedded into the image. Samson and Delilah paintings from seventeenth-century Netherlandish painters have been the most well known, beginning with Peter Paul Ruben's *Samson and Delilah* of c. 1609-1610 in the National Gallery, London, Sir Anthony van Dyck's *Taking of Samson* of c. 1628-1630 in the



Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien, and Rembrandt van Rijn's *Samson and Delilah* of 1628 in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin.

The narrative of Samson and Delilah also remained relevant through the writing of John Milton and his tragic poem *Samson Agonistes* published in 1671. In the poem, Milton presents the tragic hero of Samson, who foolishly misplaces his trust in a woman. Milton establishes Delilah (he spells it Dalila) as Samson's wife. Milton presents Samson's deepest struggle as that within himself. Though Samson himself is the reason for his misfortune, Delilah is still noted as a "specious Monster," and her actions are described as "common female faults" in her curiosity as an inquisitive pursuer of secrets.<sup>109</sup>

Cranach's *Samson and Delilah* can be seen to fit well within the attitudes of Reformation Germany, and a fear of the power of lust and single women and the need to establish control within marriage and the sexual hierarchy. The painting presents the image of a pleasing figure of a woman, made to be looked at. At the same time, the Old Testament subject provided a warning and moral overtone, for men to be cautious of the influence of women like Delilah. It also more generally created a pleasing scene with a nice recession of space, filled with foliage and a castle in the distance, and with pleasing, courtly figures, whom the buyer could likely identify with. Even though he never seems to be given the prominence of an artist like Albrecht Dürer, Cranach's images of women were prevalent throughout the North in the sixteenth century and had a lasting impact on artists and scholars alike. He was able to choose subjects, and depict figures of women, that are still relevant and of interest to people today.

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<sup>109</sup> Jane Melbourne, "Biblical Intertextuality in *Samson Agonistes*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 36, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 111-127; John Milton, *Samson Agonistes: A Dramatic Poem* (Elston Press, 1904), 20, 34-36.

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## Illustrations



1. Lucas Cranach  
*Samson and Delilah*  
1528-30  
Oil on beech panel, 57.2 x 37.8 cm  
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Image source: [metmuseum.org](https://www.metmuseum.org)



2. Lucas Cranach  
*Venus and Cupid*  
1509  
Oil on panel  
Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg  
  
Image source: [hermitagemuseum.org](http://hermitagemuseum.org)





