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The Large and Small Weibermacht Series of Lucas van Leyden

A Thesis Presented

by

Rachel Christine Parker

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Abstract of the Thesis

The Large and Small Weibermacht Series of Lucas van Leyden

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Master of Arts

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The Weibermacht prints of Lucas van Leyden are placed historically and culturally while at the same time examined as unique interpretations in their own right. The Weibermacht or 'The Power of Women' motif refers to a loosely defined set of stories in which a woman tricks a man resulting in either his humiliation or death, or at times, both. Lucas van Leyden was the first to actively popularize the Weibermacht as a specific and signature theme by producing what is known as the Large Weibermacht Series in 1512. The proof of the series' success can be seen in van Leyden's decision to make a second, smaller scale series, due to the high demand from collectors.

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Introduction

This essay will place the Weibermacht prints of Lucas van Leyden historically and culturally while at the same time examine van Leyden's unique interpretations of the Weibermacht theme. The Weibermacht or 'The Power of Women' motif refers to a loosely defined set of stories in which a woman tricks a man resulting in either his humiliation or death, or at times, both. Lucas van Leyden was the first to actively popularize the Weibermacht as a specific theme by producing what is known as the Large Weibermacht Series in 1512. The proof of the series' success can be seen in van Leyden's decision to make a second, smaller scale series, due to the high demand from collectors. Printed art changed the way that art interacted with culture and the great print artists of the time are some of the most studied artists today. The Reformation (1517-1648) saw innumerable historic changes occur in European society. Arguably one of the most important in the years surrounding this religious revolution was in printed media. The invention of the printing press and its gradual improvement in the seventy years prior to the advent of the Reformation allowed not only the mass producing of text but also of images giving historians the chance to experience the visual culture produced in a time of great importance. It was in this early print-consumer climate that the theme of the Weibermacht, "the power of women," enjoyed a great popularity. While the Weibermacht theme has its roots in what has been deemed "the fear of women," that is specifically, that women are primordially sinful and will naturally entice men to fall from grace, the popularity that this theme enjoyed in the sixteenth century has more to do with humorous implications of the subject matter than the work's value as a cautionary tale.

The idea that northern European women in the sixteenth century were kept locked up, ill-educated and used merely as pawns in the transference of property is well-contested. Though attacks against the education of females did occur, specifically seen in the closing of many convents (seats of female humanist education) the education of women extending even to the role of their gender was just as strong after the Reformation as before.[1] In fact the idea that sex in general was a taboo subject can be contested even in the religious dialogue of the Reformation. Art, poetry and literature published during the printing revolution could be bawdy and highly sexualized. Martin Luther himself discussed the role of women many times in his writings and sermons. He openly spoke about many issues pertinent to men and women that prominent figures would never dream of voicing an opinion on today! Luther was very open about the sexuality of marriage, which translates to open discussion about the sexuality of women, "Luther felt it necessary to defend sexuality in marriage, because he was aware of its strong nature which could not, or could only in rare cases, be suppressed".[2] He acknowledged the need for a healthy sex life and warned that not having one would eventually lead to adultery and divorce. This concern was not solely directed at men. Evidence that Luther was concerned about the role of women's sexuality can be seen in his encouragement of women in convents to abandon celibate life and commit to bearing children.[3]

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[1] Barker, Paula S. Datsko, "Caritas Pirakheimer: A Female Humanist Confronts the Reformation," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* Vol. 26, No. 2 (Summer 1995):260.
[2] Classen, Albrecht and Tanya Amber Settle, "Women in Martin Luther's Life and Theology," *German Studies Review* Vol. 14, No. 2 (May 1991):234.
[3] Ibid.

It is the general consensus that in the Middle-Ages the role-model for female behavior was the Virgin Mary.[4] Mary served as the redeemer of Eve, and thus, the ideal for medieval women. According to Catholic dogma, Mary was the resource to which each individual woman could turn in her daily struggle to mitigate her sinful nature—that inherent flaw which Eve was powerless to overcome when she believed the Serpent that there would be no repercussions for disobeying and took a bite of the forbidden fruit. The Virgin herself was able to overcome her sinful nature due to her elevation above all other mortal women when she was anointed as the mother of Christ. The divinity granted her by sharing in the creation of Christ, physically hosting him, gave the Virgin the grace and wisdom that Eve lacked. Theologically, in the same way that Christ redeemed man and suffered for him, Mary redeemed women through her own participation in Christ's birth, as well as through the pain she suffered during the hours she witnessed his cruel death by crucifixion.

The depiction of the Virgin Mary during the Gothic period was that of a queenly intercessor who advocated universally for all of mankind.[5] By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a new emphasis on Mary became popular and no longer was the Virgin merely an empathetic, albeit distant, footnote to the Life of Christ, the Virgin herself had become interested and personally involved in the lives of the faithful. One of the earliest representations of the life of Mary, *The Royal Portal* on Chartres Cathedral, places the

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[4] Spitzer, Laura, "The Cult of the Virgin and Gothic Sculpture: Evaluating Oppositions in the Chartres West Façade Capital Frieze," *Gesta* Vol. 33, No. 2 (1994):132.
[5] Ibid.

figure of the Virgin on the same spatial plane, thus an equal hierarchical level as Christ.[6] Many scholars link this growing popularity of the Cult of the Virgin to an ever-increasing interest in individualism. Prior to the Reformation, the Cult of the Virgin lent Mary quite a theological preeminence in the daily lives of Christians—a prominence that is soundly rejected by upholders of the Reformation who regard the elevation of the Virgin to these heights as blasphemous and heretical.

On the other hand, one Biblical woman with whose character neither those of the Reformation nor the Counter-Reformation disagreed was Eve. Without question, the first woman created "begins" the long history of narratives that detail the corruption of men by women. While the role of the Virgin, by her very nature incapable of using her gender to manipulate any man, is consecrated to that of the mother/nurturer/supporter, that of Eve's was exclusively to serve as a "helpmeet," a companion, a spouse to Adam. Analyzing the Biblical account, the very creation of Eve out of one of Adam's ribs could be seen as demeaning—coming from the worst of Adam, encompassing all that is perverse and sinful in man.

While the Virgin is the ideal that a woman should strive to emulate; perhaps, the best to which this flawed, weak soul could hope to actually achieve was to recognize her sinful nature and attempt to deny it, like Mary Magdalene. There are many Old Testament examples of women who recognize their sinful (ie: sexual) nature and then attempt to use it for what they perceive as good or evil.[7] In contrast to Mary Magdalene

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[6] Ibid.

[7] While the Old Testament is full of examples of the 'ideal mother', specifically Eve, Sarah, Leah, Rachel, the mother of Samson, and Hannah, for the purposes of this essay I am more interested in the women of the Old Testament who are remembered for their sexual and often violent exploits. For more discussion of women as role

can be used as an example of how one should completely deny this sinful nature, the women of the Old Testament (existing prior to the redemption of the Virgin) merely acknowledge this Eve-like essence. They do not deny it, they use it.

While the Protestant sects of Christianity would eventually choose to focus on the Marys of the Bible, pre and post-Reformation Europe was not reflective of any Christian-rooted "fear of women." In fact, as mentioned, the role of women in sex was something openly discussed, even in scripture. Perhaps the greatest example of this openness can be seen in the Old Testament story of Judith, where she not only recognizes her own sexuality but uses it to manipulate a man without becoming an example of a sinful woman like Eve. Comparing Eve with a figure such as the Virgin Mary creates a clear dichotomy and the scholarly and theological interpretation of the Virgin as the redeemer of Eve can be discussed quite convincingly. It is when figures such as Eve and Judith are compared that distinctions are less apparent. Obviously the Bible has gone through many interpretations and female figures especially are suspect in these various interpretations. However, this study seeks to highlight the Cult of Mary in reference to Eve and Old Testament women. If Judith can be considered a hero, when she used her feminine wiles to subdue and then behead a man, then clearly Christianity's stance on female sexuality is quite complicated.

'The Weibermacht' was not an early form of Feminism but was instead a system of moral warnings for men and women alike.[8] The necessity of invention that arose after Iconoclasm made artists seek out new or forgotten themes. The attraction that 'The

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models in the Old Testament see Yvonne Bleyerveld's article "Chaste, Obedient and Devout: Biblical Women as Patterns of Female Virtue in Netherlandish and German Graphic Art ca. 1500-1750," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* Vol. 28, No. 4 (2000-2001), pp219-250.

[8] Nurse, Julie, "She-Devils, Harlots and Harridans in Northern Renaissance Prints," *History Today* Vol. 48 (July 1998):41.

