

most wisely she spoke to everything, with much understanding producing sundry places of the holy Scriptures. Being much troubled for her sins and buffeted by the temptations of Satan, she

said that she had yet much assurance because that "Come unto me," saith the Lord, "all you that are weary and heavy laden, and I will refresh you."

## Two Sixteenth-Century Images of Women



### 7 ▼ Anton Woensam, *ALLEGORY OF A WISE WOMAN*; Erhard Schön, *NO MORE PRECIOUS TREASURE IS ON THE EARTH THAN A GENTLE WIFE WHO LONGS FOR HONOR*

Hundreds of thousands of sixteenth-century Europeans were introduced to the new technology of printing, not through books but through the broadsheet. Printed on a single sheet and usually consisting of a woodcut illustration and a brief text, these inexpensive publications were designed for the mass market. As seen earlier in the chapter, such broadsheets were used as instruments of propaganda in the Reformation, especially by Protestants. But broadsheets were not limited to religious issues. They were also instruments of satire, social commentary, and moral instruction, and a way of communicating news about murders, witchcraft trials, astronomical portents, monsters, strange births, and countless other events and phenomena.

The following broadsheets, both produced in Germany, address the issue of female virtue and relations between husbands and wives. The first is by Anton Woensam (ca. 1500–1541), a Catholic painter and woodblock carver from Cologne, whose *Allegory of a Wise Woman* appeared in 1525. The second is the work of Erhard Schön (ca. 1491–1550), a Protestant from Nuremberg, who produced hundreds of woodcuts for book illustrations and broadsheets. His woodcut, *No More Precious Treasure Is on the Earth Than a Gentle Wife Who Longs for Honor*, appeared in 1531. In neither case is the author of the text known.

Each of these woodcuts is simple and straightforward. The "wise woman" in Woensam's woodcut explains in the text the significance of her various attributes and of the objects she is holding or are attached to her. In Schön's woodcut one sees from left to right the husband (pulling a cart that is carrying a laundry tub, probably filled with diapers), the wife, a young man, his sweetheart, an old woman wearing a fool's cap, and finally an old man. In the text, they present their views on marriage.

#### QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. What is the meaning of the various objects (the lock, key, mirror, bird, snakes, pillow, vessel) included in Woensam's woodcut?

2. How do the horse's hooves in Woensam's work shed light on the woodcut's portrayal of women?
3. What meaning do you see in the posture, dress, and facial expression of the woman in Woensam's print?
4. What are the most important qualities of a "wise woman" according to Woensam?
5. What qualities of his wife does the husband in Schön's woodcut (p. 33) most bitterly complain about?
6. What is the significance of the britches, purse, and sword that the wife holds in Schön's print?
7. According to Schön, how does the wife justify her actions and behavior? How do her justifications compare to the expectations about marriage set forth by the young girl?
8. Compare and contrast the arguments for and against marriage presented by the old man and the female fool in Schön's print. To what extent do the comments of the old man confirm the fears about marriage expressed by the young man?
9. Taking the two woodcuts together, describe all they say about sixteenth-century views of women and men and their roles in society.

#### ALLEGORY OF A WISE WOMAN

Contemplate this figure which signifies a wise woman;  
a woman who behaves like her protects her honor well.

##### Eyes

I see as keenly as a hawk  
And discern the pious ones from the scoundrels.  
I guard myself both day and night  
From one who plots against my honor.

##### Ears

I will not be discouraged  
From opening my ears  
So that they can hear God's word.  
Which keeps the pious on their guard.

##### Right Hand

Pride I will despise  
And behold myself in the mirror of Christ,  
Through whom God has redeemed us.

##### Mouth

I wear a lock of gold upon my lips  
All hours of the day and night  
So that they say no harmful words  
Or wound another's honor.

##### Breast

Also I keep a steady heart  
Similar to what a turtledove does.  
And to the one who will be my husband  
I will be true no matter what his faults.

##### Waist

With serpents I gird my body.  
This an upright woman should do  
Who wants to protect herself from  
Poisonous scandal, evil love and shameful play.

##### Left Hand

I shall gladly serve the poor  
And thereby earn eternal life.  
For I cannot find anything else  
To do differently to bring this about.

##### Feet

On horses' hoofs shall I go about  
So I can stand firm in honor.  
On this I will not fall into sin  
Which is sweet, but turns as bitter as gall.