3. Lucas Cranach  
*Judith Victorious*  
 c. 1530  
 Oil on wood, 75 x 56 cm  
 Jagdschloss Grünewald, Berlin

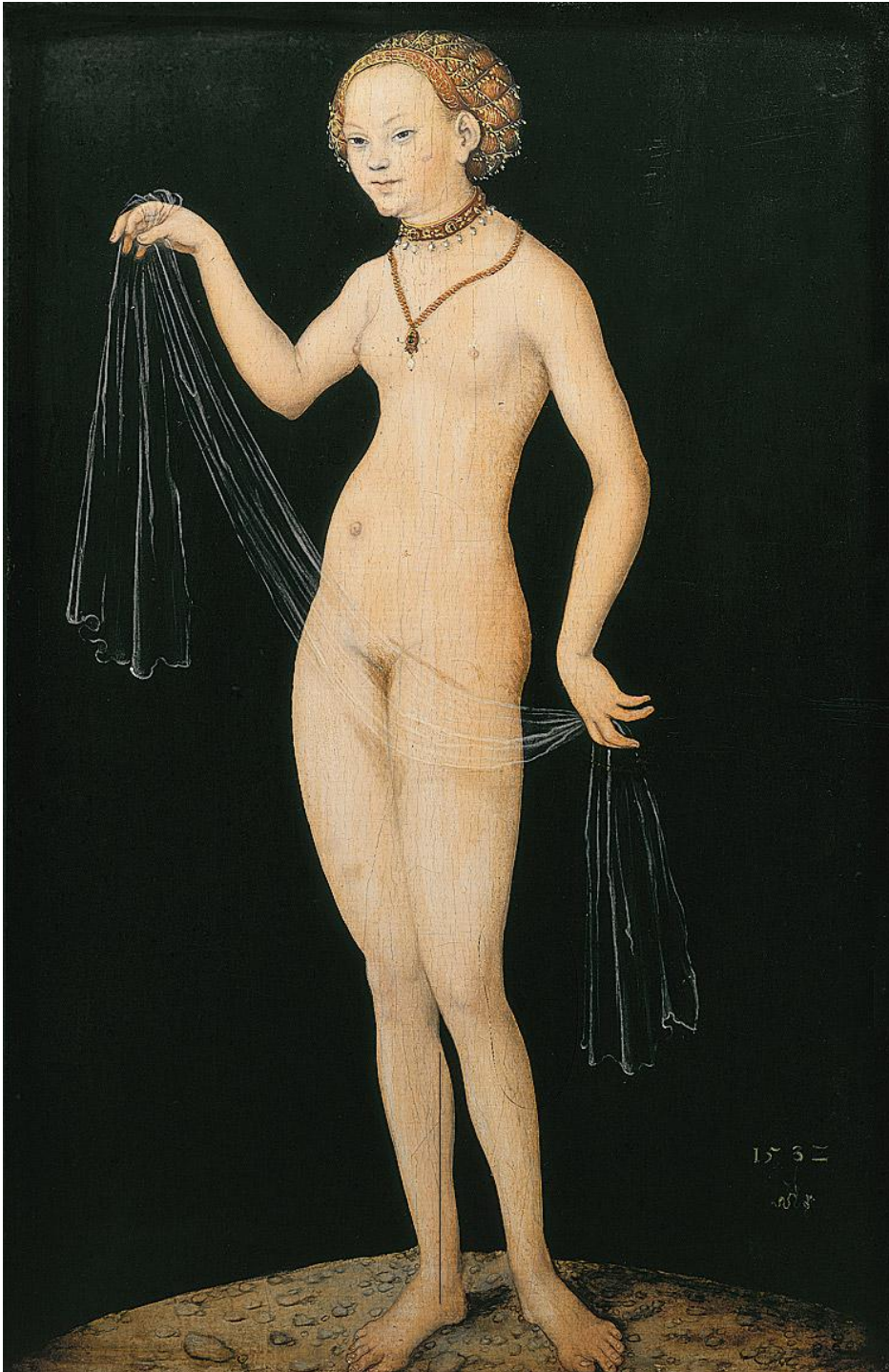
Image source: wga.hu



4. Lucas Cranach  
*Venus and Cupid*  
 c. 1525-1527  
 Oil on wood, 12.1 cm (diameter)  
 Metropolitan Museum of Art

Image source: metmuseum.org





5. Lucas Cranach

*Venus*

1532

Oil on wood

Städel Museum, Frankfurt

Image source: [staedelmuseum.de](http://staedelmuseum.de)



6. Lucas Cranach  
*Lot and His Daughters*  
1528  
Oil on beech wood, 56 x 37 cm  
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Image source: ARTstor





7. Parched; The Gates of Gaza; Shear Betrayal;  
Samson Blinded

Old Testament miniatures with Latin, Persian, and  
Judeo-Persian inscriptions

France, Paris

1240s

39 x 30 cm

M.638 (fol. 15r)

Pierpont Morgan Library

Image source: themorgan.org



8. Guyart des Moulins  
*Bible historique*, in French  
 Illuminated by the workshop of the  
 Boucicaut Master  
 France, Paris  
 c. 1415-20  
 45 x 33 cm  
 M.394, fol. 112r  
 Pierpont Morgan Library