Weibermacht' held as a theme for artists such as van Leyden could have been the same characteristic that makes it appealing even today. This leitmotif "encompasses both Old Testament stories and classical/secular stories. In fact 'the Weibermacht' was so popular that Dürer was originally commissioned to decorate the great hall at Nuremberg with the theme, although this was ultimately rejected in favor of themes about justice and order."[9] The basis for the theme comes from traditional commentary on 'the battle of the sexes.' According to Julia Nurse, the theme regained popularity in the deeply misogynistic literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a means to explain the evils in society. Attitudes at the end of the Middle Ages sought scapegoats, and women were an easy target. Many prints often with proverbs as captions that fed on male proclivities were produced. In these (with the pretext of illustrating the commendable, obedient woman) the evil woman was all too well-defined, often painting a titillating image of a lusty woman that all of the faithful were to evade. The humorous undertones of these themes cannot be denied as they play a prominent role in the artistic depictions of many Weibermacht and Weibermacht related pieces.

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[9] Ibid. 42

Fig. 1 Israel van Meckenem's *Das Böse Weib* (1490-1500), engraving. Image obtained from http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Israel_van_Meckenem_-_Das_böse_Weib.jpg and reproduced under public domain.

One example of an artist who heavily emphasized the humorous aspect of this subject, the German engraver, Israel van Meckenham, adopted this approach in *Alltagsleben*, 'Everyday Life.' This unique series lays bare undesirable aspects of daily life in a marriage and includes scenes of the henpecked husband, where the wife dominates and often beats her husband. These topics draw also on the traditional Carnival theme of the 'World Turned Upside Down'. This lineage further connects the dominant woman to immorality and unnaturalness. One specific example is van Meckenham's *The Angry Wife* (1495/1503) in which the woman beats her husband with a spindle as the loyal family dog looks on. To further promote the humorous scene the traditional symbol of marital power, the pants, lie on the floor in front of the pair. The wife is placed physically higher in space, he kneels while she stands, and she even grasps his wrist to keep him from moving away. The fact that these prints were popular speaks to how

society enjoyed the shocking role reversal. While it was a cultural belief that women should naturally defer to their husbands in marriage, it was quite entertaining to see a husband emasculated as male endured abuse at the hands of the female who was usually at the receiving end of confrontations. The Reformation took up these morals and preached them at every opportunity. It seems that if women were not acting the dutiful wife as Martin Luther encouraged than they were going against the natural order of things. These warnings are continued not only in art but in poetry.[10] Erasmus himself echoed the view of traditional Old Testament texts when he warned men to beware of women in his In *Praise of Folly*.

In the following two chapters I will examine the evolution of themes that culminates in the Weibermacht by discussing specific works with thematic relation to Lucas van Leyden's interpretations of the Weibermacht. I seek to examine how van Leyden treated the subject differently than his contemporaries for "Lucas did not treat these subjects more often than his contemporaries (Cranach, for example)"[11] and yet is known more for this theme than any other. I will also discuss possible reasons for the

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[10] Ex. *The Angry Wife*, 1533 by Hans Sachs:
Go ahead and act like a man!
Otherwise, she'll end up riding you
And before long she'll
Deprive you of your pants, your purse
And your sword.
Which will make us all ashamed of you
Do not give her too much rein,
But rather take an oak cudgel
And beat her soundly between the ears!
But rather take an oak cudgel
And beat her soundly between the ears!

[11] Brown, Christopher, "Lucas van Leyden in Amsterdam," *The Burlington Magazine* Vol. 120, No. 909 (December 1978):883.

public's preference for such a theme, and finally, I will examine van Leyden's Large and Small Weibermacht Series themselves.

I. The Development of the Weibermacht as a Theme

In the Middle Ages genres from poetry to sermons, to songs and to plays covered the theme of *The Power of Women*. In the world of art, figures of couples in which men fall prey to love decorated everyday household objects and textiles and were sculpted into various types of ornamentations. An example of this theme, also known by the German term, Weibermacht, can be appreciated in pieces such as Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Adam and Eve* (1526). In this oil painting, Adam and Eve stand together underneath the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden surrounded by forest creatures under their dominion.

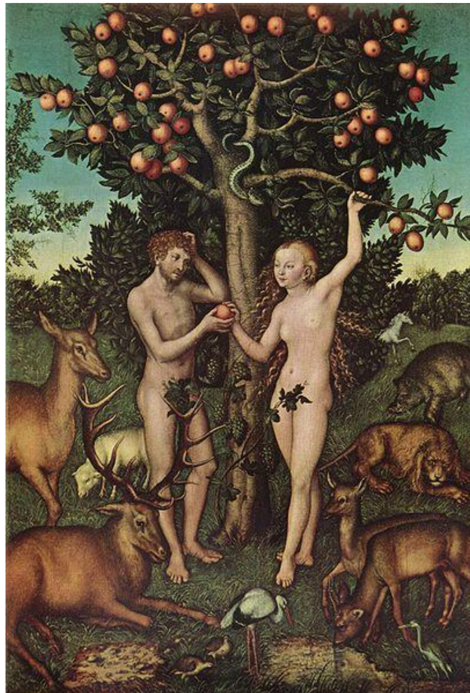

Fig. 2 Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Adam and Eve* (1526), oil on panel. Reproduced under public domain.

While at first glance there appears to be symmetry between the figures of Adam and Eve, upon closer analysis, Cranach, in fact, presents the female figure as more

powerful than the male. Though they seem to stand next to each other, Eve's posture places her physically, and thus, psychologically more prominently than Adam. Eve's left arm is raised above her head, grasping a branch of the Tree of Knowledge, while her right hand places the fruit in the hands of Adam. Her expression communicates knowledge already—she is transfixed, triumphant, and with her left leg she's ready to take a step forward as if to take action and even more physical space than Adam does. Adam himself is slumping, his left hand props him up sleepily against the tree, and he is clearly the passive recipient in the tableau as his hand is positioned under Eve's when he takes the fruit. Eve is most definitely the dominant figure in this painting; she has seduced Adam into accepting her offer of the fruit. While the composition could be interpreted as a warning against the sinfulness of women, the message is also one that conveys strong erotic tones.

The regained interest in the *Power of Women* theme arose out of the concern over the evolving place of women following the Reformation. The Renaissance interest in the subject was a revival in an interest left over from the Middle Ages. This was encouraged by satirical writings about folly, in which all that is foolish is represented as a woman, in the fifteenth century such as *Ship of Fools* (first published in Dutch in 1500), and Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly* (first printed in the Netherlands in 1512).[12] The theme was so popular that in 1511 a parade was held in Metz with floats that carried Solomon with his

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[12] In *The Praise of Folly* I am thinking of the example of the withered old woman who pursues a young man, as this features an inversion of gender roles (as in Topsy Turvey images). It also portrays women as an Allegory for Folly itself.

wives, Samson and Delilah, Virgil in his Basket and Phyllis atop Aristotle.[13] The parade was, of course, heavily influenced by the morality plays of the time, which in turn, reflected the interest of the public in the theme.

The humor found in the work of artists like van Meckenham that featured inversion of the natural order fueled the demand for many similarly themed prints. The theme of 'Woman on Top' comes directly from the topsy turvy battles of the sexes like those seen in *The Angry Wife*. Often the woman is shown literally riding the man, which, of course, alludes to more salacious references that the consumer would have found amusing.[14] The most popular of these visuals was the story of *Phyllis Riding Aristotle*. Not so literal, but of more significance, is the more figuratively-rendered concept of "Woman on Top." Examples of images abound in which a woman is depicted physically higher in the scene in order to reference her power over the other mostly male figures around her.

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[13] Jacobowitz, Ellen S. and Stephanie Loeb Stepanek, *The Prints of Lucas van Leyden and His Contemporaries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 103.

[14] It is plausible that these visuals also have roots in the story of the Whore of Babylon. Prints such as Albrecht Dürer's *Woman of Babylon* (1498) depict a figure who symbolizes the Antichrist. It is no accident that this figure is a woman who represents the worst of sinful intent.

Fig. 3 Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Adam and Eve* (1509), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

As discussed, many prints that featured Adam and Eve in the Garden, especially the Temptation, show Eve on a slightly higher elevated plane than Adam. We have seen this occur in the work of Cranach who employed this spatial composition several times including in print with his *Adam and Eve* woodcut of 1509. Lucas van Leyden also employs this arrangement more subtly in paintings like *The Dance around the Golden Calf* (1530) (detail).

Fig. 3 Detail of Lucas van Leyden's *Dance Around the Golden Calf* (1530), part of a triptych oil on panel. Image obtained from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lucas_van_Leyden_007.jpg and reproduced under public domain.

In such scenes the instrument of male temptation (the woman) is shown higher than the man she coerces. In the painting Moses seeks the Commandments while the people decide to worship a golden idol. Van Leyden's painting depicts a throbbing mob of people in the foreground and idolaters dancing in the mid-ground while Moses, ostensibly the main character, is hidden in the background. In the very center of the painting a woman sits holding a child and she has just finished passing a fruit to a man who sits at her feet. Symbolically this woman represents the women of the Old Testament story who were blamed for convincing the men to abandon God and begin worshiping the idol. The central scene is a direct echo of Eve and Adam and the child the woman holds will be yet another heir to the sinful world manipulated by women.

