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The Many Wives of Adam Kraft

*Early modern workshop wives in legal documents,
art-historical scholarship and historical fiction*

"... women had always been involved in the production of art, but our culture would not admit it."
Griselda Pollock¹

The following essay is an expanded version of a paper given in a session organized by Diane Wolfthal for the conference "The Roles of Women in the Middle Ages: A Reassessment" organized by Rosemarie Morewedge at the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies at Binghamton University in 1992. The late Alfred Michler contributed much through his generous help and advice. I wish to thank Jennifer Janicki for her research assistance, Winberta Yao for her expert bibliographic recommendations and the Women's Studies Program of Arizona State University for support in the form of a mini grant. I am also indebted to Christine Göttler for her stimulating suggestions, to Julie Codell for her helpful theoretical insights and to Jane Carroll and Alison Stewart for their criticism of an early draft. The article draws on material from two larger projects currently in progress: a book on the reception history of Adam Kraft as well as a study on "Agnes Frey Dürer: the Roles of Artists' Wives and Widows in History and Historiography".

¹ Pollock, Griselda, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, London/New York 1988, p. 23.

One of the important ways in which late-medieval and early-modern women participated in the production of art was in the capacity of workshop wives. Nonetheless, contemporary and later cultures, both academic and popular, went to great lengths to deny or abrogate the contributions of artists' wives. In fact, in spite of the increased consciousness of the roles of women and attention to issues of gender in recent years, the historical place and status of the workshop wife has received only very scant scholarly notice and no systematic examination. This article's discussions spring from the case of Adam Kraft's sculpture workshop, which flourished in Nuremberg at the turn of the sixteenth century and which became the subject of historical fiction during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The essay will first explore the sparse surviving archival sources — principally legal documents — that mention his wives. How many wives Adam Kraft had, the names of the women, and the dates of the marriages all remain unclear. Possibly he was married three times: first to Margreth, then to Magdalena, and last to Barbara. To complement and contextualize the isolated fragments and mere snippets of information I will pull in examples of contemporary artists' wives about whom we are better informed on particular issues. Further I will use the analyses of demographic structure, political participation, legal status, economic potential, and social standing of wives of non-artist craftsmen that have been provided by historians, particularly Martha Howell, Merry Wiesner, Natalie Zemon Davis, Gertrud Schmidt, Edith Ennen, Margret Wensky, and Claudia Opitz. It is necessary to draw on these studies since far more attention has been focused on women in craft workshops than on those in art workshops. It must be stressed from the outset that practices within artists' workshops probably varied greatly even within any given region, city, or guild. My study will also probe contradictions in contemporary attitudes towards workshop wives and widows. Lastly it will call attention to the manner in which scholars of art history have dismissed workshop wives, and it will point



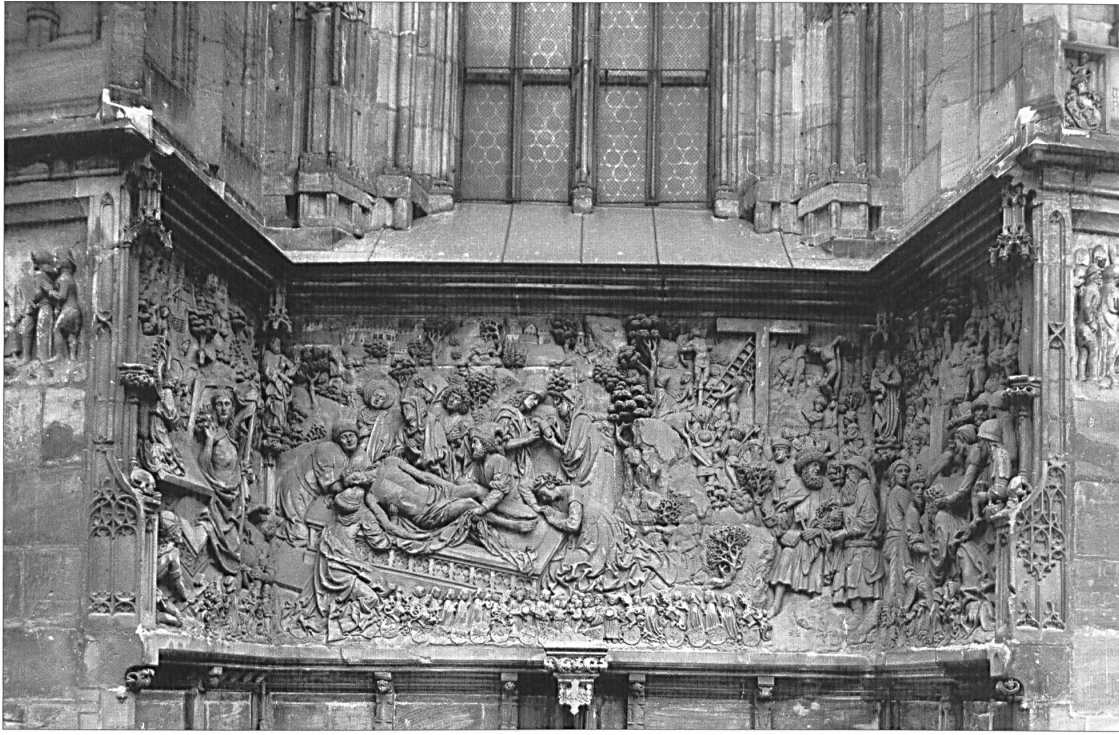


Fig. 1: House and workshop of Albrecht Dürer and Agnes Frey Dürer, Nuremberg.

Fig. 2: Adam Kraft, Schreyer-Landauer Epitaph, St. Sebaldus, Nuremberg, 1492.

