

**“And the Rich Man’s Heart Sorrows and Grieves”:  
Iconography and the Historiography of *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*  
by Dirck Coornhert and Maarten van Heemskerck**

Dean Messinger

In 1547, Dirck Volkerszoon Coornhert (1522-1590) was hired by the Haarlem city council to engrave and print posters advertising the city’s lottery, a series of works which would become the first recorded evidence of Coornhert as an artist.<sup>1</sup> Given his propensity for modesty and aversion to greed, a lottery advertisement is an ironic glimpse into the early career of Coornhert, who has been studied as a theologian, statesmen, and author, but little as an artist. His opposition to avarice is best reflected in his print series, *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*, produced in 1550 in collaboration with famed Dutch painter Maarten van Heemskerck (1498-1574).<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I will examine the style, meaning, purpose, and audience of *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*. In doing so, I aim to place *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* within a larger historiographical framework, which will bring to light its novel iconography and how it serves as an active intervention into numerous theoretical debates surrounding printmaking and its iconography, as well as uncovering the relationship between Coornhert’s prints and his more famous literary works.

This research paper was produced in collaboration with the University of Arizona’s Art Museum’s exhibition, *Renaissance Prints from the Permanent Collection: A Selection*. I chose *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* to be the focus of my research, as well as to be publicly displayed in the exhibit, because of the series’ striking visual appeal and enigmatic creator that demanded further research. As someone who John Calvin described as a “savage beast,” and “so foolish and dense that no one can be led astray by all his gibberish,” Coornhert stood out to me as a polemical and controversial figure as a historian of the Reformation in Europe.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, as an individual described by renowned Dutch art historian Karel van Mander as someone, “whose mind, intelligence, and hands were skillful and capable of understanding and executing everything that man can understand,” I knew his art demanded as much scholarly

---

<sup>1</sup> Ilja Veldman, *Maarten van Heemskerck and Dutch Humanist in the Sixteenth Century* (Dublin: European Printing Corporation, Ltd., 1977), 55.

<sup>2</sup> I write this paper with the help of the University of Arizona’s Museum of Art, where *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* is housed. Special thanks to UAMA Registrar Kristen Schmidt for allowing me access to the print.

<sup>3</sup> Henk Bongers, *The Life and Work of Dirck Volkertszoon Coornhert*, trans. Gerrit Voogt (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 22.

## “And the Rich Man’s Heart Sorrows and Grieves”

attention as his more widely known political and religious ideas.<sup>4</sup> It is my hope that this paper will bring a heightened awareness to Coornhert’s many artistic achievements.

Dirck Coornhert was born in Amsterdam to a wealthy merchant family but was disinherited at a young age for marrying against his parents’ wishes. From Amsterdam, he moved to Haarlem, where he began working as an engraver, translator, as well as civic official. During the tumult of the Dutch Revolt, Coornhert’s heterodox religious ideals led to his exile numerous times, and he spent the rest of his life on the move, publishing polemics against both Catholic and Reformed theologians and participating in public disputations. He would become famous as a freethinking theologian and for his Neo-Stoic ideas of human perfectibility, his staunch opposition to original sin and predestination, and his arguments for religious toleration and freedom of worship.<sup>5</sup> In this paper, I will argue that his time as an artist in collaboration with Maarten van Heemskerck was a period of intellectual crystallization for Coornhert, and that his works of art served as the original medium for expressing his ideas. Furthermore, I argue that Coornhert would use his previously produced prints, indirectly but often directly, as the inspiration for his later, and more famous, literary works on theology and ethics.

At the center of this argument is a major historiographical issue that continues to divide art historians and historians in the practice and analysis of iconography: the relationship between image and text. Brendan Cassidy, former director of the Index of Christian Art at Princeton University, lays out the many issues involving the relationship of influence, which has often been seen as unidirectional, from text to image. He counters this notion, explaining that “texts rarely inspire works of art directly... Only occasionally would artists have had to resort directly to written sources, or receive from the often cited but rarely sighted humanist or theologian detailed instructions about the subjects they were expected to represent.”<sup>6</sup> Cassidy is thus arguing not only for the independence of image, but also for the unidirectional approach to be cast aside. “Historians must accept,” he continues, “that those who live by the pen and those who live by the brush or chisel work to quite separate agendas.”<sup>7</sup> What, however, would the historian make of a

---

<sup>4</sup> Bonger, *The Life and Work of Dirck Volkertszoon Coornhert*, 20.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-155.