Notably, the *Power of Women* was not only an evil to be warned about or laughed at, but a patriotic tool to be exploited. As mentioned before, the stories of Old Testament heroines complicate and make problematic the idea that the Weibermacht and its related

themes are based on the idea that women's sexuality is inherently evil. Julia Nurse points this out in the tale of *Judith and Holofernes*. While the tale would have serious warnings to the enemy, namely Holofernes himself who fell victim to Judith's trickery, it is also a tale of patriotic duty performed by a woman in service to her people. This image of not just a devious woman, but a decidedly violent one inspired print artists of the Northern Renaissance. However, a woman with such crude credentials did not coincide with the Renaissance idea of good-decorum. Of course, it can be argued that neither did the hen-pecking, devious wife. It is possible that such violent women are just examples of how not to act, but Judith's status as a patriotic heroine who saved her people through the use of her 'evil' feminine wiles puts this story and others like it at a strange crossroads. Therefore, the depiction of Judith and others, like Jael, occupy an ambiguous spot. Sometimes the artist attempts to make Judith very threatening and tries to downplay her womanliness. Others focus on her violence emphasizing the danger of her gender and her allure and highlighting the risk to the intended male audience.

Fig. 4 From the Nuremburg Chronicle, *Judith with the head of Holofernes* (1493), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

An example of Judith portrayed in what ordinarily would be interpreted as pronounced violence can be seen in the Nuremberg Chronicle. The illustration created by the workshop of Michael Wolgemut and published in 1493 (during a time when Albrecht Dürer worked as an apprentice at the workshop) shows Judith skewering Holofernes' head on the tip of her sword. Judith's passive, emotionless eyes casually glance at the severed neck with no apparent reaction even though the open mouth and rolled-back eyes of Holofernes point to his last moments of horror. Judith also holds Holofernes' head aloft with only one arm while the folds of her head-dress ripple fashionably around her and her left hand is affectedly posed in a lady-like gesture. This fine and courtly lady has decapitated a much larger man and with apparent ease. Yet, while viewers confront the violence of the situation, the harshness is mitigated by the humor of the image. It is humorous that such a dainty lady be amidst this carnage.

Other attempts to diffuse the violence of the situation can be seen in depictions of the tale of Samson and Delilah. In the story Samson loves Delilah yet she betrays him for money.[15] This is virtually all readers are told about Delilah in the Old Testament. Samson, as a Hebrew, had accepted a religious vow that prohibited him from drinking wine or cutting his hair. Contingent on his faithfulness to this oath, Jehovah God bestowed upon this warrior undue physical prowess. Delilah, a Philistine and thus not of the nationality of God's chosen people, was recruited to extort the secret source of Samson's unnatural strength. Master E.S.'s *Samson and Delilah* portrays the image of Delilah on a plane that is physically higher than Samson, who sleeps at her knees. Representing Delilah disproportionately larger in size than Samson, it can be deduced

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[15] Kahr, Madlyn, "Delilah," *The Art Bulletin* Vol. 54, No. 3 (September 1972):282.

that the artist intended a hierarchical shift. Since disparity between the genders is not usual for Master E.S., it is easy to surmise that the placement and size of Delilah's image are intentional. The scissors she holds are the definitive clue tipping viewers that this is not a scene of courtly love but the infamous tale of the Old Testament.

Fig. 5 Master E.S., *Delilah Cutting Samson's Hair* (1460), woodcut. Image obtained from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Delila_schert_Simson_die_Haare.jpg and reproduced under public domain.

Adding insult to injury, Samson is not only smaller in size but frail-looking—like a child napping on his mother's knee. In analyzing this work the critic, Madlyn Kahr comments, "Art responds to cultural and individual determinants, and it serves social and psychological purposes."[16] For Kahr the story of Samson is about human weakness, specifically that of men under the influence of women. She relates the Weibermacht to the power of Motherhood. The power of men flows first from their mother's womb. Kahr

[16] Ibid.

ultimately connects this flow of power to the Virgin Mary, the New Eve, whose breast is the antithesis of Eve's apple.[17] Yet, because of the changes in the interpretation of Mary's role that took place as a direct result of the Reformation, the cult of Mary waned, taking away a positive example of feminine power and leaving Eve as the dominant archetype for female behavior.

While the introduction of Old Testament heroines can complicate the idea of feminine powers and duty, the iconography of motherhood complicates it even further. Are viewers to mock Samson for his foolishness, or empathize with him for trusting a maternal figure, or look down on him for being emasculated so?

Fig. 6 Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Samson and Delilah* (1530), oil on panel. Reproduced under public domain.

[17] Ibid. 286

Lucas Cranach's later painting of *Samson and Delilah* from 1530 seems to support this recasting of Delilah as an Eve-like figure.[18] In a setting evocative of the Garden of Eden, a blond Delilah in courtly attire sits under a tree that is ripe with fruit. If the setting and the fruit are not enough allusion to the Fall, perhaps Cranach's choice of the color red and the gratuitous richness of the velvet material of the dress will be. Slumped in her lap in deep, debilitating slumber, lies Samson. Delilah is depicted methodically and purposely cutting his hair with a pair of shears while Samson's lips are slack and open and his legs are awkwardly resting on each other as if in child-like sleep. Samson's weapon lies discarded at his side and the soldiers waiting treacherously to capture him are visible on the outside of the grove. The allusion to the garden is made even stronger with the surrounding flora and once again the seductress is shown physically more prominent than the duped male. Delilah's comfortable lap and ministrations echo the behavior of a mother, yet in this portrayal too, she betrays the hapless Samson instead of protecting him. Much like the print by Master ES., this image is virtually desexualized due to the helplessness of Samson.

One cannot ignore another tradition that includes the motif of the *Power of Women*, that is, the Question: Who is the Strongest? From the book of Esdras, considered apocryphal, King Darius is asked choose the best of three answers to the question "Who is the Strongest?" The answers are Wine, The King, and Women. (e.g., drink, power, sex). The answer which Darius declared the best, "women." is most often juxtaposed with

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[18] This painting is most probably a diptych piece meant to be viewed with Cranach's *Phyllis and Aristotle* (1530) as both images share a color palette and similar backgrounds. Both paintings also portray the title woman as a courtly-looking figure which points to the popularity of such Old Testament themes and their consumption by affluent patrons. I will discuss images of Phyllis and Aristotle later on in this essay.

Truth in something like “women are the strongest but nothing is stronger than Truth.” Such an inconsistency suggests that ‘Truth’ was tacked on at a later date.[19] The tale was rediscovered sometime in the sixteenth century after the Weibermacht became a popular subject in art, perhaps precisely because the subject was popular. It was taken up by mostly Flemish artists and the theme became known as ‘The Four Powers.’[20] Each answer would be the subject of its own print or panel, with *The Power of Women* often featuring references to or actual scenes with Delilah, Jael etc. Interestingly, ‘Truth’ would always receive its own composition instead of being paired with the ‘Women’ panel.

Fig. 7 The Master of the Weibermacht, *Macht des Weibes* (1451-75), engraving. Image obtained from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Macht_des_Weibes.jpg and reproduced under public domain.

One particular engraving *The Power of Women* from 1462 by an artist known only as The Master of the Weibermacht resembles these types of images. They are more likely related to morality plays and more specifically to the idea of the previously mentioned Weibermacht floats. The theme of ‘The Four Powers’ is generally depicted as

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[19] Veldman, Ilja M, “Who Is the Strongest? The Riddle of Esdras in Netherlandish Art,” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* Vol. 17, No. 4 (1987):224.
[20] Ibid.

allegorical, with each Power depicted as a woman on a horse surrounded by attributes and icono-graphic symbols that allude to the allegorical meaning. In this engraving a woman on a horse is surrounded by eight figures, four leashed monkeys and four well-dressed court jesters or 'fools.' The fatigued nag seems to stumble underneath the woman's weight. A hunting bird perches on her outstretched left arm. The four monkey figures replace traditional hunting hounds and perhaps represent the tools of her "hunting" trade, that is, her ability to inspire lust. The physical sexuality of women is represented by the monkeys while the wiles and trickery she will employ is referenced by the fools that gather around her.

Adding to the richness and complexity of the Weibermacht theme in the Northern tradition of prints is the characterization of women as witches. Such extensive research has been conducted regarding images of witches produced in the sixteenth century, that suffice it to say, these were the product of a society that was hypersensitive to the changing roles of women in the Reformation and familiar with classical and biblical allusions to female deviousness and power. Mixed in with this paranoia was a fascination with the implied or expressed sexuality of these women. Hans Baldung Grien arguably cemented the pairing of witches and sex by including them as subjects in a significant number of chiaroscuro woodcuts. Sullivan contends, however, that Baldung Grien's is not a superstitious interest in witches, but that his robust nudes engaged in various erotic activities are better seen "as a response to humanist interest in the poetry and satire of the classical world" rather than confirmation of the artist's or his contemporaries' actual

belief in witchcraft.[21] Images of witches are full of contemporary beliefs about the sexuality of women and tend to be much more erotic than Old Testament Weibermacht images because they are not constrained by any Biblical narratives. Charles Zika's The Appearance of Witchcraft credits Baldung Grien's *Two Weather Witches* (1523) with sparking his own interest in the connection between witchcraft and art in the Reformation.[22] This particular painting is highly-charged sexually, as it features one of the nude figures staring brazenly back at the viewer. These women do not exhibit the grotesque bodies and strange activity of those of Baldung Grien's prints. Instead of being repugnant, these witches sizzle with flirtatiousness and are more akin to a classical siren— a beautiful woman with strange unknown powers. One of those powers is the ability to seduce and control a male viewer.