Any woman who has such morals  
Will never damage her honor  
And surely merit from God  
An eternal kingdom in heaven.

Dieſe figur ſol man an ſchawen. Die bedewet ein weyle ſtrawen.



Wolffgang Weich Schenckh von

Anton Woensam, Allegory of a Wise Woman

NO MORE PRECIOUS TREASURE

*The Wretched Idol (the Husband)*

Oh woe, oh woe to me, wretched fool,  
With what difficulty I pull this cart  
To which point marriage has brought me.  
I wish I had never thought of it!  
A shrewish scold has come into my house

and has taken my sword, pants and purse.  
Night and day I have no peace  
And no good word from her.  
My fidelity does not please her;  
My words provoke hostility from her.  
Thus is the fate of many a man  
Who has, knows and can do nothing,  
And yet in time must have a wife.

*The Wife Speaks*  
Hey, beloved mate, but is this really true?  
Be quiet! Or I will pull you by the hair.  
If you want a nice and gentle wife  
Who will always be subservient to you  
Then stay at home in your own house  
And stop your carousing.  
Naked I go running around to peddle things,  
Suffering from hunger and quaffing water.  
It's difficult for a nice young wife  
To maintain her wifely honor.  
If you won't work to support me,  
Then you have to wash, spin and pull the cart  
And must let your back be bared.

*The Journeyman*  
What do you say about this, young lady?  
Would you like to be like her  
And yourself hold sword, pants, purse and au-  
thority?  
With words bite, rasp and cut?

That I should and would never suffer.  
Should I fight and brawl with you,  
Then perhaps I would end up  
Pulling a cart like this poor man,  
Who has lost all joy and pleasure.  
Should I waste my life of freedom  
With spinning, washing, cooking and carting?  
I would rather swear off from taking up mar-  
riage.

*The Girl*  
Boy, believe me on my honor.  
I don't wish for such power.  
If you want to fight over rank,  
Then you will be the man in all things.  
What a wife deserves,  
To love, to experience hardship together and  
honor,  
I will demand nothing besides this.  
You should have no doubt about it.  
I will devote my life to serving you



Erhard Schön, No More Precious Treasure Is on the Earth Than a Gentle Wife Who Longs for Honor

And love you in constant friendship.  
And you won't be scolded by a single word.

*The Woman Fool*

Watch yourself, young man.  
I, a poor fool speak the truth.  
Much good is said about marriage  
But it means more correctly "Woe."  
You must suffer 'til you die  
Much anxiety, uncertainty, worry and want.  
From this no married person is spared.  
Now when you see a pretty girl,  
She will gladly do what you want  
For a bottle of wine.  
Afterwards you can let her go  
And take on another.  
A wife you have forever.

*The Wise Man*

Young man I will teach you better.  
Do not listen to this woman fool.  
Beware of the tricks of whores,  
Who are always there to deceive you.  
Take a young lady into marriage.  
God will guide your lives.  
Stay with her in love and pain  
And always be patient.  
If you experience aggravation,  
Consider it to be God's will.  
Provide for your wife by the sweat of your brow,  
As God commands in the Book of Genesis.  
Patience and suffering make a door  
Through which we arrive at that place  
Where the angels have their home.

## Midwives and Their Duties



### 8 ▼ *NUREMBERG ORDINANCES CONCERNING MIDWIVES, 1522, 1579*

Among the hundreds of occupations of early modern European women, only one was considered absolutely essential to the well-being of society. This was the woman's role as midwife. Although male apothecaries, barber-surgeons, and university-trained physicians in the early modern period had worked hard and successfully to exclude women from most health-related careers, they were more than happy to leave the physically and emotionally demanding job of providing prenatal care and delivering babies to female midwives and their assistants. Although physicians and barber-surgeons might be called upon to perform caesarean sections or attend a woman dying in childbirth, what we call today the fields of gynecology and obstetrics were exclusive female specialties.

So essential were midwives that municipal governments in many parts of Europe took steps to ensure the quality of obstetrical care by regulating the apprenticeship, recruitment, licensing, and practices of midwives. In Germany many cities also appointed a special board to oversee the activities of midwives and adjudicate disputes. Usually drawn from upper-class families, board members were known as "honorable women," or *Ehrbare Frauen*. City governments also provided modest stipends for midwives (two to eight *gulden* a year, compared to ten to twenty-five *gulden* paid to barber-surgeons), which could be augmented by

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