2 Wiesner 1986; Howell 1986, pp. 27–46. Sculpture and painting belonged to the so-called “free” arts, which were not allowed to establish self-governing ordinances in Nuremberg but were regulated by the city council. See: Mummenhoff, Ernst, *Freie Kunst und Handwerk in Nürnberg*, in: *Korrespondenzblatt des Gesamtvereins der deutschen Geschichts- und Altertumsvereine* 3, 1906, cols. 105–120. The ordinance of the Nuremberg parchment makers, published in the *Handwerksrechtsbuch* of 1629 records the following: “Any son of a master must have reached his twenty-second year and be legally and honorably married, before he may assume the right of the master.” See: Jegel, August, *Alt-Nürnberger Handwerksrecht und seine Beziehungen zu anderen*, Neustadt a. d. Aisch 1965, p. 503. I wish to thank Ulrich Merkl for calling this source to my attention.

3 Staatsarchiv Nuremberg, *Schreyer'sche Chronik- und Copialbücher B*, fol. 124r–125r; Gümbel, Albert, *Einige neue Notizen über das Adam Kraft'sche Schreyergrab*, in: *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, vol. 25 (1992), pp. 360–370, esp. 364; Schleif, Corine, *Nicodemus and Sculptors: Self-Reflexivity in Works by Adam Kraft and Tilman Riemenschneider*, in: *Art Bulletin*, vol. 75, 1993, pp. 599–626, esp. 599–603.

4 Huth, Hans, *Künstler und Werkstatt der Spätgotik* (Augsburg 1923), reprint: Darmstadt 1981, pp. 11–12.

up the mythic and stereotypic roles that writers of historical novels and short stories assigned to Adam Kraft's wives thereby fashioning *new* wives that were in keeping with gender expectations of their own day.

63

Even in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Nuremberg where guilds were strictly outlawed, for a man to call himself “master” there had to be a “Mrs”. For the establishment of a workshop the presence of a wife was a “*conditio sine qua non*”. She assured that someone was available to oversee the business, which included dealings with journeymen and apprentices, as well as with patrons and suppliers of materials. Such enterprises were family economies.² At the time of their marriage, a master and his wife usually moved into their own home which also functioned as workshop, place of business, and, when necessary, warehouse (fig. 1). Apprentices commonly slept and ate in the same dwelling. In Nuremberg, the business of art was, like so much else, regulated by customary law rather than by formal statute. Nonetheless the roles of the workshop wife were matters of strict societal control, exceeding mere social norms and certainly going beyond individual lifestyle predilections.

In 1492, when Adam Kraft finished his first commission, an elaborate epitaph on the church of St. Sebald (fig. 2), the patrons Sebald Schreyer and Matthäus Landauer awarded him forty gilders in addition to the 160 he had been promised in the contract, and his wife was given four gilders “to her honor” (*zu[r] E[h]lung*).³ Gratuities served as an incentive to entice artists and their workshops to fulfill contracts conscientiously, skillfully and to the liking of their patrons; these “tips” were not infrequently bestowed on the workshop wives.⁴ In the contemporary Nuremberg

The Many Wives of Adam Kraft

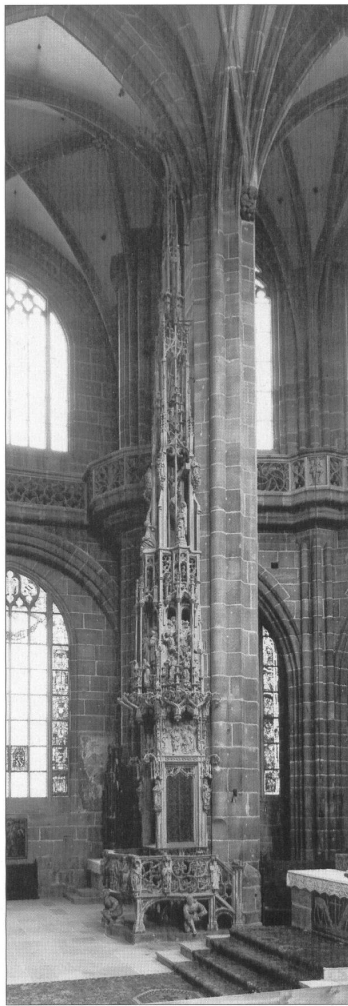


Fig. 3: Adam Kraft, Eucharistic Tabernacle, St. Lorenz, Nuremberg, 1496.

5 Panofsky, Erwin, *Albrecht Dürer*, Princeton 1943, p. 232.

6 Rupprich, Hans, ed., *Dürer: Schriftlicher Nachlass*, Berlin 1956, vol. I, p. 73; Hutchison 1990, p. 104.

7 Hutchison 1990, p. 83.

8 Wensky, Margret, *Die Stellung der Frau in der stadtkölnischen Wirtschaft im Spätmittelalter*, Cologne/Vienna 1980 (Quellen und Darstellungen zur hanseatischen Geschichte, N. S. vol. 26), p. 319.

9 Campbell 1976, p. 195.

10 Stadtarchiv Nuremberg, B 14/I, vol. 8, fol. 249r–249v.

11 Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nuremberg, Imhoff-Archiv, Fasc. 28, no. I, fol. 79r.

12 Clemen, Paul, *Notizen*, in: *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, vol. 15, 1892, pp. 245–248; Huth 1923 (as in note 4), p. 139. The *elle* was a linear measure derived from the length of the forearm.