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[21] Sullivan, Margaret A, "The Witches of Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien," *Renaissance Quarterly* Vol. 53, No. 2 (Summer 2000):333.
[22] Zika, Charles, *The Appearance of Witchcraft Print and Visual Culture in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1.

Fig. 8 Hans Baldung Grien, *Two Weather Witches* (1523), oil on panel. Reproduced under public domain.

Adding to the salaciousness of the composition, the infant behind the seated figure featured in *Two Weather Witches* is most likely an offspring of a sinister mating that will be raised to serve the Devil rather than a child stolen to be eaten in a mockery of the sacrament of communion.[23] Certainly witches were a great excuse for artists, particularly printmakers, to depict nude women that were often involved in quite erotic actions with monsters and the grotesque. On this subject, critic Charles Zika concurs with other scholars who credit artists with playing a major role in fueling society's preoccupation, and at some critical historical junctures, its obsession with witchcraft. Artists relied heavily on the sexualization of the witches' bodies, linking their powers and deviant behavior closely with virtual pornographic images. Zika notes, "Since the images created

[23] The Witch as the anti-mother is a topic that deserves much more time than I can give it here. For more information may I suggest beginning with Charles Zika's article (in which he discusses many inversions of the role of mother, including witches devouring infants); "Cannibalism and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Reading Visual Images".

by Dürer and Baldung Grien in the first decade of the sixteenth century, witchcraft was consistently represented in highly gendered terms, as an inversion of the gender order or as a threat to masculine sexuality and power."[24] This relates heavily to the previously discussed images of the Weibermacht, in which men are tricked, duped and emasculated by a devious woman who uses her feminine wiles to achieve her objectives. The relationship between images of witches and the Weibermacht continue in Lucas van Leyden's *Phyllis and Aristotle*.

Fig. 9 Lucas van Leyden, *Phyllis Riding Aristotle* (1515), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

In this woodcut the wind catches and accentuates the medusan effect of Phyllis's long, tight serpent-like curls. Zika cites that the hair of the witches "connected her to the wild and the bestial."[25] A woman's hair has long been connected with her sexuality and

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[24] Ibid. 7
[25] Ibid. 87

an effective artifice was to draw attention to hair as if it were a wild thing, a living embodiment of the power of a woman's body. An increase in the witch craze was very closely linked with the development of the role of women during and after the Reformation. The witch hunts that occurred in history usually had deeply-rooted, complicated reasons. Consequently, just like the images of the Weibermacht are seldom simply cautionary tales that warn of the evils of women, those depicting witches are not merely representative of the collective paranoid consciousness. It is undeniable that these works communicate eroticism and that they intend to have a comedic effect. In fact, one could argue that in all the images of witches, in their black Sabbaths and despicable ceremonies, very little actual moralizing is expressed. In reality these images seem to convey a perverse intent to appeal to (mainly male) viewers' most base desires.

As previously mentioned the special circumstances of the Reformation in the North and the increased interest in the role of women in that new evolving society kept the consumption of humorous and morality tales at a premium. The North mainly concentrated on examples from the Old Testament. These characters, Eve, Delilah, Jezebel, Salome, and Jael share one main trait: each uses her sexuality to capture and/or murder a formerly strong male. In a few cases, classical stories were also popular subjects, as was the case with *Phyllis and Aristotle* which features as the third protagonist, Alexander the Great. During one of his many campaigns, Alexander was conquering Asia when he became infatuated with Phyllis, an Indian woman of considerable wit and guile. So taken was he by her, in fact, that he married her and spent every possible moment with her to the dereliction of his stately duties. Naturally, the nobles became alarmed and turned to Alexander's teacher, Aristotle, to speak reason to

the love-struck Alexander. Aristotle was able to convince the King to return to his duties and this change in Alexander's attention enraged Phyllis so much that she vowed to seek revenge on the old man who obviously had so much more influence over Alexander than she did.

Likely due to Aristotle's long abstinence, the unscrupulous Phyllis was able to seduce the old man quickly. The newly-infatuated Aristotle pressed Phyllis to return his love; but, Phyllis asked him instead for proof of *his* undying love and devotion. So love-sick was Aristotle that he agreed to the humiliating test—to allow Phyllis to ride him like a beast of burden through the grounds of the palace. To make the mockery worth the trouble, Phyllis alerted Alexander to her ruse and desperate to regain the feelings of emotional closeness at the expense of Aristotle, Phyllis urged Alexander to watch the spectacle. She proceeded to put a saddle on Aristotle's back and a bit in his mouth and to ride him around the palace grounds while he crawled on all fours. Phyllis achieved the desired results since Alexander thought that the denigrating act was all very amusing. However, as the King, Alexander had to address the scene that Aristotle had caused. When questioned, Aristotle retorted, "If a woman can make such a fool of a man of my age and wisdom, how much more dangerous must she not be for younger ones? I added an example to my precept; it is your privilege to benefit by both."[26]

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[26] Sarton, George, "Aristotle and Phyllis," *Isis* Vol. 14, No. 1 (May 1930):9.

Fig. 10 Pieter Flötner, *Phyllis Riding Aristotle* (e. 16thC), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

Artists such as Pieter Flötner depicted the subject of *Phyllis Riding Aristotle* (early sixteenth century) in woodcut. Flötner's woodcut shows Aristotle on all fours being ridden by Phyllis through a courtyard filled with vegetation. Phyllis is holding a whip in her right hand, the reins in her left. The miserable expression on Aristotle's face conveys his abject embarrassment as he grimaces while biting on the bit and Phyllis rides sidesaddle in apparent ease and comfort.

As shocking as it would be for spectators to see a purportedly respectable woman portrayed riding a man, there are prior traditions that would allow viewers to enjoy not only the humor of the image but to instantly be reminded of the deviousness of women. Visually this particular story is clearly related to the 'Woman on Top' theme and images of the Whore of Babylon, though this narrative became popular before the Weibermacht became a theme in its own right. Examples can be seen in many household objects, such as aquamaniles used for hand washing before dinner and as humorous entertainment for dinner guests. The subject of Phyllis and Aristotle was incredibly popular and examples can be found from artists such as Hans Baldung Grien (1510), Lucas Cranach the Elder

(1530), and Lucas van Leyden (1515). All the images share common compositions similar to the previously examined print by Flotner. In all, Phyllis is shown holding a whip, sitting on Aristotle's back while the philosopher is depicted usually wearing some sort of equestrian tack, the focus being a bridle with a bit.

Fig. 11 Hans Baldung Grien, *Phyllis Riding Aristotle* (1510), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

In the case of artist, Baldung Grien, he chose to focus on the sexual humor of the scene by depicting both figures nude. The humor is amped by the nudity because Aristotle's indignity is increased by exposing his aging body to ridicule. In contrast to the old man and his sagging skin, Phyllis with her ample bottom sits atop Aristotle as she flicks her whip directly between his cheeks. The scene takes place in a tree-filled courtyard and presumably Alexander the Great can be seen peeking over the second floor wall to witness Aristotle's humiliation.

Another example by Lucas van Leyden [see Figure 9] on the other hand, focuses on a much more presentable Phyllis. She sits atop Aristotle fully-clothed in a voluminous dress with large sleeves. Aristotle wears a robe that appears to be getting caught up in his four-legged locomotion. The ceremonial turban he wears strikingly contrasts with the ridiculous bridle that comes from underneath it. Phyllis holds the reins in one hand and

cracks her whip over her head with the other. Her long curly hair swirls around her and her belt accentuates the curves of her hips.[27] The sexual motivation for Aristotle's folly and subsequent fall is made more subtly here than in Baldung Grien's work. The opulence of the draped, clinging fabric and the free-flowing hair can be contrasted against Baldung Grien's complete nudes. The figures in Lucas van Leyden's woodcut are also placed much closer to the margins of the field of vision thus obscuring the majority of the setting. What remains seems to be a bare rocky area without any witnesses.

While its visual roots could be traced to images of the Whore of Babylon, the narrative of Phyllis and Aristotle itself has its roots in India. These stories traveled West via the dissemination of Islam and were translated as necessary. The story became not just a simple tale of a beautiful woman tricking a usually wise old man, but of a queen, a sultan and his vizier. George Sarton can find no trail of a written version from the Islamic East to Christian Europe but he surmises that it is probable that the story forms part of the oral tradition. "The Aristotelian form was almost certainly an invention of western Europe. Let me repeat that there is no mention whatever of Aristotle in the Arabic versions."[28] Sarton notes that the tale appears in print simultaneously in German and French. The French version refers to the temptress as Campaspe while the German version is the one that bequeaths the name of Phyllis to the intrepid temptress. Both are about Alexander, his Indian bride (retained from the original story) and Aristotle. That Aristotle was the figure that Europeans associated with this story is significant. Why

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[27] Phyllis' wild hair can be connected with the previously discussed images of witches. Here, Phyllis' hair fills the space around her and is charged with all the same sexual energy as those of the witches in Charles Zika's examples.