<sup>6</sup> Brendan Cassidy, ed. *Iconography at the Crossroads: Papers from the Colloquium Sponsored by the Index of Christian Art at Princeton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Cassidy, *Iconography at the Crossroads*, 10.

humanist or theologian who is writing treatises, but is also producing art? That, after all, was the case for Dirck Coornhert. This paper will recognize the importance of the relationship between text and image, but from a different angle. Countering the conventional unidirectional model of theme transference from text to image, this paper will focus instead on how the images, produced earlier in Coornhert's career, inspired and shaped the ideology and content of his famous texts.

Before we proceed to *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*, it is important that we first determine the extent to which Dirck Coornhert, as the engraver and printer of Heemskerck's pictures, influenced the style and content of the images. The series was the product of a prolific artistic relationship between Coornhert and Maarten van Heemskerck. In the records, the series has been noted as designed by Heemskerck and engraved by Coornhert. In this understanding of the print's design, the agency for its conception and ideology is given to Heemskerck, while Coornhert is relegated to the artisanal role of producing his image (which Vasari's *Lives* misattributed to Hieronymus Cock).<sup>8</sup> This is based on the Renaissance division of labor between 'invention' and 'execution', typified by the relationship between the painter Raphael and the engraver Marcantonio Raimondi that became popularized and codified through the ages. Timothy Riggs and Larry Silver explain how "Raphael distinguished between the original ideas of an artist-genius and the lesser craftsmanship of the engraver who reproduced his concepts."<sup>9</sup> In this system, the engraver has little influence over the final product. While previous studies have recognized the role Coornhert played in the composition of the text, the credit for the design is still given to Heemskerck, with Coornhert listed as the engraver or reproducer of his image. This, however, was not the case for *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*.

Recent scholarship on the social and collective production of art has re-examined the relationship between painter and engraver, highlighting ways in which works of art were not just the product of the "skilled hands and great mind," of the named artist as previous art historians such as E.H. Gombrich have argued.<sup>10</sup> Instead, scholar's like Janet Wolff argue that the idea of an artist-as-genius creating entirely from his own will, "obscures the fact that art has continued to be a collective product," and that historians must pay attention to ways in

---

<sup>8</sup> Veldman, *Maarten van Heemskerck and Dutch Humanism*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy Riggs and Larry Silver, *Graven Images: The Rise of Professional Printmakers in Antwerp and Haarlem, 1540-1640* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Jim Berryman, "Gombrich's Critique of Hauser's Social History of Art," *History of European Ideas* 43.5 (2017): 496.

## “And the Rich Man’s Heart Sorrows and Grieves”

which figures like art dealers, printers, and publishers affect and determine the final outcome of an image.<sup>11</sup> The creation of art is never a solitary process, and an engraver or printer always, in some ways, influences the work they are ‘reproducing.’ *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* is a perfect model for analysis within the framework of the collective production of art. With this in mind, the ways in which Coornhert impacted the final product of the *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* must be examined.

The clearest examples of Coornhert’s role in the origination and creation of *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*, which will be addressed later in this paper, are the changes that he made to the original images sketched by Heemskerck. The notion that Coornhert simply ‘reproduced’ the image through the engraving process, therefore, is inaccurate and misleading. In the case of *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*, Ilja Veldman, the preeminent scholarly authority on Heemskerck’s printed works, argues that the print “embodies a number of characteristics specific to Coornhert,” noting the similarity in content between the series and Coornhert’s literary works.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the inscriptions for the prints are in Dutch, Coornhert’s preferred language (Heemskerck preferred Latin), and Veldman points out similarities between the inscriptions and Coornhert’s poetic style, concluding that the series was in fact conceptualized and designed by Coornhert, which Heemskerck then drew, and Coornhert engraved.<sup>13</sup> This understanding of the origination of the *Allegory of Hope for Gain* is essential, and helps explain how Coornhert used his engravings as a means to explore and depict his philosophical ideas before publishing them in the written word.

