

Cultural Transfers 2017-2018

Session 2: **Women and Wisdom in Early Modern Europe**

Friday January 19, 2018

“Solomon, Wisdom, and the Power of Women in the Age of Iconoclasm”

Cecile Wilson (PhD Candidate, Cultural Mediations)

In this presentation, I compare how two Netherlandish graphic artists depict Solomon’s idolatry in prints from the second half of the sixteenth century. The prints illustrate the long-standing *topos* of the Power of Women, which argues that no matter how strong, virtuous, or wise a man is, he can be overpowered by a woman. One of the frequent exemplars of the *topos* was the biblical story of king Solomon, who—despite his reputation for wisdom—was convinced by his foreign wives and concubines to worship a heathen idol.

While Coornhert’s (1551) and Galle’s (1569) prints are usually interpreted through the lens of an inversion of the ‘normal’ gender hierarchy, I consider how the visual and linguistic features of the prints may contribute to an alternative reading that incorporates the political and religious stances of their creators. The two artists, Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert and his pupil Philips Galle, were both members of a humanist circle in the northern Netherlandish city of Haarlem. Although they were at least nominally Catholic until their deaths, they were known to have associated with people who held unorthodox religious opinions. Coornhert was unconventional in his support of religious toleration and self-determination and in his opposition to the concept of predestination. Galle appears to have associated with the strongly hierarchical sect known as the Family of Love. In a time where political and religious affiliations were deeply intertwined, as reflected in the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* (whose realm, his/her religion) of the Augsburg Peace of 1555, any perceived rejection of the ruler’s religion was tantamount to treason.

By conducting a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis and an intertextual comparison of Coornhert’s and Galle’s depictions of Solomon’s worship of the idol, I will expose the subtle differences between the representation of idolatry in the prints and how these may be interpreted in relation to the artists’ religious convictions. Furthermore, I focus on the ways in which Solomon’s wives represented in the prints and what implications these representations may have for Solomon’s culpability in his choice of worship.

“Katherine Parr, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the Dangers of the Tudor Court”

Dr. Micheline White (English Language and Literature & Humanities)

In this presentation, I will discuss Katherine Parr’s use of the “wisdom” of King Solomon in the dangerous environment of the late Henrician court. Parr married Henry VIII in 1543 and was a powerful religious and literary presence at court until her death in September 1548. She is best known as the author of three religious tracts, but she was also celebrated as an important and discerning reader. As we shall see, Parr left traces of her reading as she excerpted eight verses from King Solomon’s *Ecclesiasticus* and copied them onto the fly-leaf of her copy of *A Sermon of Saint Chrysostom*. Parr’s excerpts from Solomon address ethical conduct and they announce

her desire to overcome the spiritual temptations of the court and to transform the court into a more godly place. Importantly, Parr's extractions from Solomon resonate closely with the annotations that Henry VIII made in his copy of Solomon's *Book of Proverbs* (c. 1545). Although it is unclear exactly when these handwritten annotations were entered, the markings in Parr's and Henry's books reveal similar patterns of Biblical reading and a shared view that the margins of religious books were important sites for monarchical self-reflection and self-representation. Finally, Parr's annotations display her astute awareness that she might use Solomon "wisdom" to distinguish herself from her ill-fated predecessor (Katherine Howard) and to shield herself from potential accusations of greed, sexual promiscuity, or ambition.