13 Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nuremberg, Imhoff-Archiv, Fasc. 36, no. 2a, fol. 16r; Schleif 1990, p. 247.

artist workshop of Albrecht Dürer, his wife Agnes Frey repeatedly received gifts and gratuities. In fact, after her husband had completed the famous panels with the “Four Apostles”, even the parsimonious Nuremberg City Council gave her twelve gilders — an additional hundred went to Albrecht and two to their servant.⁵ Her gratuity equaled about a third of the annual income of a priest holding a prebend at a side altar. It is telling that she not only expected but solicited a gratuity from the Frankfurt merchant and patron Jacob Heller, which she relayed through a letter written by her husband. The gratitude she expressed through a subsequent letter indicates that he honored her request.⁶ It appears that she was personally known to clients and that they held her in high esteem. Quite possibly the wife was included when her role had placed her in direct contact with the patrons. We know that Agnes Frey, together with Albrecht Dürer’s mother Barbara, sold prints that the workshop produced, an enterprise that involved frequent business trips especially to fairs in Frankfurt.⁷ In her study on the position of women in late medieval Cologne, Margret Wensky demonstrated that in trades in which production was dominated by men, for example the manufacture of metal goods, workshop wives assumed merchandising responsibilities.⁸ Artists’ shops probably often ascribed to this division of labor. Lorne Campbell has observed that in the southern Netherlands wives are sometimes cited in their husbands’ contracts and that they may have acted as agents for the workshop.⁹

A second archival source mentioning a wife of Adam Kraft, this one a legal document dating from 1493, records that “Margreth, Adam Kraffts eliche wirttin” (wife in marriage) acknowledges that she has received all of the inheritance due to her from her deceased father and surviving mother.¹⁰ It is apparent from the other names mentioned in the document that Margreth was also from a middle-class merchant or craftsman family. Quite likely Adam Kraft had been married to Margreth when he fashioned the Schreyer-Landauer Epitaph and was still married to her in 1493, when he assumed his second major commission, the Eucharistic Tabernacle for St. Lorenz (fig. 3–5). Here too, after the monument was completed and installed, the donor Hans IV Imhoff showed his pleasure by giving Adam Kraft an extra seventy gilders and his wife a coat that cost six gilders, two shillings and six heller.¹¹ Other examples of gifts of textiles and clothing are recorded. For example, in 1533, the sculptor Wilhelm von Roermond received ten *ellen* cloth for himself and his wife, after carving figures for the high altar of St. Viktor in Xanten.¹² The above mentioned “tip” that Agnes Frey received from Jacob Heller must have likewise been some piece of apparel, since Dürer told Heller she would wear it in his honor. A coat was clearly an expensive present. The cost of that received by Frau Kraft equaled two months’ income for the average Nuremberg priest. Here as well, it may be surmised that Margreth Kraft had extensive contact with the patron and his family during the three years the project was under construction, during which time the workshop received payment in installments.

Already in 1500 the sponsoring Imhoff family contracted the Kraft workshop to undertake the first major maintenance on the tabernacle. A surviving Imhoff account book lists the costs for scaffolding, as well as wages for Adam Kraft and his two journeymen, Christoph and Ulrich, and for Master Adam’s housewife “a tip for pulverizing stone” (*ein trinck gelt fur stain mel zu klopfen*).¹³ Undoubtedly it was



Fig. 4: Adam Kraft, Self-Portrait at base of Eucharistic Tabernacle, St. Lorenz, Nuremberg.



Fig. 5: Member of Kraft Workshop, Self-Portrait at base of Eucharistic Tabernacle, St. Lorenz, Nuremberg.

14 Schmidt 1950, esp. pp. 38ff.; also Wiesner 1986, p. 165.

15 Davis, Natalie Zemon, *Women in the Crafts in Sixteenth-Century Lyon*, in: Barbara Hanawalt, ed., *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, Bloomington 1986, pp. 167–197.

16 Schmidt 1950, p. 37.

17 Uitz, Erika, *Die Frau in der mittelalterlichen Stadt*, 2nd ed., Freiburg 1992, pp. 83–87 (English translation: *The Legend of Good Women: Medieval Women in Towns and Cities*, New York 1988).

18 Wolthall, Diane, *Agnes van den Bosche, Early Netherlandish Painter*, in: *Woman's Art Journal*, Spring/Summer, 1985, pp. 8–11. In spite of these examples to the contrary, some interpreters have viewed women's prohibition for certain activities as limiting them to the *leichtere Hilfsarbeiten* (lighter ancillary tasks). See: Stahlschmidt, Rainer, *Die Geschichte des eisenverarbeitenden Gewerbes in Nürnberg von den I. Nachrichten im 12.–13. Jahrhundert bis 1630*, Nuremberg 1971, pp. 182–184.

19 Lochner 1875, p. 10.

20 Kalden, Iris, *Anmerkungen zur Werkstatt Tilman Riemenschneiders in Würzburg*, in: *Anzeiger des Germanischen Nationalmuseums Nürnberg*, 1991, pp. 135–143.

used in mortar for patching or mending seams between stone segments or to make a wash that was painted over the entire surface. This record substantiates the participation of the artist's wife in a "hands-on" workshop activity. It was a simple preliminary task presumably requiring no skill. In her study of women's roles in the early craft workshops in Nuremberg, Gertrud Schmidt observed that women were often given menial jobs.¹⁴ Studies of other cities have yielded similar findings.¹⁵ The Imhoff account book does not allow us to calculate Margreth Kraft's remuneration, but since the wages of the master and the two assistants are specified and hers is only called a "tip" (*Trinkgeld*) we can assume that her payment was minimal. Pounding stone into powder was nonetheless strenuous physical labor. Schmidt cites other instances of Nuremberg masters' wives and children involved in hard labor;¹⁶ and Erika Uitz lists numerous examples in her broad study of women in medieval cities.¹⁷ Similarly, Diane Wolthall has pointed out that women engaged in textile painting in the Netherlands often carried out rather coarse work on a large scale — rather than fine and delicate details.¹⁸

Yet another mention of a wife of Adam Kraft is that provided by Johannes Neudörfer in his mid-sixteenth-century collection of Nuremberg artists' biographies. Quoting a previous unnamed source, he wrote that in 1503 Adam Kraft married a second time, this time a widow — Magdalena.¹⁹ It was of course common for artists and other craftsmen to marry widows. Not infrequently young journeymen who wished to become masters married women considerably older who brought into the marriage an already established household, workshop and capital. The first of Tilman Riemenschneider's four wives was a widow twenty years his senior, who had previously been married to a goldsmith. Riemenschneider could thus become a master and immediately assume a well-situated home and shop in Würzburg.²⁰

The Many Wives of Adam Kraft

Fig. 6: Albrecht Dürer, "The Young Fool and the Old Wife", Illustration from Sebastian Brant's "Ship of Fools", 1494.