*The Allegory of Hope for Gain* is a series of four images produced through copper engraving. The first, entitled *Satan filling Man’s Heart with Worldly Things* (Fig. 1), depicts a man distracted by Satan. The devil is painting images of money, symbols of power like crowns and a cardinal’s cap, as well as the figure of nude woman upon a heart-shaped panel. Meanwhile, the personification of desire, in this case another nude woman, is tying a rope around the man’s ankle, ensnaring him in sin. The Dutch inscription beneath the image foreshadows the rest of the series, stating that “the devil fills man’s heart with vain, worthless things, thus enabling desire to capture him deceitfully, but the end of the tale brings only sorrow.”<sup>14</sup> Both the man and the woman in the image are based on

---

<sup>11</sup> Janey Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981) 27 & 32.

<sup>12</sup> Veldman, *Maarten van Heemskerck and Dutch Humanism*, 56.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

classical models of the human figure, and *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* is done in the Mannerist style, both of which speaks to Heemskerck's travels in Italy. During the early 15th century, "the use of classically nude or draped figures was a singular novelty in the Netherlands," and represents the "heroic Italianate style," that Heemskerck introduced to both Coornhert and the city of Haarlem with his return from Rome in 1536.<sup>15</sup> This style used by Coornhert and Heemskerck would be the early beginnings of the influential school of Haarlem Mannerism that would develop into a vast artistic field in the late 16th century.

The succeeding three prints in the series follow the story established in the first. *Desire tempting Man with Money* (Fig. 2) replaces the female embodiment of desire with a blindfolded cupid who pulls on the rope tied to the man's ankle up a cliff towards sacks of coins. "Because man has been captured by desire," the inscription reads, "she draws him along with effort and difficulty to high station, honour, lust, and money."<sup>16</sup> The third print in the series, *Man placing his Hope on Money* (Fig. 3) has the man and devil once again at the center, hoisting a statue of personified hope upon a large bag of money. The print's inscription reads, "Once man has acquired much money and wealth he begins to place his hope upon it, as is the way of the world."<sup>17</sup> The statue of hope holds an anchor, based on the verse from St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul."<sup>18</sup> *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* thus utilizes both classical and biblical iconography to deliver its warning against avarice and temptation.

The final print in the series, *Money is of no avail in the sight of Death* (Fig. 4), is a dramatic scene of the man under assault from the skeletal figure of death personified. The inscription reads, "But when eternal death appears before him he is revealed having been betrayed by vain hope."<sup>19</sup> *Money is of no avail in the sight of Death* fulfills the promise of the first print in the series, bringing only sorrow for the man, as a broken hourglass in the foreground spells that his time on earth is at an end. This image in particular displays the qualities of style and form for which Coornhert as an engraver is best known. Art historian Walter S. Melion praised Coornhert's intricate use of "curved hatches that swell and taper gradually," that were ideally suited for "delineating musculature as well

---

<sup>15</sup> Riggs and Silver, *Graven Images*, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Veldman, *Maarten van Heemskerck and Dutch Humanism*, 76.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>18</sup> Heb. 6:19 NIV

<sup>19</sup> Veldman, *Maarten van Heemskerck and Dutch Humanism*, 76.

## “And the Rich Man’s Heart Sorrows and Grieves”

as transitions of tone and light.”<sup>20</sup> The figures of the man and of death are both in active poses that place their physicality and motion on display. In-depth and detailed musculature can also be seen in the second print of the series (Fig. 2), where the man’s arched back and outstretched arms and legs are deeply textured and shows off the physical form and tone of the human body.