[28] Ibid. 10

Aristotle? "The point of the original story was to illustrate the dangerous power of woman. The wiser the man beguiled by her coquettish wiles, the stronger the point."[29] By the thirteenth century Aristotle had begun a historical transformation from the greatest example of logical thinking to the wisest man who ever lived. It would then be no surprise that for greatest impact in the story, the wisest man be chosen. This in turn allows the story to be set in the court of Alexander the Great and the story to retain some of its exotic Eastern influences. Additionally Sarton points out that a secondary point was being made because Aristotle's "shameful failure illustrated not only the malicious power of women and the triumph of love, but the vanity of philosophy, especially of that philosophy which was as yet unredeemed by Christian grace."[30] Also of significance is that probably it was not until a later time in history that this tale gained the identities of its star characters. The first Latin text in which the duped character is Aristotle did not appear until the fourteenth century in writings by Dominican monks. Before this, the story already circulated orally in Europe but without any allusion to Aristotle. This incident is not found in the medieval histories of Aristotle or Alexander and so was most likely attributed to them much later. Yet, this anecdote did not take long to gain a sizeable following. Indeed, it was so popular by the fifteenth century that there was a French parlor game in which a losing man was obliged to carry around a lady on his back while walking on all fours. This game was called "Le cheval de Aristotle."[31]

Some reasons for the Weibermacht theme's popularity have been discussed and placed within a cultural context. As society became concerned with the changing role of

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[29] Ibid. 11
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid. 13

women (that often included wielding more power and independence) there were attempts to diffuse tension by objectification, the representation of eroticism and humor. Using classical and Old Testament examples, artists reflected these tensions in their art by depicting scenes in which women exhibit power over men. This power is connected to female sexuality and the inability of men to resist such wiles. This sexuality is at once celebrated as a natural part of being a wife (which will lead to motherhood) and criticized as the inherent sinfulness of women—heirs of Eve. These humorous and moralistic treatments of a complicated subject in art culminate with the specific theme of *The Power of Women*. An innovator of this theme is the artist Lucas van Leyden whose woodcut of Phyllis and Aristotle. Although not intended as one of the pieces of his Large or Small series, this work can lead to more careful examination of his treatment of the theme.

II. The Large Weibermacht Series of Lucas van Leyden

The Weibermacht is obviously a product of its time, a culmination of many themes that examined moralistic lessons concerning the sinfulness of women. The images helped to reflect the changing role of women during the Reformation, using eroticism and bawdy humor that helped drive the theme's popularity on the print market. Many scholars consider the contributions to the theme made by Lucas van Leyden to be the most significant interpretations of the Weibermacht as a complete subject at this time. J. Carter Brown of the National Gallery of Art and Jan Fontein of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts called van Leyden "the most important and influential of the graphic artists working in the Netherlands in the early sixteenth century."[32] Van Leyden worked hard to create a signature style that would help him compete against Albrecht Dürer. His Weibermacht series exhibits many of his signature compositional details as well as a studied inclusion of many of the themes previously discussed in this essay. Van Leyden would often turn to Old Testament subjects for his numerous woodcuts and the Weibermacht theme became a type signature work for him.

The Large series is not signed but similarities of style and the fact that van Leyden did produce a smaller signed series of the same subject leads scholars to confidently assign authorship to van Leyden. "Characteristically, his choice of moment is a quiet one—not active confrontation, but rather furtive deception or stealthy

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[32] Jacobowitz, Ellen S. and Stephanie Loeb Stepanek, *The Prints of Lucas van Leyden and His Contemporaries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 7.

negotiation."[33] Van Leyden's figures are solid, not prone to dramatic movement. It has been previously noted in this study that van Leyden experimented with more dramatic composition in his later thematically-related woodcut, *Phyllis and Aristotle*. The expressions of the Large Series' figures were sober, often melancholy. Van Leyden included as much detail as he could through the use of several different line weights and cross-hatching. While the emotional element of these prints is lacking, the variety of body types and facial expressions show van Leyden's concern for individuality and detail. These compositions immediately bring to mind the tableau vivant. The restrained gestures and the main figures occupation of the foreground are theatrical in style.

It has been posited by many that van Leyden created this series as an immediate answer to Dürer's successful print books like the *Apocalypse*, the *Large Passion*, the *Life of the Virgin* and the *Small Woodcut Passion*. The success of these books ostensibly drove van Leyden into trying his own versions. Van Leyden's style is vastly different from Dürer's. Van Leyden seems most interested in a clear representation of the scene rather than in expressive emotion. He did not copy the German artists' themes but still chose well-known subjects that would do well in the market. It is impossible to ignore the endless comparisons scholars have made between the two artists, but this study does not intend to enter the arena of trying to establish supremacy of one over the other. Certainly, it is well-established that van Leyden attempted to borrow from Dürer stylistically; but, it is debatable whether van Leyden felt such borrowings valuable in the advancement of his work.

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[33] Ibid. 104

Equally in doubt is whether van Leyden created the six prints in his *Large Weibermacht* as a series. They are undated and "although at least one impression … can be found in the four major collections of Lucas' prints (Amsterdam, Berlin, London, and Vienna), there is not sufficient unity among any of the groups with regard to type and quality of impression or paper to indicate whether they might have survived together as a series from the sixteenth century."[34] No record exists of the prints being in one collection together at any given time. This leads scholars to conclude that it is likely they sold on an individual basis and at separate times. Perhaps van Leyden chose to test the market for a dedicated Weibermacht series by offering the prints on an individual basis. Various stylistic changes can be observed between all the prints themselves and while the 1515 woodcut of *Phyllis and Aristotle* is most definitely related by subject, it is differentiated by style. The order of the prints' execution is unknown and it is by modern convention that Old Testament scenes are presented before the classical scenes. If the prints were indeed sold individually and over a considerable span of time, it is difficult to assess them as a true response to the bound works of Dürer. This can be discussed in a section on van Leyden and the much more cohesive Small Weibermacht Series. As for the Large Weibermacht Series, whether intended as a series or not, the prints *are* joined thematically and they exhibit van Leyden's greatest innovations with regard to the subject.

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[34] Ibid. 105

Adam and Eve (The Fall of Man)

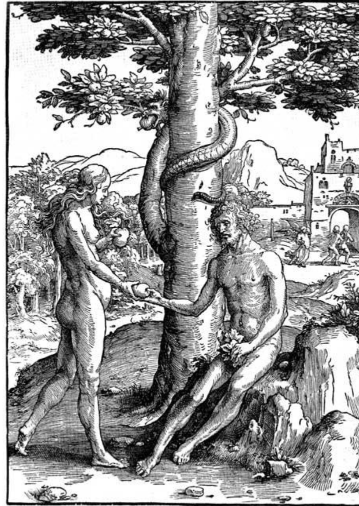

Fig. 12 Lucas van Leyden, *Adam and Eve (The Fall of Man)* (1512), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

Though I have posited that Eve is the first in a long line of sinful, tempting women, the Fall of Man, as a subject, was never deliberately included under the heading of Weibermacht until van Leyden did so in his Large Series of 1512.[35] To make the subject his own, van Leyden drew on fourteenth century manuscript illuminations when rendering the figures and including the continuous narrative (something van Leyden employed repeatedly). While he referenced the text-dependent book illustrations of the past, van Leyden also attempted to free the image from the text completely. It is large scale and not accompanied by any passage or quotation. The difficulties with the woodcut itself, in line weight, shading and attempts to render depth, are attributed to van Leyden's experimentation with a new medium and also places the *Fall of Man* woodcut as the first in the series completed.

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[35] Ibid. 107

Compositionally most are familiar with the figures of Eve and Adam as they are similar to the *Fall of Man* by Cranach discussed early in this paper. Adam, somberly sitting under the Tree of Knowledge with his feeble legs propped under him, takes the fruit Eve offers him without making eye contact. His rounded shoulders and left hand covering his genitals with leaves point to Adam's shame, while his weak legs and indirect gaze speak to his emasculation. Conversely Eve is standing, striding, and walking with her hair moving and all the curves of her womanly body visible to the viewer. She seems to look directly at Adam as she gives him the fruit, like she is admonishing a child or giving an order. Eve's open left hip also physically expands the area taken up by her body; she strides forward, as well as extends outward, with gesturing hands that grip the fruits from the Tree of Knowledge. The standing figure of Eve and the sitting figure of Adam are placed rather close to the picture plane with the tree splitting the composition in half and dividing the space into the extreme foreground and the far background. The viewer can interpret the continuous narrative over Adam's left shoulder: Adam and Eve being expelled from the Garden of Eden and Eve leading them out of the Garden as Adam cowers behind her. The tree tends to flatten the image, especially the midground, but the main figures are not as somber as those in the background. They lend the foreground a dichotomy that energizes it.