21 I am indebted to Renate Liebold for several conversations, in which she shared her sociological findings on this topic. A recent exhibition has also explored historical differences in European marriage relationships. See: *Über die Ehe: Von der Sachehe zur Liebesheirat, Eine Literatúrausstellung*, exh. cat. Bibliothek Otto Schäfer, Schweinfurt 1993. For an analysis of marriage in sixteenth-century Augsburg, see: Roper, Lyndal, *The Holy Household*, Oxford 1989, pp. 132–164.

22 Stewart, Alison, *Unequal Lovers: A Study of Unequal Couples in Northern Art*, New York 1977. Such unions are likewise termed ill-matched, ill-assorted, or, in German, "ungleiche Paare" (dissimilar pairs). See also Wiesner-Hanks, Merry, "A learned task and given to men alone": *The Gendering of Tasks in Early Modern German Cities*, in: *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 25, 1995, pp. 89–106, esp. 93ff.

23 The most often quoted twentieth-century English translation has cleansed Brant's text of its scatological references: "Who flays a donkey for its fat, He has no brains beneath his hat, Who weds an old wife just for gain, Makes one grand splurge, then ne're again, And he has very little joy, No children, either girl or boy, And happy, carefree days he lacks, Save when he sees the money sacks..." (Brant, Sebastian, *The Ship of Fools*, Edwin H. Zeydel, trans., New York 1962, 182ff.). See also Stewart 1977 (as in note 22), p. 59. The original reads, "Wer in den Esel schlüfft / umb das Schmaer / Der ist vernunft / vnd wißheit laer / Das er eyn alt wib nimbt zur ee / Eyn gutten tag / vnd keynen me / Er hatt ouch wenig freud dar von / Keyn frucht mag jm dar vsz entston / Vnd hat ouch nyemer gutten tagk / Dann so er sicht den pfening sagk" (Brant, Sebastian, *Das Narrenschiff*, Friedrich Zarncke, ed., Hildesheim 1961, p. 54).

24 Schmidt 1950, pp. 34–36; Krebs, Peter-Per, *Die Stellung der Handwerkerswitwe in der Zunft vom Spätmittelalter bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, Dissertation Universität Regensburg, 1974. It is evident from one of the stipulations in the above cited ordinance of the Nuremberg parchment makers that they made special allowances for someone to become a master and take over an already extant workshop by marrying a widow. See: Jegel 1965 (as in note 2), p. 504.

Indeed, during this period, the politics and economics of marriage were far more transparent within society than they are today, and therefore goals of increased influence and improved finances were undoubtedly more self-consciously pursued by respective partners.²¹ Perhaps it was this collective consciousness that prompted depictions of what Alison Stewart has termed "unequal lovers".²² Around 1500 a large quantity of these prints were produced, often accompanied by texts. They usually show the embrace of a man and a woman who were in many ways unlike. One partner is old, ugly, wealthy, lustful and foolish; the counterpart is young, handsome, greedy, calculating and exploitative. These characteristics appear to be strung together as if in parallel discursive chains, with the age differential linking itself to the other disparities. Although the majority of these prints show an old man and a young woman, a substantial number depict an old woman with a young man, which corresponded to the situation in which an older widow married a younger journeyman, thus making him a master and allowing him to inherit a workshop. One of the harshest of such (re)presentations is that by Sebastian Brant and Albrecht Dürer in the "Ship of Fools", published in 1494 (fig. 6). Both the ribald text and the accompanying unambiguous image address the matter with respect to the would-be position of the young man. Brant's rubric reads in translation: "He who marries for no other reason than for goods has much strife, suffering, dissension and pain." Dürer's woodcut shows a foolish young man raising an ass's tail to expose the anus with his right hand while grabbing an old woman's money bag with his left. The poem beneath the picture begins (in literal translation), "Whoever slips into the ass for the fat is void of all reason and wisdom...".²³ Whether such representations were read as injunctions against situations in which unscrupulous exploitation exceeded the bounds of healthy and productive pragmatism or if they were rather understood as satires of what was common practice would have depended on the perspective of the viewer. Regardless of the interpretation, the prominence of this theme at this time underscores the prevalence of unions between partners of divergent ages, a situation which, at least in some cases, enjoyed the blessing of the larger community.