Perhaps the most lasting impression of *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* is the rather unique illustration of the devil painting onto a human heart (see detail, Fig. 5). Satan painting these symbols onto the heart represents the way in which desire takes hold of man: the acceptance of the sins of pride and avarice. The motif of painting on the human heart would become more common in the years after this print was published, especially in the medium of printmaking, as seen in Anton Wierix the Younger’s 1595 engraving series *Jesus Preparing the Human Heart*. It would seem that future artists would take the motif and use it positively, to depict virtue and faith being inscribed onto the heart, particularly in relation to the figure of Christ. Art historian John Knipping identifies the original inspiration for the motif of painting on the heart as Hendrik Goltzius’ engraving from 1578 entitled *Christ, Example of the Virtues*.<sup>21</sup> Knipping makes no reference, however, to Coornhert and Heemskerck’s *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*, which was produced twenty-eight years before Goltzius’ engraving. Goltzius was also a student of Coornhert’s, so it is highly likely that perhaps the motif of painting on the human heart originated with Coornhert, demonstrating how influential Coornhert and Heemskerck’s iconography would be in the years after their deaths.

Despite its novel iconography, in the original sketches made by Heemskerck, on which *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* was based, the devil was instead painting on a shield.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, it must have been Coornhert himself who added the heart shape to the final image. Among the allegorical engravings produced by Coornhert and Heemskerck, those in which Coornhert had the largest amount of influence over their design, the human heart is a common symbol and is used in many ways. In a positive manner, the heart is represented as the source of human virtue and the conduit of God’s love. In the series *Six Sayings about Fortune* (1560), a triumphal personification of the virtue Patience towers over a defeated Fortune. Behind Patience and atop a pillar, a flaming heart also stands triumphant. In the *Jacob’s Ladder* series produced in 1550, the

---

<sup>20</sup> Riggs and Silver, *Graven Images*, 54.

<sup>21</sup> John B. Knipping, *Iconography of the Counter-Reformation in the Netherlands: Heaven on Earth* (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1974), 102.

<sup>22</sup> Veldman, *Maarten van Heemskerck and Dutch Humanism*, 82.

eleventh print, *Knowledge of God bringing forth Charity*, has the inscription “From this [knowledge] flows love and divine virtues,” and shows the personification of Charity holding a large human heart in one hand, while the other holds the Tetragrammaton, the divine Hebrew name for God (Fig. 6).<sup>23</sup> Thus Charity symbolically connects God with the human heart. The heart can also be seen in allegories against certain sins like sloth or drunkenness, similar to *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*. In the 1551 series entitled *The Consequences of Drunkenness*, the Roman god Bacchus plucks the heart from a man’s chest (see detail, Fig. 7), symbolizing how alcohol leads man towards sin. This moralizing print, also a collaboration with Heemskerck, illustrates how the heart is the center of virtue, and without it, man falls deeper into temptation and drunkenness.

Considering this, the purpose of *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* becomes clearer. Keith Moxey, in his work into the theory and reception of late medieval and early modern prints, dispels the notion that works of printed art, like woodcuts and engravings, were ‘popular’ or ‘folk’ art. “Far from being expressions of popular opinion,” Moxey argues, “prints were actually the means by which the reformed attitudes of the middle and upper classes could be disseminated to as a broad an audience as possible.”<sup>24</sup> Dirck Coornhert was a part of the upper echelons of the Haarlem society he lived in, having held numerous civic offices as well as owning his own printing press and workshop in partnership with six-time *burgomaster* of Haarlem, Jan van Zuren, and was known as a moderate reformer in the realms of ethics, politics, and religion.<sup>25</sup> In his semiotic analysis of iconography and symbolism in *The Practice of Theory*, Moxey explained that “the subject’s [viewer’s] appreciation of the significance of pictorial sign systems ultimately results in the formation of cultural habits that have the potential to result in social action.”<sup>26</sup> This, I believe, is exactly the desired purpose of Coornhert’s prints. The clear moralizing message of prints like *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* and *The Consequences of Drunkenness* were intended by their creators to inspire good Christian habits in the people of the Netherlands.

In this regard, *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* and Coornhert’s other didactic prints take on the role of an active social actor. Anthropologist

---

<sup>23</sup> Ilja Veldman, *Images for the Eye and Soul: Function and Meaning in Netherlandish Prints* (Leiden, Primavera Press, 2006), 52.

<sup>24</sup> Keith Moxey, *Peasants, Warriors, and Wives: Popular Imagery in the Reformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 3.

<sup>25</sup> Henk Bongers, *The Life and Work of Volkertszoon Coornhert*, trans. Gerrit Voogt (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 23.