Samson and Delilah

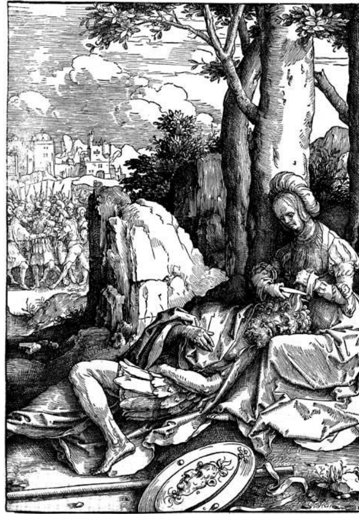

Fig. 13 Lucas van Leyden, *Samson and Delilah* (1512), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

When Lucas van Leyden depicts Delilah and Samson, he makes use of some poetic license. In Leyden's work, Samson wears armor, but his shield and halberd lay on the ground.[36] Samson's feet are bare, leaving him no hope of flight. The scene takes place in a traditional landscape setting and the figures of Samson and Delilah occupy the entire foreground in what appears to be a garden or a grotto separated from the rest of the landscape in the background. Like the previous Samson and Delilah images discussed, van Leyden seeks to completely emasculate Samson by stripping him of his warrior identity. Samson is asleep in the pose of a child, not a warrior. He is almost in a fetal position with his knees bent and legs leaning on each other. His arms curl around his torso as if seeking warmth. Samson's slack lips also point to his total surrender to the motherly figure of Delilah who supports the warrior's head in her lap while she begins to cut his hair. She leans herself against a tree that stretches to the top of the frame and beyond, like the Tree of Knowledge in *The Fall of Man*. In this particular woodcut, van

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[36] 1508 version

Leyden has gained greater control over the medium, the shadows are more nuanced and the atmospheric perspective of the background does not combine with the midground full of soldiers. This midground is actually another continuous narrative. Soldiers can be seen arresting the now-shorn Samson. Their legs cross each other, surrounding Samson like the rocks of the grotto surround the prior scene. The sharp ends of lances and pikes jut into the air above the arrested Samson's head, referencing the imminent violence that will result from Delilah's treacherous act. Van Leyden will continue to show the soldiers in the background in his woodcut series, both large and small. He will also make use of continued narrative showing the guard, then the captured Samson. In the 1517/18 woodcut Samson's halberd has become a spiked war-club (which Kahr believes is a reference to the classical Hercules, a strong man who also fell victim to a woman). In his versions of Samson and Delilah, van Leyden enhances the military aspect of the story instead of the sexual encounter. Here the story becomes a confrontation between a man and his enemies rather than a man and a woman. The treacherous act of Delilah is done at the orders of the soldiers who are next shown taking Samson away. The motherly position of Delilah and her subdued expression coupled with the childlike position of Samson and the focus on the discarded weapons in the extreme foreground point more to military and political motivation than to the sexualized power of the Eve of the Large Series' first print.

Solomon's Idolatry

Fig. 14 Lucas van Leyden, *Solomon's Idolatry* (1512), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

Lucas van Leyden's inclusion of the subject of Solomon's Idolatry is directly reflective of his knowledge of the market. Before the sixteenth century this subject was only rarely seen, eventually becoming quite popular. Van Leyden builds upon the theme of beguilement and embarrassment by depicting the story of Solomon as not just a story of seduction and manipulation, but of public humiliation. Though the print is without text, van Leyden follows the scriptural description very closely and sets this particular interpretation after the beguiling has taken place, symbolized by the cupid that sits atop the idol. Solomon is portrayed as an old man with large ears, kneeling and praying in front of an idol while his wife stands over him supervising. The composition of this piece is not as sophisticated. The foreground is taken up by Solomon and his wife, the idol and a wall. The midground is marked by the waist-high wall around which the ranking officials and people of the city gather. The far background shows atmospheric perspective with distant mountains and clouds.

Humorously, the statue of the idol rests upon little dog statues that mock the loyalty of marriage. Solomon's sword juts from his groin area as if to draw attention to the organ that perhaps played a large part in the scene with which viewers are confronted. Solomon's wife stands physically above Solomon, continuing a now familiar type of composition. Interestingly, all the members of the crowd who seem to be speaking are older people speaking to younger people, perhaps moralizing and warning against falling prey to similar folly. One humorous note is the age difference between the advanced-in-age Solomon and his young wife. Even the cats sitting on the ledge of the building seem to be discussing the scene, with the older, larger cat looking towards the attentive, smaller and younger kitten. This image is also linked to the classical subjects of the Weibermacht such as *Phyllis and Aristotle*. As is common knowledge, Solomon is the epitome of wisdom and in the classic story of *Phyllis and Aristotle*, a woman deceives and makes a fool of a man. It is quite important that the humiliation of Solomon occur in public under the open criticism of his own subjects. The humor in the scene is increased dramatically by the presence of other characters.

Herod and Herodias

Fig. 15 Lucas van Leyden, *Herod and Herodias* (1512), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

Again van Leyden chooses a subject never before directly associated with the Weibermacht: *The Fall of Man*. The depiction of Herod and Herodias was never before considered a specifically Weibermacht tale until van Leyden did. Once more the artist employs the use of continuous narrative. The main scene in the foreground is the presentation of John the Baptist's head to Herod and Herodias. Out of a window on the right side of the image can be seen the depiction of the decapitation of John the Baptist. The violence of this scene is not hidden but brought directly out into the open. The decapitation and presentation of the head are the most graphic scenes in the story of Herodias' manipulation of her husband in order to seek revenge. Like the subject of Samson and Delilah van Leyden focuses primarily on the violence of the situation rather than the inherent sexuality of the manipulative women. The theme of sexuality becomes secondary to the primary violent act.

Analyzing the use of space, a table once again appears to flatten plane, echoing the previously mentioned shallow space of a stage in the representation of morality plays. Herod and Herodias are seated behind the table while there are indications that the figure

of Salome is moving gracefully across the room bearing the platter with John the Baptist's head. The small painting above Herodias' head seems to be of two lovers embracing, referencing the sexual manipulations that Herodias employed in encouraging Salome to dance.[37] Herodias holds a knife, and places her hand upon her husband's arm. She is shown physically higher than her husband with a larger head, her blocking arm and her gesturing knife points to her dominance over her husband whose petulant expression merely conveys unhappiness as he realizes the consequences of his manipulation. The presence of the knife in the hand of Herodias when there is no food on the table alludes to an even more violent act. She intends to stab the head of John the Baptist and mutilate it. The two women in the composition are both shown moving and gesturing perhaps even speaking, while the rest of the men seated around the table and the servant are all silent. Only one man seems to be pointing or gesturing but is face is obscured and he could be speaking to Herodias instead of Herod.

Of all of the Weibermacht images from the Large series, this is the least humorous. The recorded violence of the beheading, the implied mutilation of John the Baptist's head, the vengeful motivation for Herodias' manipulation of her husband, as well as the accusations of incest by John the Baptist that instigated Herodias' desire for revenge are layers of sinister, abhorrent behavior that leave little room for any comedy relief.

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[37] I haven't found a source that identifies this 'painting' within the print, it could be lovers or perhaps a figure stabbing another? If it is a stabbing this painting would reinforce the overt violence that van Leyden fills the scene with.

The Poet Virgil Suspended in a Basket

Fig. 16 Lucas van Leyden, *The Poet Virgil Suspended in a Basket* (1512), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

The story of Virgil being trapped in a pulley basket by the Emperor's daughter is also familiar. "According to medieval legend, Virgil fell in love with the Roman emperor's daughter. One night she promised to raise him to her bedroom in a basket but left him dangling halfway to be mocked by passersby the following day." (Boorsch and Orenstein[38] Versions of this story can be found across Europe in "written histories, sermons, songs, poems, and performances. The tale could even be found in guidebooks to the city of Rome, directing one to the scene of the poet's humiliation."[39] While the pictorial representation of the story was not unheard of, there are only three known prints prior to van Leyden's Large *Power of Women* series and it is odd because it is not paired

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[38] Boorsch, Suzanne and Nadine M. Orenstein, "The Print in the North: The Age of Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, New Series* Vol. 54, No. 4 (Spring 1997):45.
[39] Jacobowitz, Ellen S. and Stephanie Loeb Stepanek, *The Prints of Lucas van Leyden and His Contemporaries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 117.

with his *Phyllis and Aristotle*. Van Leyden would do a second version of this scene as an engraving that would become more famous than this Large Series version,[40] but grouping classical themes with the Old Testament stories is significant and unique to van Leyden.

This 'Virgil' is strongly related stylistically to the Adam and Eve print. Even from a distance, the same unwavering line weight and compaction of space can be observed. In this image Virgil can be seen dangling in his basket while the citizens of Rome, dressed in Flemish fashion, gather below him to point and discuss the implications of his actions. On the front of the building that Virgil is trapped against a decorative motif over the entrance shows vines and discarded armor and weapons perhaps in a reference to Virgil's emasculation. In the left foreground a woman lectures a child about Virgil's humiliation and the anguished look on Virgil's face is the most emotional expression van Leyden has allowed in the series.