Nuremberg society appears to have favored the arrangement in which a widow married a journeyman of the same trade as her previous husband. Repeatedly ordinances stipulated that only a subsequent husband from the same craft could continue the workshop. Generally in Nuremberg widows were allowed three years to find a husband and successor before they were forced to give up a workshop; in some cases the time was lengthened to six years.²⁴ Clearly the situation in which the female head of the workshop provided the perpetuating link allowed for the most expedient method of passing along a workshop from one master to the next, with a minimum of disruption through loss of commissions or the necessity of new capital investment. This arrangement also assured the highest promise of success with the least risk in situations in which the market was already saturated – as might be the case with monumental sculpture or painting in a given city. Although perhaps equally efficient, passing a workshop from father to son or son-in-law was possible only in comparatively few cases. Ambitious young journeymen often aspired to acquire established workshops through marriage. The case of Albrecht Dürer's teacher Michael Wolgemut is well known (fig. 7). After being employed in 1470 and 1471

Wer durch keyn ander vrsach me
 Dann durch gûts willen griffst zûr ee
 Der hat vil zanccks / leyd / hader / we /



wibē durch gutz willē

Wer schlüfft inn esel / vmb das schmār
 Der ist vernunfft / vnd wißheyt lār
 Das er eyn alt wiß nymbt zûr ee
 Eyn gûttē tag / vnd keynen me



Fig. 7: Albrecht Dürer, Portrait of his Teacher Michael Wolgemut, 1516, Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nuremberg.

in the workshop of the Munich painter Gabriel Mälesskircher, Wolgemut sued the master's daughter for breach of promise because she had allegedly broken her engagement to him. After losing the litigation he returned to his native Nuremberg, where he married the newly widowed Barbara Pleydenwurff and took over Hans Pleydenwurff's workshop, thus becoming a master in 1473.²⁵

In a source dating from 1506, a third woman's name surfaces as the wife of Adam Kraft. The circumstances are somewhat striking. In a legal affidavit Barbara Keglín acknowledges that she has received the sum of twenty gilders from another Barbara, the married spouse of Master Adam.²⁶ The payment had been required as support for an illegitimate child that Adam Kraft had fathered. Barbara Keglín agreed to raise the child and waived all further claims against Adam Kraft, Barbara Kraft and Barbara Kraft's heirs. The document underscores — not so much the sensitivity of one woman to another woman's plight nor the generosity of one woman toward another — but rather the financial obligations of the family economy and the role of Barbara Kraft in the workshop. Legally the family business had to stand good for the master's liabilities; if Barbara Kraft made payment to Barbara Keglín she had clearly assumed the role of business manager for the workshop.

This was not an unusual division of labor.²⁷ Already in the fourteenth century, Christine de Pizan advised the wives of tradesmen to oversee their husband's financial dealings and thus assume the greater responsibility themselves.²⁸ The sources attesting to this role for an artist's wife outnumber those showing workshop wives involved in menial manual labor. Here too, Agnes Frey provides a parallel example in that she concerned herself with the financial success of the Dürer workshop.²⁹ As already mentioned, Wensky observed that in Cologne workshops in which the

25 Betz, Gerhard, *Der Nürnberger Maler Michael Wolgemut und seine Werkstatt*, Dissertation Universität Freiburg, 1955; Stange, Alfred, *Deutsche Malerei der Gotik* (1958), vol. 9, reprint: Nendeln/Liechtenstein 1969, p. 52.

26 Stadtarchiv Nuremberg, BI4/II, vol. T, fol. 29v; Lochner 1875, commentary, p. 17; Daun, Berthold, *Adam Kraft und die Künstler seiner Zeit*, Berlin 1897, pp. 80–81.

27 Howell 1986, pp. 27–46; Wiesner 1986, pp. 152–157.

28 Labarge, Margaret Wade, *A Small Sound of the Trumpet: Women in Medieval Life*, Boston 1986, pp. 145–146.

29 Hutchison 1990, p. 83.

Fig. 8: Anton Pilgram (attr.), Self-Portrait, probably originally supporting a pulpit, ca. 1490, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.



69

man was involved directly in production, the woman took over responsibilities of marketing and book-keeping – as well as merchandising; and Campbell noticed that Netherlandish workshop wives functioned as agents.³⁰

One obligation that does not seem to have belonged solely to the workshop wife was that of providing for the nutritional needs of the master and other workers. Workshop wives did not – so to speak – make sandwiches and pack lunches for the men who were away on the job. As numerous documents prove, these matters were the purview of the patrons. This practice explains the German term *Zehrgeld* – money for sustenance, i.e. travel allowance. Accounts of payments for both the Schreyer-Landauer Epitaph and the Eucharistic Tabernacle show fairly large amounts spent for food and drink while the works were being installed or maintained. In fact, the already mentioned maintenance record of 1500 includes rather detailed menus: the first evening – wine, beer, and bread; the next morning – soup, eggs in lard, bread, and wine; at noon – a good meal and wine to go with it; and finally that evening – cheese, bread, and wine.³¹ In his self-portrait now in Berlin, Anton Pilgram represented himself in work clothes with a *Brötchen* (hard roll) tucked into his jacket (fig. 8). As the menus in the Imhoff account book indicate, bread was a necessary element in many meals. Perhaps in this somewhat whimsical way, Pilgram wanted to remind patrons of the biblical injunction that “the laborer is worthy of his hire” (Luke 10,7).

³⁰ Wensky 1980 (as in note 8); Lorne Campbell has observed that “wives, who are sometimes cited in their husbands contracts and who occasionally took over the running of the business when their husbands died, may often have acted as agents”. See Campbell 1976, p. 195.

³¹ Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nuremberg, Imhoff-Archiv, Fasc. 36, no. 2a, fol. 16r; Schleif 1990, p. 247.

The last archival sources on Adam Kraft concern the insolvency of the workshop at the end of the master's life and the resultant misfortune of Barbara Kraft. In 1503, Adam Kraft had given Peter Imhoff three gilt goblets and a "pater noster" chain as collateral for a loan of twenty-seven gilders. Later that year, he borrowed smaller sums of three and two gilders. By the year 1505, he had borrowed 310 gilders from Peter Imhoff partially against work that he had been contracted to complete – sculptural decoration for one of the Imhoff residences. By the time Adam Kraft died, at the end of 1508, he had not paid back the money. Even before Adam Kraft was buried, Peter Imhoff's attorney had a lien placed on the Kraft house and workshop. After Barbara Kraft declared that she could not pay the debt, the house became the property of Peter Imhoff and was sold.³² In all probability Barbara Kraft spent her remaining days in poverty.