<sup>26</sup> Keith Moxey, *The Practice of Theory: Poststructuralism, Cultural Politics, and Art History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 35.

## “And the Rich Man’s Heart Sorrows and Grieves”

Alfred Gell, argues that with images and objects, “it is not the meaning of things per se that are important, but their social effects as they construct and influence the field of social action.”<sup>27</sup> Coornhert, above all else, wanted to create social action towards a more moral society and encourage religious and ethical discourse. In fact, moralizing prints like Coornhert’s, as art historian Barbara Kaminska explains, “served to spur discussion and acted as a focal point of private and public conversations, thus playing an active role in shaping contemporary religious, social, and political discourses.”<sup>28</sup> The overtly social purpose of his works, however, earned Coornhert the condemnation of Reformed theologians, who leveled charges of Lutheranism against him, using his own prints against him as evidence.<sup>29</sup> It can be said, then, that Coornhert’s prints actively participated in and shaped public debates on morality during this tumultuous time in the Netherlands.

Bearing in mind the strong social purpose behind Coornhert’s artistic endeavors, the audience and reception of his prints are therefore crucially intertwined. Coornhert’s religious ambiguity and confessional flexibility would have worked towards his benefit in attracting an audience, as it would have opened up the market to people of various religious inclinations. In general, appealing to pluri-confessional audiences was the goal in printmaking, to have as wide an audience as possible, allowing Catholics, Lutherans, and those of the Reformed faiths to purchase the prints without confessional prohibitions. Barbara Kaminska explains how prints, particularly in the Netherlands, “accommodated varying doctrines and were therefore potentially marketable to confessionally diversified audiences.”<sup>30</sup> For Coornhert, who was considered a freethinker and criticized both the Catholic and Reformed churches, a confessionally diverse market was essential to his work.

While his desired audiences may have been confessionally diverse, Coornhert had one targeted cultural group in mind: the Dutch people. Based on his well-known desire to spread his ideas among the common people of the Netherlands and create a rebirth of the Dutch language, it is not surprising that the inscription for *The Allegory of Hope*

---

<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, “Introduction,” in *Photographs, Objects, Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, eds. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (New York: Routledge Press, 2004), 4.

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Kaminska, “Looking Beyond Confessional Boundaries: The Discourse of Religious Tolerance in Prints by Dirck Volkertsz. Coornhert and Adriaan de Weert,” *Renaissance and Reformation* 36.3 (2013): 84.

<sup>29</sup> Kaminska, “Looking Beyond Confessional Boundaries,” 84.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.



for *Gain* is in Dutch. His use of Dutch in the inscription is also revelatory of his desired audience. In his later work as a translator of ancient and classical texts into Dutch, Coornhert specifically envisioned a non-elite audience for his works, writing that his work was for the “edification and education,” of the Dutch people, and to allow local peoples to read philosophy and literature in their mother tongue.<sup>31</sup> His didactic program, both in graphic and literary form, were thus for, in Coornhert’s own words, “untutored persons desirous of learning.”<sup>32</sup> It is important to note that among Coornhert and Heemskerck’s collaborative works, it is only the prints with the clearest moralizing messages, like *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* and *The Consequences of Drunkenness* that have Dutch inscriptions, supporting the argument that Coornhert’s purpose was to inspire social action among Dutch people.

How likely is it, however, that common, non-elite Dutchmen would have appreciated or purchased these prints? Art historians have argued that the classical imagery and figures like Cupid found in *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* would have been only appreciated and understood by the educated, humanist elite of Dutch society. Olivia Miller points out numerous classical reference in this series, like the man’s “*contrapposto* pose with Roman sandals and a toga-like garment,” that is reminiscent of Greco-Roman sculpture and the similarity between his “strict profile,” and Roman Imperial coins.<sup>33</sup> *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*, however, was produced at a time when translations of classical and early Renaissance Latin literature were becoming widely available Dutch. Art historian Julie L. McGee argues that “the plethora of translations and commentaries, in both pictorial and written form... made [classical] myths more accessible and understandable to a wider audience.”<sup>34</sup> Along this line of argumentation, classical forms and figures would not have only been recognized by the humanist elite, and in fact prints like *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* would have helped spread a wider understanding of these classical forms beyond just this educated elite, as the print medium allowed for wider dissemination and appeal.