The artist placed the building behind Virgil closer to the foreground where it takes up half of the composition. Later van Leyden would use his technique of marginalizing the main event of the narrative by placing it in the extreme background. In this work, the main event takes center stage but the Emperor's daughter is not pictured. Again van Leyden has decided to show us the consequences of Virgil's actions rather than the circumstances leading up to them. The absence of the woman who caused the wise Virgil to lose all common sense and act like such a fool allows viewers to concentrate on Virgil. In so doing they are able to share in the full extent of the hilarity of stumbling upon the poet as the fictional citizens and to leave them to participate in the guessing game of why

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[40] In van Leyden's second version of "The Poet Virgil in a Basket" from 1525 van Leyden will invert the composition (a stylistic trademark) placing the main event of Virgil's mockery in the far background.

Virgil finds himself in such a predicament. The only clue of Virgil's bad decision making is merely hinted at by details such as the central figure's jutting sword. Of all van Leyden's prints, this one is the most humorous viewers, especially if the particulars of Virgil's revenge are recalled.[41]

The Mouth of Truth

Fig. 17 Lucas van Leyden, *The Mouth of Truth* (1512), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

The print featuring the story of The Mouth of Truth is about the poet Virgil. Instead of choosing Phyllis and Aristotle it seems van Leyden wanted to make a much more pointed statement about the behavior of adulterous women while allowing the viewer to experience the embarrassment of yet another wise old man of history. The story begins when Virgil invents a statue that "as a foolproof test…bit off the hand of any person who lied before it while under oath. The emperor of Rome rightly suspected his wife of adultery but she offered to prove her innocence before the statue. Prior to the test, she instructed her love-interest to dress up as a poor jester and gave him instructions to

[41] Spargo, John Webster, *Virgil the Necromancer: Studies in Virgilian Legends* (Whitefish:Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 136-37.

embrace her as she approached the statue. When this happened, the onlookers discounted it as the behavior of a madman. However, when it came time to answer, the woman could truthfully swear that she had been embraced by none but her husband and the fool."[42] The moral of this tale is that the wisdom and cleverness of men will never outwit the cunning of women. Like the tale of Phyllis and Aristotle in which the woman shamelessly outwits the man, this story probably has its roots in an Indian folktale.

This subject is quite rare and again points to van Leyden's wish to depict images that are unique to him. The artist uses the shallow space and posed figures of tableau vivant again in this scene. He creates the impression of shallow space using the crowd of onlookers as a wall that pushes the figures of the emperor, his wife, the fool and Virgil into the foreground. All of the main characters appear old and unattractive, and Virgil himself is depicted with saggy jowls standing next to the emperor. The crowd is made up of strange hollow-eyed people perhaps due to some difficulty in carving this particular design. The middle-ground is obscured by the crush of people while the background can only be seen over the tops of the crowd's heads. Simple lines give the effect of atmospheric perspective and distant mountains.

The idea that Virgil was a magician or had magic powers is not connected at all with the idea of witches and the devil. Many classical figures were attributed strange powers to complement their exotic origins and emphasize their pagan beliefs. Virgil's truth statue is so lifelike that it appears in this print as a living lion, and yet it is fooled by a simple trick of an old woman. Perhaps this is a statement that reflects the illegitimacy

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[42] Jacobowitz, Ellen S. and Stephanie Loeb Stepanek, *The Prints of Lucas van Leyden and His Contemporaries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 121.

of his pagan beliefs, but at its core this is another story in which a wise man is made a fool. Interestingly, in this scene the manipulative woman is represented on a lower physical plane than the men she fools. Perhaps this serves as a warning that all is never as it seems. This is punctuated by the capering antics of the Fool, whose expression seems forced (as it should). The company of a fool for a seductive woman echoes the much earlier *Power of Women* scene by the Master ES.

III. The Small Weibermacht Series of Lucas van Leyden

The later Small Weibermacht series was obviously intended to encourage collection, binding, or wall display. After the first printing of the small series a second was created with ornamental frames that helped to bind the series together cohesively. Logically, it seems that van Leyden reasoned that the unity of the series would be helped by keeping all of the depicted subjects to scenes from the Old Testament. The classical stories of Aristotle and Virgil were dropped and replaced with equally unusual stories from the Old Testament such as *Jael Killing Sisera* and *Jezebel Promising Naboth's Vineyard to King Ahab*. Each woman is placed on a higher plane than her male victim and all the scenes are presented from the same angle and have a continuous narrative. Van Leyden seems to have decided to create a series meant deliberately for collection. Once all of the prints were collected, especially the second printing with the ornamental borders, they could be framed and displayed together like a frieze.[43] The scenes in the Small Series that correspond to those in the Large Series exhibit much of the same iconography and detail, though the compositions have been largely simplified and made to appear more harmonious as a result of the reduction in size of the image. As part of the decorative border, there is a paragraph of text that accompanies each image, presumably helping to convey the moral meaning (according to Jacobowitz and Stepanek the passages do not seem to have been chosen with particular regard to the image, suggesting that they were picked by someone other than van Leyden himself, the publisher

[43] Ibid. 164

perhaps).[44] At the top of each border is a different shield and serpent. The serpent motif is related to the serpent in the first print, *The Fall of Man* and connects each sinful woman to the mother of all sinful women, Eve.

Adam and Eve

Fig. 18 Lucas van Leyden, *The 'Small' Power of Women Series – Adam and Eve* (1516), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

The Small Fall of Man print is similar to the Large print. A tree bisects the composition and Adam and Eve stand around it. Eve stands and Adam sits indicating Eve's higher authority. The continued narrative can be seen in the background as Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden. This print seems directly related to the earlier Large Fall of Man, while the figures themselves exhibit more sophisticated anatomy and shading. It is apparent that Van Leyden's skill has greatly improved with the second small Weibermacht series.

[44] Ibid. 166

Jael and Sisera

Fig. 19 Lucas van Leyden, *The 'Small' Power of Women Series – Jael Killing Sisera* (1516), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

The story of Jael and Sisera is perhaps the most violent of all the subjects in any of van Leyden's Weibermachts even when compared to the print of Herod and Herodias. The story of Jael and Sisera comes from the *Book of Judges* in the Hebrew bible which was included in the *Latin Vulgate Bible*. In it the prophetess Deborah is told by God that a woman would be the one to kill the leader of the Canaanite army and help deliver Israel from the control of King Jabin. After the defeat of the Canaanites their leader Sisera flees the field. He reaches the settlement of Heber and is welcomed as a guest by Jael. She recognizes him but does not let him know. Jael receives him paying attention to all details of the Jewish protocol of hospitality, given food and drink and offered a place to rest. However, when he falls asleep, Jael drives a spike through Sisera's head. In fact, the stealthy Jael used a mallet with such strength that she drove the tent peg through Sisera's temple and into the ground below. A story of so much violence at the hands of a woman was just the type of story that the printmakers of the North loved. It afforded them every

opportunity for a scene to terrify men and to depict erotic violence. Deborah's prophecy is considered one of the oldest parts of the Bible.

Warnings to beware the hospitality of women seem have quite a long history. The story of Sisera's death at the hands of Jael has been described as a reverse-rape. This is understandable when reading part of Deborah's song recorded in Judges that describes Sisera's death.

> *He asked for water-milk she gave,*
> *in a princely bowl she offered him cream.*
> *She reached out her hand to the tent peg,*
> *her right hand to the workman's hammer;*
> *She hammered Sisera,*
> *she smashed his head,*
> *she pierced and struck through his mouth.*
> *Between her legs*
> *he bent over, he fell, he lay.*
> *Between her legs*
> *he bent over, he fell.*
> *Where he bent over, there he fell, Ravaged.*[45]

In a way the song goes hand in hand with the idea of the World Turned Upside Down. Sisera's world has come undone. He dies not like a commander of an army, which he was; but, sleeping in the lap of an unknown woman, he dies *like a woman*. The repetition of "between her legs" leaves little doubt of the phallic allusion of the tent peg, but what, exactly, was Jael's motivation for such revenge? As Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn observe "The political and gender-related norms that motivate her action are…conveniently overlooked. No mention of her husband's allegiance. No mention of the Israelites themselves threatening to make her a victim of violence. Conveniently, the song loses sight of the fact that Jael is not Israelite, that she is not fighting the oppression

[45] Judg. 5:23-27

of Jabin king of Hazor, that she probably couldn't care less about Yaweh and his people, she must act for herself."[46] In the Weibermacht, the lesson is to not trust a woman no matter how hospitable she is. The idea that Jael has no immediate reason for murdering Sisera in his sleep, other than in defense of an unspecified or unmentioned threat of rape, provides an added level of violence to the image. Sisera got what he deserved for deserting the battlefield but in the end he was murdered by a woman of whom he was a guest. Perhaps if Jael were defending herself or if he were on a mission like Judith, then the violent act would not seem as terrifying to the viewer. As it is, the viewer would be hard-pressed to find the humor in the scene.