In many ways these sources substantiate the criticism now being brought up by historians who are revising and qualifying notions associated with the term *Witwenfreiheit* (the freedom of the widow). In some of the literature originating during the so-called "first generation" of women's studies, scholars underscored the emancipation that women experienced after they were no longer controlled by a husband and could enjoy the advantages that inherited property, capital and social status brought with them.³³ Those widows who, because they had the means of production at their disposal, were able to sustain workshops in the absence of husbands, indeed realized a large degree of financial independence.³⁴ Further, widows in successful workshops and lucrative trades had the freedom and right to pick and choose a successor/spouse to their liking. For example, Anna Resch, the widow of the Nuremberg wood block cutter (*Formschneider*) Wolfgang Resch, who died in 1534 or shortly thereafter, married the printer and document illuminator (*Briefmaler*) Hans Wandereisen in 1536, thus enabling the workshop to continue the production of single-leaf prints using Resch's blocks.³⁵ Several examples of widow-run artists' workshops are also known in Nuremberg: Barbara Wolgemut, widow of the painter Valentin, is listed in the Nuremberg tax records for ten years after his death in 1469.³⁶ Likewise, Kunigunde Hergot, widow of Hans Hergot, appears to have continued the Nuremberg print workshop under her own name for eleven years (1527–1538), although records also show that she had married another printer, Georg Wachter.³⁷ Similarly, several sources verify that Kunigunde Glockendon directed that family's illumination workshop for several years, from the time of the death of her husband Georg the Elder in 1514 until her son Albrecht took it over. Yet another record survives showing that Kunigunde Glockendon's widowed daughter-in-law Anna, who had been married to Nikolaus Glockendon, issued a receipt to a costumer in 1534.³⁸ Campbell similarly mentions that wives occasionally took over the running of Netherlandish artists' workshops when the husbands died.³⁹ The widow-run shop, however, may have been limited to certain kinds of artistic endeavors. The Wolgemut workshop may well have continued with repairs and small commissions for decorative objects. The business of making prints could flourish for a time without large numbers of new blocks and plates or major new designs, as could the business of decorating documents and providing simple book illuminations.

In other situations in which an artist's widow did not have a ready and qualified journeyman who was eligible immediately to step into the master's shoes, she

32 Stadtarchiv Nuremberg, B 14/II, vol. S, fol. 64r–64v; B 14/I, vol. 24, fol. 273r–274r. I wish to thank Karl Kohn for his help in critically dating the second source.

33 Kowaleski, Maryanne, and Judith Bennett, *Crafts, Gilds, and Women in the Middle Ages: Fifty Years After Marian K. Dale*, in: Bennett, Judith, et al., eds., *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages* (1976), Chicago 1989, p. 15; Wiesner 1986, pp. 157–163; Opitz, Claudia, *Emanzipiert oder marginalisiert? Witwen in der Gesellschaft des späten Mittelalters*, in: Lundt, Bea, ed., *Auf der Suche nach der Frau im Mittelalter: Fragen, Quellen, Antworten*, Munich 1991, pp. 25–48.

34 Howell discusses high labor status with respect to control of the means of production. See: Howell 1986, pp. 9–46.

35 Timann, Ursula, *Untersuchungen zu Nürnberger Holzschnitt und Briefmalerei in der ersten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Münster/Hamburg 1993, p. 51.

36 Strieder, Peter, *Michael Wolgemut – Leiter einer 'Großwerkstatt' in Nürnberg*, in: Lucas Cranach, exh. cat. Kronach/Leipzig 1994, pp. 116–123.

37 Benzing, Josef, *Buchdruckerlexikon des 16. Jahrhunderts (Deutsches Sprachgebiet)*, Frankfurt 1952, p. 131. I wish to thank Alison Stewart for calling this reference to my attention.

38 I am grateful to Ulrich Merkl for generously sharing this information from unpublished sources that he has discovered in his research for his forthcoming doctoral dissertation *Studien zur Buchmalerei in Südostdeutschland in der ersten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Universität Regensburg.

39 Campbell 1976, p. 195.

was particularly disadvantaged. Unlike other crafts, those of panel painting and monument sculpting were usually heavily dependent on the abilities and reputation of one man – even though this one man could never have functioned without the support and collaboration of the other members of the shop. Documents on Adam Kraft bear this out. In the contract for the Eucharistic Tabernacle he promised to work on the monument himself, “with his own body”, and not to use more than three assistants.⁴⁰ When in 1508 he became too ill to work on certain figures for the Nuremberg Frauenkirche, the whole project was held up, because, as he himself stated, no one else from his workshop could be entrusted with these pieces.⁴¹

Undoubtedly the social and economic status of the artist's wife was then far more contingent upon her husband's presence than was that of the wives of other craftsmen. It is therefore not surprising that upon the death of the artist the widow appears to be treated with little or no respect. Soon after Albrecht Dürer's death, Agnes Frey became the target of malicious gossip claiming she was greedy. The accusations originated with Dürer's friend Willibald Pirckheimer and the secretary of the city council Lazarus Spengler.⁴² The plight of the wife of another Nuremberg printmaker and painter Georg Pencz was far worse. Immediately after his death in 1550, some of the contents of a chest belonging to children for whom the Penczes had assumed guardianship were found to be missing. Margareta Pencz asserted that her husband had pawned the items in order to pay some debts. The city council, however, held the widow responsible and declared “that she nonetheless would be granted modest public assistance because she had so many children, because she was poverty stricken and because her husband had been such a fine artist, who had worked satisfactorily for the gentlemen of the council – but not for her own sake because she had brought her husband into his financial predicament and had consumed all that had come her way.”⁴³ Accusations generally had to do with the handling of finances: either the wife was too frugal or too extravagant.