But, one might ask, even if the non-elite in Dutch society could understand, or learn to understand through viewing, the classical imagery of *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*, would it have been within their means to purchase these prints? Here the historical context of

---

<sup>31</sup> Bonger, *The Life and Work of Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert*, 24 & 283.

<sup>32</sup> Veldman, *Maarten van Heemskerck and Dutch Humanism*, 91.

<sup>33</sup> Olivia Miller, “Influence and Audience in *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*,” (2014), 11.

<sup>34</sup> Julie L. McGee, *Cornelis Corneliszoon van Haarlem: Patrons, Friends, and Dutch Humanists* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf Publishers, 1991), 61.

## “And the Rich Man’s Heart Sorrows and Grieves”

Netherlands may help elucidate this issue. Michael North, a historian of early modern consumer culture, argues that regular wages in the Netherlands were the highest in Europe, in both rural areas and urban centers like Haarlem.<sup>35</sup> This means that even among the non-elite peoples of the Netherlands, their comparative purchasing power was high, and would have had income available to spend on prints or other artworks. North explains that due to the high wages of even rural laborers, “the tales of Dutch peasants who bought paintings were true.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore, it would have been well within the financial means of a porter or laborer to purchase Coornhert’s prints, and hopefully glean a moral message from this purchase.

If the non-elites of the Netherlands could read the inscription of *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*, could understand its message and imagery, and afford to purchase it, were Coornhert’s prints actually purchased and used as moral tools? Historians do know, in fact, that *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* was successful enough to warrant reprints and newer editions. In 1609, for example, nineteen years after Coornhert’s death, William van Swanenburg produced his own, updated version, of *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*.<sup>37</sup> The commercial traction of this print series, then, reveals that Coornhert and Heemskerck made a lasting impression on print culture. Another glimpse into the widespread reception of Coornhert’s work can be found in the *Kerckelycke Geschiedenissen (Church History)* published by Reformed theologian Jacobus Trigland in 1650. In this important work of Reformed religious history, Trigland writes that Coornhert, “mocked all the religions... Popish, Lutheran, Reformed... and issued well known prints on the subject, very many of which were to be found in people’s houses.”<sup>38</sup> Trigland’s begrudging recognition of the prevalence and appeal of Coornhert’s prints illustrates that his work was well-received by the public. Most importantly, this passage highlights that Coornhert’s prints were brought into people’s homes, bringing his ideas into the private sphere, where they would have been contemplated and used as didactic tools among families. Accordingly, Coornhert’s works of art must have been successful and marketable to a wide audience, thus maximizing his possible influence and diffusion of his ethical ideas.

With this formal analysis of Coornhert’s style, purpose, and audience, this paper will now shift towards Coornhert’s ideas behind his

---

<sup>35</sup> Michael North, *Art and Commerce in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 50.

<sup>36</sup> North, *Art and Commerce in the Dutch Golden Age*, 47.

<sup>37</sup> Miller, “Influence and Audience in *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*,” 19.

<sup>38</sup> Veldman, *Maarten van Heemskerck and Dutch Humanism*, 55.

prints, their origination, and the transference of themes between image and text. A review of historical literature on the subject reveals that scholars, often writing in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, continued to privilege the text over the image in the transference of themes. In Timothy Riggs and Larry Silver's exploration of Heemskerck's and Coornhert's creative partnership, they argue that Heemskerck seems to have "depended quite literally on a literary program," of Coornhert's.<sup>39</sup> Ilja Veldman too, argues that the prints produced from this collaboration were the "perfect visual rendition of Coornhert's personal confession of faith."<sup>40</sup> While these scholars make extensive comparisons to Coornhert's literary works to show their similarities, particularly works like his famous *Ethics: the Art of Living Well* and other literary explorations of morals, one crucial element is missing from their arguments: chronology.