Van Leyden chose a heavy topic. Fewell and Gunn point out that Jael's reverse-rape is also, in effect, a reverse birth. "Destroyed by a woman whom he could have easily overpowered, he falls between her legs, stillborn."[47] Jael then also becomes a twisted mother-figure, who cares for Sisera and gives him nourishment, while killing him and letting his bleeding body fall between her legs to her feet, nothing so much as an aborted child.

Jael is now a terrifying figure. In his woodcut Lucas van Leyden depicts her as a woman who coldly goes about her business. He again uses continuous narrative in this image, depicting three scenes as one. First, in the background, viewers find Jael giving Sisera refreshment while her fashionable clothing shows off her alluring figure. Second, in the midground the seductive Jael greets the Israelites, and third in the foreground Jael

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[46] Fewell, Donna Nolan and David M. Gunn, "Controlling Perspectives: Women, Men, and the Authority of Violence in Judges 4 and 5," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* Vol. 58, No. 3 (Autumn 1990):404.
[47] Ibid.

is brutally driving a spike into the sleeping Sisera's temple.[48] "In a later edition of the print, a quotation deriving from Ecclesiastes didactically condemns Jael's actions: "Nothing exceeds the malice of a woman".[49] This comment repudiates any notion of Jael's virtue or divine sanction."[50]

Samson and Delilah

Fig. 20 Lucas van Leyden, *The 'Small' Power of Women Series – Samson and Delilah* (1516), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

This Small series depiction of Samson and Delilah is quite similar to the earlier Large series version. Samson seems less child-like here and more alert, his weapons are slightly changed, but still discarded in the foreground. Delilah is shearing Samons' hair more aggressively, but they occupy a similar grotto-like area under a tree with the continued narrative of Samson's capture seen in the background.

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[48] Bal, Mieke, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 113.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.

Solomon’s Idolatry

Fig. 21 Lucas van Leyden, *The ‘Small’ Power of Women Series – Solomon’s Idolatry* (1516), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

This composition is much more dynamic than the static Large series, Solomon’s Idolatry. Instead of stiffly kneeling and standing figures, Solomon kneels gracefully at the base of a large idol surrounded by putty figures that serve as iconography of seduction. Solomon’s wife directs Solomon in his worship of the idol while two figures in the middle-ground watch and criticize the proceedings. The public humiliation of Solomon, who is easily swayed by his wife, is still important in this version, though the shading and receding composition is more effective, as is the much more dramatically rendered idol itself.

Jezebel Promising Naboth's Vineyard to King Ahab

Fig. 22 Lucas van Leyden, *The 'Small' Power of Women Series – Jezebel Promising Naboth's Vineyard to King Ahab* (1516), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

The story of Jezebel and Naboth is out of the ordinary. One day upon hearing that her husband, King Ahab, was "despondent," Jezebel told him not to worry and to look forward to the day that she gave him a new garden, one of the greatest gardens in the kingdom. This garden happen to belong to a man named Naboth who refused to sell this land to the queen. Jezebel used the King's seal and forged letters to officials in the kingdom, ordering them to denounce Naboth as a blasphemer at the next feast. Once they did, Jewish law held that a blasphemer must be stoned to death. After Naboth's death Jezebel took his garden and presented it to the King as his own. The story is unusual because the King did not seem to be tricked at all by his wife, he seemed complacent to her plan to kill an innocent man in order to take his property. The implication is that King Ahab was complicit in the crime his wife committed.

The image that van Leyden created to go with the story shows Queen Jezebel tending to a sick King Ahab, while out the window and door the accusation and stoning of Naboth is depicted. The Queen appears crone-like, while King Ahab is perhaps

absolved of the depicted sin by being bedridden and unable to stop Jezebel from going through with her plan. Jezebel stands central in the composition with the bedridden king balancing the background scenes seen on the left.

Herod and Herodias

Fig. 23 Lucas van Leyden, *The 'Small' Power of Women Series – Herod and Herodias* (1516), woodcut. Reproduced under public domain.

In this particular scene of Herod and Herodias the table and wall are retained, though the figures in the space have been reduced to three: Herod, Herodias and Salome holding the head of John the Baptist on a platter. The beheading of John the Baptist is depicted out the window in the background. Salome herself stands with her back arched and pelvis out, but she no longer retains the graceful forward movement that echoes her erotic dancing. Neither does Herodias hold the knife with which she planned to mutilate the head of John the Baptist, though she does still place her hand on Herod's arm and speak to him. Herodias also sits at the head of the table a more direct symbol of her control over her husband.

IV. Conclusion:

Lucas van Leyden's Large and Small Weibermacht series have proven to be unique takes on the Weibermacht theme. Van Leyden uses composition and unusual subjects to differentiate his work from that of other artists handling the same theme while also creating competitive, collectable prints that help him compete against Albrecht Dürer on the open market. Van Leyden's ability to play not only with humor but with malevolence and morality all in one print point to the versatility of the Weibermacht as a theme, suggesting that the main reason for the artist's interest in the theme was the ability to depict a range of ideas that were topical and popular among potential collectors.

The Weibermacht gained popularity due to the growing interest in the role of women as a result of the Reformation, though the roots of this theme actually go back to the decorative arts of the Middle Ages that depict the battle between the sexes. However, with the changes brought about by the Reformation such as women winning more independent control of their property, gaining access to humanist education, and becoming more prominent in everyday society, the role of women began to change, causing tension within the misogynistic society of the sixteenth century. As a result of this tension, prominent writers such as Erasmus addressed the new role of women as wife and mother, echoing the teachings of the Church and encouraging women to continue their domestic duties. Often these writers taught traditional modes of behavior by drawing on the examples of prominent women in the Old Testament. These Old Testament women in turn prefigured the Virgin Mary, who represented the ultimate maternal figure, devoted entirely to her role as Mother of Christ.

However, in mining the Old Testament for appropriate women of virtue one uncovers problematic stories of women who are not precursors to the Virgin--stories with a recurring theme of deception and female-on-male violence. Yet some of these Old Testament women are also seen as examples of virtue. These tales that were connected by one common denominator: that a man can be outsmarted or embarrassed by a seemingly inferior woman, truly inspired the Weibermacht as a theme. Overarching, this involved the male protagonist falling victim to love and/or lust—a trope which resonated all the way back to the Genesis story of Adam and Eve. "The entire incident could be portrayed as either a mild, humorous satire on the war between the sexes or as a strong indictment against all involvement with women."[51] During the Reformation all women were the heirs of Eve, they shared in her punishment and her faults and in so doing were inherently sinful, seeking to share their sinful nature with men. But in this warning there is humor. It is humorous that men will invariably fall victim to the manipulations of women no matter how preposterous the situation, like in the story of Phyllis and Aristotle in which the wisest of all men allows himself to be ridden around like a beast.

Another example of the tensions surrounding the evolving role of women in the Reformation is the popularity of Witch-related media. Various writings and prints, such as those by Hans Baldung Grien, satirized the idea of a secret community of women that were granted power by the Devil. Artists capitalized on the many circulating ideas about their appearance and various practices and they took advantage of the subject to sell prints by depicting grotesque, funny and often erotic scenes of women. The popularity of

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[51] Jacobowitz, Ellen S. and Stephanie Loeb Stepanek, *The Prints of Lucas van Leyden and His Contemporaries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 102.

witch imagery can also help to explain why the Weibermacht as a theme was such a success for van Leyden as so much of it involved extremely violent scenes. The theme of cannibalistic devil worshipping witches also enjoyed popularity pointing to a market that embraced not only the grotesque and obscene, but also erotically charged images of female violence.

Eventually, it was van Leyden who solidified the theme of the Weibermacht. Before van Leyden's series the *Power of Women* theme involved any scene the artist considered an inversion of male/female power, but van Leyden limited himself at first to stories from the Old Testament and more humorous classical stories. Noticing the interest in the Weibermacht theme, van Leyden created series to encourage collecting. In addition to working with Old Testament narratives, van Leyden also chose strange and lesser known tales in order to differentiate himself from other artists, to show his greater creativity, and also to help sell prints based on their unique subjects. By adapting a traditional theme to reflect issues of his day and by depicting this adapted theme in a unique way, Lucas van Leyden created two series of prints that helped him compete in the market against the extremely successful works of Albrecht Dürer. At the same time van Leyden also solidified a theme that would endure and allow future viewers to ponder the meanings of these satirical, violent, humorous and sexually-charged images and how they fit into the world market of the sixteenth century. It has been a long-held tradition in European history that many of men's problems, and by extension, the problems of the world, can be blamed on the charm and wiles of women.[52] Using his own ingenuity, skill, and talents to create works of art that reflected certain societal concerns and interests of

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[52] Ibid.

his day and taking advantage of the new, evolving print market, Lucas van Leyden carved a niche for himself among the best of sixteenth century artists.

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