Late-medieval urban society deemed the wife of the artist to be a necessity for the workshop. At the same time, the roles society assigned to her, defined her as a necessary evil in that she was responsible for retail sales, for seeing to it that the books balanced, that cash flowed, and that the business stayed afloat. One of the characteristic marks of the uppermost levels of society in Nuremberg was their non-involvement in retail transactions. Women participating directly in selling, soiled their hands with “filthy lucre”. This role in marketing was perhaps the constructed equivalent of the dirty job of pulverizing stone. In a city so defined by the mercantile and dominated by the merchant, this distinction provided an especially important ideological veil. Sentiments against the workshop wife that reflect these prejudices were voiced most often after she had lost the protective aura with which her husband's status surrounded her. Her marginalization differed only by degree from that of other “Others” in medieval and early modern European society to whom dominant culture had assigned necessary, yet socially distasteful or morally repugnant roles. The hangman who executed criminals was officially remunerated through public funds, but because of the collective guilt that society projected onto him, he was made a scapegoat and treated as an outcast. Moreover, he too was castigated for dealing with money since he killed not for a cause but for monetary gain.⁴⁴ The situation for the Jewish money lender or pawn broker was similar

71

40 Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nuremberg, Imhoff-Archiv, Fasc. 31, no. 3a; Schleif 1990, p. 243.

41 Staatsarchiv Nuremberg, Rep. 44e, Losungsamt, Akten 181, no. 16, unpaginated; Geyer, Christian, *Adam Kraft und das sogen. Männleinlaufen*, in: *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, vol. 29, 1906, pp. 249–261.

42 On Pirckheimer, see Hutchison 1990, p. 185. In my forthcoming study of Agnes Frey, I analyze both the causes and effects of Pirckheimer's diatribe. On Spengler, see Wiesner 1986, p. 154.

43 Zschelietzschky, Herbert, *Die “drei gottlosen Maler” von Nürnberg*, Leipzig 1975, pp. 97–99. I wish to thank Petra Seegets for calling this example to my attention.

44 Danckert, Werner, *Unehrliche Leute: Die verfehmten Berufe*, Bern 1963, pp. 23–49; Keller, Albrecht, *Der Scharfrichter in der deutschen Kulturgeschichte* (Bonn 1921), reprint: Hildesheim 1968, esp. p. 115; Oppelt, Wolfgang, *Der Henker: Bestallung und Stellung im öffentlichen Leben*, in: *Anzeiger des Germanischen Nationalmuseums*, 1993, pp. 75–86; Schuhmann, Helmut, *Der Scharfrichter*, Kempten 1964, p. xiii.

in that he was sought out and patronized by Christians who needed loans, yet ironically he was socially shunned and considered a pariah for accepting interest because of Christian taboos against usury.⁴⁵

With the advent of art-historical treatises, the place of the wife changes dramatically — for artists' spouses generally and for Adam Kraft's wives specifically. When Neudörfer wrote his "Nachrichten von Künstlern und Werkleuten..." in 1547, he included one minor and somewhat diminishing anecdote, around which a character would develop in nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical fiction.⁴⁶ He asserted that Adam Kraft's wife let herself be called Eve (in German *Eva*) in order to please him — a story that was repeated by Joachim von Sandrart in 1675, by G. K. Nagler in 1839, by Berthold Dawn in 1897, and again by Wilhelm Schwemmer in 1957.⁴⁷

Most art historiography ignores the presence and functions of wives in the Kraft workshop altogether. In fact the existence of a workshop is often ignored. Although the nearly life-size sculpted figures of Kraft's two assistants assume prominent places along with his at the foot of the Eucharistic Tabernacle (fig. 3–5), actual references or even the semantic acknowledgment of workshop collaboration is scarce. Either Kraft is contextualized against other individual masters who are likewise viewed as singular men of genius, or *his* work is portrayed as the paradigm of a larger movement characterized as stylistically virile and often carrying nationalistic overtones. Thus the omission of wives falls in line with the absence of other shop participants — a neglect that has outlived the general art historical disregard for patrons and audiences, some of whom were also women. It can therefore be stated, that, in art historical writing, wives were not fashioned as necessary but rather were constructed as insignificant and/or their existences were obliterated or erased.

Historical fiction developed quite apart from professional art history, which had been dominated not only by male writers but, at least initially, also by male readers. Fiction, whose audience included many women, painted a wifely picture of a spouse who was usually neither necessary nor evil but a pleasant and supportive personal embellishment. These fictive wives changed somewhat with the times, always reflecting and promoting contemporary gender expectations. For example, in 1829, August Hagen wove an adventurous tale of Adam Kraft into his famous spurious diary of Jacob Heller, long believed to be genuine. After an odyssey involving being shipwrecked, kidnapped, sold into slavery, and forced by the king of Tunis to build a mosque, Adam Kraft returned to Nuremberg where he married the woman he called Eva, who had waited for him faithfully for twenty years. She is characterized by domesticity, cleanliness, and hospitality: her pewter shines, her cabinets are polished, her floors are swept. When Adam calls her, she emerges from the kitchen a "quiet little mother, wearing a white bonnet and red pleated skirt," producing bread, butter, beer, and *Kuchen* (cake). The high point of the story involves a legend surrounding Veit Stosz's sculpted relief of the "Last Supper" in the church of St. Sebaldus, which was believed at the time to have been carved by Kraft (fig. 9). The faces of the apostles were said to incorporate portraits of prominent Nuremberg patricians. When Heller asks Kraft whom he chose as the prototype for Judas,

45 Danckert 1963 (as in note 44), pp. 265–283.

46 Lochner 1875, p. 10.

47 Peltzer, A. R., ed., *Joachim von Sandrarts Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste von 1675*, Munich 1925, p. 61; Nagler, G. K., *Neues allgemeines Künstler-Lexicon*, vol. 7, Munich 1839, p. 147; Daun 1897 (as in note 26), p. 86; Schwemmer, Wilhelm, *Adam Kraft*, Nuremberg 1958, p. 8.