Coornhert was an engraver and printer well before he wrote and published the well-known literary texts that past scholars have pointed to as the inspiration for his artistic works. Most of Coornhert's original literary works were written at the earliest in the mid-1560s, with the 1570s and 1580s being his most prolific period as an author. Coornhert's time as an engraver with Heemskerck, however, began in 1547 and lasted until 1559.<sup>41</sup> Based on this series of events, it is clear that these early prints produced in collaboration with Heemskerck served as the inspiration for Coornhert's later literary works, and that his time as an engraver in Haarlem (before he was banished and exiled numerous times), can be understood as a period of intellectual crystallization. Engravings were the original medium for the expression of his ideas, and Coornhert used the print's access to a wider marketplace to explore how Dutch audiences might react to his ideas. Coornhert's moral themes were thus not transferred from text to image as previously posited, but from image to text.

While most scholarship has upheld the transference of themes from text to image, there is a scholarly foundation for the argument against this. This foundation comes mostly from literary analysis of Coornhert's letters and translations. In John Coppenol analysis of Coornhert's letters and epistolary network, he argues that "Coornhert used his correspondence... to develop new ideas..." and that "his correspondents' questions challenged him to formulate his ideas on

---

<sup>39</sup> Riggs and Silver, *Graven Images*, 15.

<sup>40</sup> Veldman, *Maarten van Heemskerck and Dutch Humanism*, 62.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

## “And the Rich Man’s Heart Sorrows and Grieves”

different subjects.”<sup>42</sup> In the same vein, Coornhert’s prints challenged him to articulate his philosophy in a manner that would be accessible to the public. Coornhert’s interactions with Heemskerck, who had recently returned from Italy with the latest humanist knowledge, also must have been inspirational for the younger thinker, and challenged him to think critically about his ideological positions. In relation to his work as a translator of Latin texts into Dutch, literary historian Julie McGee argues that “Coornhert used his translations of classical literature to disseminate his own beliefs in a manner less controversial than his own writings.”<sup>43</sup> In a similar way, I argue that his prints also served in this function. Coornhert’s prints were used to test his philosophy in the marketplace of ideas and gave him an early access to a wide public audience before he became a controversial figure and published author.

A close examination and comparison of Coornhert’s prints and his texts proves this point. Two print series in particular highlight his use of image as inspiration for his texts. *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*, in its unique use of heart imagery and its moralizing message against greed, and *Jacob’s Ladder, or the Allegory of the Road to Eternal Bliss*, both produced early in Coornhert’s career in 1550 highlight his use of image as inspiration for his texts. In *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*, two elements stand out as important inspirations for Coornhert’s future works: the unique role of the human heart and his opposition to greed and avarice. The human heart, in Coornhert’s view, was the center of virtue and vice, and the location of God’s interaction with mankind. In his *Werken*, a collection of posthumously-published writings produced while he was in exile, Coornhert says that God granted every person “a tiny spark in his heart,” towards goodness and virtue.<sup>44</sup> As seen in *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*, Satan painting symbols of vice and sin unto the heart smothers this spark, and encourages sinful behavior. In his most famous work, *Ethics*, published in 1586, Coornhert defines sin in a similar way to how it is presented in *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*. Coornhert writes that sin is “a wrong habit, or an evil predisposition of the heart, causing the sinner to live wrongfully.”<sup>45</sup> The human heart, a common symbol in his didactic prints with Heemskerck, was thus the most important symbol of

---

<sup>42</sup> Johan Koppenol, “Living to the Letter: Correspondence of Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert.” in *Between Scylla and Charybdis: Learned Letter Writers Navigating the Reefs of Religious and Political Controversy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jeanine de Landtsheer et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 301.

<sup>43</sup> McGee, *Cornelis Corneliszoon van Haarlem*, 127.

<sup>44</sup> Bongers, *The Life and Work of Dirck Volkertsoon Coornhert*, 159.

<sup>45</sup> Bongers, *The Life and Work of Dirck Volkertsoon Coornhert*, 161.

spirituality and morality. In using the symbology of the heart frequently in his prints, he sought to pictorially establish its importance in his audience's minds.