Image source: themorgan.org



8-1. Detail; Samson and Delilah





9-1. Detail lower left

9. Jan van Eyck  
*The Annunciation*  
 c. 1434/1436  
 Oil on canvas transferred from  
 panel  
 90.2 x 34.1 cm  
 National Gallery of Art,  
 Washington

Image source: nga.gov



10. Albrecht Dürer  
*Samson and Delilah*  
Woodcut for *Der Ritter vom Turn*,  
Basel  
1493

Image source: ARTstor





11. Andrea Mantegna  
*Samson and Delilah*  
c. 1500  
Glue size on linen, 47 x 36.8  
cm  
National Gallery of Art,  
London

Image source:  
[nationalgallery.org.uk](http://nationalgallery.org.uk)



12. Mirror case with Samson and  
Delilah  
16<sup>th</sup> Century Germany  
Ivory, 14.4 cm (diameter)  
Turin, Palazzo Madama-Museo  
Civico d'Arte Antica

Image source:  
[gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk](http://gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk)



13. Lucas Cranach  
*Samson and Delilah*  
1529  
Oil on linden panel  
117.2 x 81.9 cm  
Kunstsammlungen und Museen Augsburg

Image source: [pinakothek.de](http://pinakothek.de)





14. Albrecht Dürer  
*Design for Decoration of the Town Hall of Nuremberg*  
 1521  
 Drawing, 25.6 x 35.1 cm  
 The Pierpont Morgan Library

Image source: [themorgan.org](http://themorgan.org)



14-1. Detail; Samson and Delilah; Phyllis and Aristotle





15. Master E.S.  
*Samson and Delilah*  
 1463  
 Engraving, 9.5 x 6.7 cm  
 Coburg, Kunstsammlungen der Veste  
 Coburg, Kupferstichkabinett

Image source: ARTstor



16. Master E.S.  
*Samson Killing the Lion*  
 1463  
 Engraving, 9.3 x 6.4 cm  
 Klein-Öls, Sammlung Graf York von  
 Wartenberg

Image source: ARTstor



17. Master E.S.  
*Samson and Delilah*  
c. 1460-65  
Engraving, 13.8 x 10.7 cm  
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Image source: [metmuseum.org](https://www.metmuseum.org)





18. Master of the Housebook  
*Samson Slaying the Lion*  
 1460-75  
 Engraving, 9.1 x 8.2 cm  
 Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam

Image source: ARTstor



19. Master of the Hosuebook  
*Delilah Cutting Off Samson's Hair*  
 1460-75  
 Engraving, 9.4 x 8.3 cm  
 Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris

Image source: ARTstor





20. Lucas Cranach the Elder  
*Samson Slaying the Lion*  
1528-30  
Oil on beech panel, 56.7 x 38 cm  
Klassik Stiftung Weimar

Image source: wga.hu





21. Lucas van Leyden  
*Samson and Delilah*  
c. 1508  
Engraving, 28.3 x 20.2 cm  
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Image source: [metmuseum.org](https://www.metmuseum.org)





22. Lucas van Leyden  
*Samson and Delilah*  
(Large Power of Women Series)  
c. 1514  
Woodcut, 41.8 x 29.5 cm  
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Image source: [metmuseum.org](https://www.metmuseum.org)





23. Lucas van Leyden  
*Samson and Delilah*  
 (Small Power of Women Series)  
 c. 1517  
 Woodcut, 24.3 x 17.1 cm  
 Metropolitan Museum of Art

Image source: metmuseum.org





24. Lucas Cranach the Younger

*Samson and Delilah*

c. 1537

Oil on limewood, 74.5 x 121 cm

Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden

Image source: [commons.wikimedia.org/](https://commons.wikimedia.org/)





25. Hans Burgkmair the Elder

*Samson and Delilah*

From *Weiberlisten* series

c. 1519

Woodcut, 11.8 x 9.5 cm

British Museum

Image source: [britishmuseum.org](http://britishmuseum.org)