

King James Bible and its Cultural Afterlife
Ohio State University, May 5 -7

Seminar: Women Reading/Writing the Bible

Leader: Michele Osherow, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Respondent: Heather Walton, University of Glasgow

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**“Sequestered Space: Typology as Rhetorical Resistance in Susanna Parr’s
Susanna’s Apologie against the Elders”**

This paper will explore the way in which Susanna Parr, a pre-Restoration sectarian woman in conflict with a local religious community, claims the identity of the apocryphal Susanna to resist the church’s attempts to exercise control over her right of association. In *Susanna’s Apologie Against the Elders* (1659), Parr uses the rhetorical strategy of typology to establish personal boundaries through a self-generated act of sequestration; she rejects the right of her previous congregation to excommunicate her and justifies her right to sequester herself from them in order to “keep and preserve mine own peace,” as she says. In the early modern era in Britain, women were frequently managed through sequestration, safely contained for various reasons by parents, husbands, sovereigns, and the church. However, the word “sequester” can also be used to describe a self-reflexive move; subjects can exercise their agency by sequestering themselves from certain people and circumstances deemed (in this case, spiritually) harmful. This use of the word allows us not only to think in terms of early modern women as objects upon which sequestration is enacted, but also to understand them as subjects exercising agency through their enactment of sequestration as a self-enclosing move. Through her use of typology, Parr engages in a rhetorical strategy that allows her to occupy multiple positions and to represent her self-sequestration as liberating rather than constricting. Previous critical attention to Parr has focused on the framing of the debate in terms of sexual (mis)behaviour and the gendering of space. Reading Parr’s text and its context through the typological lens she herself supplies allows us to sharpen our perspective on two equally important factors: first, her understanding of “private” and “public” as determined primarily by function rather than more simply by gender or physical space; and secondly, her belief that the opposition to women speaking was not an isolated issue, but part of broader problems with the exercise of leadership in the church. Through her appropriation of the biblical narrative, Parr rewrites Susannah as one who can speak and act for herself and one who can uncover the motivations of those who would try to disguise their unjustifiable efforts to sequester her as a legitimate exercise of church authority.

Andrea Crow, The Ohio State University (crow.73@osu.edu)

“The Poetics of Restoration in *The Sacred Historie*”

The Sacred Historie (1670), whose anonymous author editor Jill Seal Millman has named “Mary Roper,” offers an interesting test case for understanding allusion and its relationship to authorship. The manuscript primarily consists of a verse paraphrase of Genesis which is interrupted during the story of Joseph by a series of royalist poems recounting the history of the civil wars and Restoration. Additionally, throughout the text the author has pasted several pictures from the 1660 illustrated edition of the King James Bible as well as images of Charles I and Charles II.

My paper explores two primary ways in which this manuscript can complicate and inform our understanding of allusion in general and Biblical allusion in particular. First, this text reverses the direction of typical allusions. Rather than referring back to the Bible from the perspective of the present, *The Sacred Historie* rewrites Genesis to incorporate allusions into the Biblical story which point forward to the contemporary moment. Second, this inversion is further complicated by Roper's multimedia approach to allusion. Her cut-and-paste method, placing pages from a Bible printed in the year of the Restoration alongside explicitly royalist images, foregrounds the historical embeddedness of any version of the Bible. Her work exemplifies the concept of intertextuality, revealing how contemporary texts affect each other and collectively produce meaning. This aspect of her approach has important implications for the notion of authorship. *The Sacred Historie* continually pushes against the idea of a single authored work, incorporating other texts both through reworking their stories and literally placing them materially into her text. Furthermore, Roper never identifies herself directly but rather playfully alludes to her identity, which likely is behind her complete lack of any, in Harold Bloom's terms, "anxiety of influence."

By closely examining *The Sacred Historie*, and situating it in relation to the group of cut-and-paste versions of scripture called "harmonies" produced by a community of women in Little Gidding earlier in the 17th century, my paper will explore the alternative model of authorship and allusion these works present. I will consider these works in relation to the often gendered distinctions between manuscript and print culture which these texts literally cut across. By theorizing how authorship and allusion operate in these texts, my paper will develop a model of seventeenth century English women both reading and writing the Bible.

Elizabeth Law, Rutgers, Newark (elizlaw@gmail.com)
**"Willingness to Sacrifice & the Strength of Weakness:
Allusions to The Book of Esther in Christina Rossetti"**

I identify how Christina Rossetti challenges class hierarchy, patriarchy, and the praising of patriarchal medievalism popular in Victorian poetry with her poem "A Royal Princess." When the poem is read alongside the Book of Esther, the princess evolves beyond a young woman trapped in her wealth desiring self-fulfillment into a willing sacrificial victim for the oppressed. Rather than merely represent Esther as a feudal princess however, Christina Rossetti combines Vashti and Esther to create a revolutionary Christ figure in the princess. Rossetti aligns her princess, Esther, and Christ on the side of the oppressed and the feminine. In doing so, she implicitly questions the tradition of patriarchy within Christianity.

Michele Osherow, University of Maryland, Baltimore County (mosherow@umbc.edu)
"Hazards of Seeing: Lot's Wife in Women's Literature of Witness"

Lot's wife merits all of a single sentence in the Bible and it is the sentence that marks her ruin: "And his wife looked back from behind him and she became a pillar of salt" (KJV, Genesis 19:26). Lot's wife's decision to see what she has been forbidden to see has been taken up over the centuries to indicate disobedience and courage both. In the twentieth century, most notably with Akhmatova's compelling "Lot's Wife" poem, we see readings of grief and compassion accompany the wife's turn. Such readings are particularly fierce in Holocaust and post-Holocaust literature where memory is routinely complicated. The literature that attempts a turn back toward the Holocaust and similar events is commonly called "literature of witness." This genre struggles at its core with the burden, danger,

impossibility and potential of memory and sight—precisely those issues suggested by Lot’s wife’s story. This essay explores women’s use of Lot’s wife as an effective vehicle through which to view the broken past.

Laura Stevens, University of Tulsa (laura-stevens@utulsa.edu)

“Obedience, Dissent, and the Biblical Esther in Eighteenth-Century Britain”

I am writing a book exploring the role that biblical women played in articulating collective identities in the British Atlantic world of the long eighteenth century. I would be very interested in participating in panels dealing with gender, with nationalism, with the transatlantic circulation of bibles or biblical interpretations, or with Protestant identity and anti-Popery.