Fig. 9: Veit Stosz, "Last Supper" from Volckammer Relief, St. Sebaldus, Nuremberg, 1499.



he replies that it was the secretary of the city council, Lazarus Spengler, who had joked that Adam was so afraid of biting into the apple that he waited until Eva had lost all her teeth – a reference to Adam's delayed return to Nuremberg and long postponed marriage.⁴⁸

This remarkable anecdote alludes (unwittingly) to what has been termed the "vagina dentata", or vaginal teeth, a metaphor for a man's fear of being castrated, consumed or devoured by a woman through intercourse with her – or for the universal anxiety that intimacy or involvement with another will lead to the loss of self.⁴⁹ This reference to Kraft's supposed reluctance to marry may be used as a simile for (male) writers' avoidance of women in the writing of art history, i.e., they are written out; as well as of the controlled, limited and manipulated inclusion of women in the writing of historical fiction, i.e., they are written in – but without teeth. Such motivations have certainly never been consciously articulated by authors.⁵⁰ It is symptomatic that even here in this fictionalized anecdote the statement originated with Hagen, who attributed it to Heller, who allegedly quoted Spengler, who imputed this fear to Kraft, who finally denied it and took action against Spengler for the accusation!

Subsequent authors of fiction likewise employed Adam Kraft's wives to construct model middle-class housewives whose duties are confined to the domestic sphere and whose supporting and nurturing influence took place behind the scenes. In Friedrich Wagner's play about Adam Kraft, published in 1852, Eva is the understanding wife who smooths over little misunderstandings between her husband and his associates.⁵¹ In J. W. Otto Richter's novel of 1899, the first wife, Magdalena, is a happy-go-lucky spendthrift; the second, Barbara, is a diligent frugal woman who arrives too late to help him out of his dire financial straights.⁵² In Heinz Schauwecker's tragic short story of 1955, "Nacht im Spital," dealing with Adam Kraft's lonely death of lung disease in Schwabach, it is merely mentioned that his loving

48 Hagen, August, *Norika das sind nürnbergische Novellen aus alter Zeit nach einer Handschrift des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig 1938, pp. 105–114.

49 See "Vagina dentata," in: Moore, Burness E., and Bernard D. Fine, eds., *Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts*, New Haven 1990, pp. 202–203 and the literature cited.

50 Kaja Silverman stresses the importance of unconscious replication in her analysis of the "dominant fiction" which equates the phallus with the penis. See: *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, New York/London 1992.

51 Wagner, Friedrich, *Scenen aus Nürnbergs alter Künstlerwelt*, Nuremberg 1852.

52 Richter, J.W. Otto, *Adam Kraft. Eine Erzählung aus dem Künstlerleben Alt-Nürnbergs*, Glogau 1899.

wife Barbara knows nothing of his solitary struggle against death, and hence she is not present.⁵³ And finally, in the novella published by Wilhelm Kotzde-Kottenrodt in 1963, the wife Margarete sets the stage for a love and adventure story centering on Adam's illegitimate daughter and an apprentice. The story opens as Adam Kraft's dutiful housewife looks up from her sewing.⁵⁴ In various ways, each of these works employs a wife as a foil against which the artist is constructed through the imbricated traits of virility, boldness and heroism.⁵⁵

In closing, some speculative conclusions about the roles of artists' wives during the late-medieval or early-modern period are possible. Initially, contemporary urban society deemed the wife a necessity for the artist's workshop, which, like other craft shops, was a family economy. Her important roles as overseer and business manager, which put her in contact not only with apprentices and journeymen but also with clients, rendered her visible in the community. Although it was particularly difficult for the wife of a painter or sculptor to maintain the business alone after the death of her husband, her right to choose a subsequent husband/master of the shop put her in a potentially powerful and influential position. Nonetheless contemporary attitudes toward the workshop wife were ambivalent. She could easily be scapegoated, especially when she was in a vulnerable position as widow without an appropriate successor to whom she could pass along the shop. Such denigration was largely due to the mercantile ideological veils that constructed direct responsibilities for cash flow as disdained and decadent. Although scarcely true with respect to Adam Kraft, in some cases, these prejudices were sustained in art historical and fictional literature. Generally, however, the authors of art history ignored the input of the wife together with other aspects of collaboration, in order to create narratives with great (male) artists as solitary agents, solely influenced by each other. The writers of historical fiction reintegrated the wives but often in very general supporting roles limited to the domestic sphere, thus fashioning new wives as harmless and powerless — "without teeth".

53 Schauwecker, Heinz, *Nacht im Spital*, in: Die Meister: Altnürnbergische und Oberpfälzer Novellen, Weiden 1955, pp. 23–27.

54 Kotzde-Kottenrodt, Wilhelm, *Adam Kraft und sein Geselle*, Schrobenhausen 1963.

55 Much of what Sarah Burns observes about the threat of what was termed "degeneracy" and associated with homosexuality can be applied here. See especially the section on "Regulation of Artistic Masculinity" in her chapter on "Sickness and Health" in: *Inventing the Modern Artist* (New Haven 1996). I am grateful to Gray Sweeney for calling this book to my attention.

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