*The Allegory of Hope for Gain's* clear message against greed is also a philosophical antecedent to his later works. In his *Werken*, Coornhert argued that obsession with earthly goods and desires turned people away from God: "Can one name any sin that does not cause attachment to false, perishable, earthly goods or bring about one's renunciation of the true, eternal heavenly goods?"<sup>46</sup> The desire for worldly things as the source of sin is seen in the title of the first print in *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*, entitled *Satan filling Man's Heart with Worldly Things*. Coornhert did not, however, renounce completely worldly goods or wealth. In his writings, he described three sources of income "Natural (from farming, hunting, and fishing), entrepreneurial (trade and finance, provided that are neither deceitful nor usurious), and professional. The natural source of income is not for gain, and is thus the most honorable, whereas the other two have profits as their motive."<sup>47</sup> Thus wealth itself was not the problem, but the unchristian desire for it that bred sin. This highlights the role of the figure of Desire in *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*, who ensnares and guides the man on his path towards doom. Coornhert would go on to write texts like *The Merchant* (1580) which elaborated on his opposition to greed and the lust for money first enumerated in his prints.

Beyond the ideas and meaning behind these prints, even their imagery would inspire Coornhert's later writings. For example, the imagery of personified desire tying a rope around man's ankle in *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* clearly inspired his 1567 play entitled *Comedy of Joy and Suffering*. In this play, 'bad habit' is personified as a woman holding a rope tied to the allegorical protagonist's leg.<sup>48</sup> It would seem that Coornhert clearly took this idea from *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*, proving how he used his older prints as the inspiration for his literary works.

Another example of Coornhert's print imagery inspiring his literary works is found in *Jacob's Ladder, or the Allegory of the Road to Eternals Bliss*. In the second and third prints in the series, entitled *God's Pre-Existing Mercy Engenders Self-Knowledge* (Fig. 8) and *Self-Knowledge*

---

<sup>46</sup> Bonger, *The Life and Work of Dirck Volkertsoon Coornhert*, 160.

<sup>47</sup> Pieter van Thiel, "'Poor Parents, Rich Children' and 'Family Saying Grace': Two Related Aspects of the Iconography of Late Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Dutch Domestic Morality," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* Vol. 17 No. 2/3 (1987): 93.

<sup>48</sup> Veldman, *Maarten van Heemskerck and Dutch Humanism*, 84.

## “And the Rich Man’s Heart Sorrows and Grieves”

*Inspires the Conscience with Abhorrence* (Fig. 9) respectively, the symbol of a mirror is of central importance. In Figure 8 the personified Mercy holds a mirror in one hand and a staff adorned with the crucified Christ in the other, while in Figure 9, personified Man stares deeply into a mirror. As seen in these prints, the symbol of the mirror represents self-reflection and self-knowledge. Drawing inspiration from these two images, Coornhert opened his *Ethics* with a dedication to his friend Hendrick Laurensz, writing, “Here you see, the mirror of my thoughts on sins and virtues brought to light for everyone to behold. Now if someone should use this mirror in a way that serves to provide him with true knowledge of himself and his condition, then that person should thank you, besides God and his own serious reflections on this mirror.”<sup>49</sup> Again it would seem that Coornhert was basing his literature on his previous works of art. Even more telling, is the fact that in 1584, thirty-four years after producing the print series *Jacob’s Ladder*, Coornhert published a book entitled *Jacob’s Ladder, or the Stairway to Virtue*. As seen here, Coornhert directly translated the themes in his images into text.

*The Allegory of Hope for Gain* proves that ideas come in many shapes and form, and that they often outlast their own creator. John Copenol writes:

Letters from Coornhert must have had a long afterlife as they appear to have been read, reread, kept, and passed on. The reason for this was the content: the letters must have played a role in the religious debates of the time. This function did not stop at the moment Coornhert died.<sup>50</sup>

Like his letters, Coornhert’s art and ideology lived on after his death. His prints were active in the public religious and moral debates long before Coornhert himself was drawn into official disputations. Moreover, *The Allegory of Hope for Gain* stands out among the historiography of engraving and printmaking. The series interjects itself into numerous topics and its unique iconography demands scholarly attention. The collaboration between Coornhert and Heemskerck speaks to the social and collective production of art, its didactic message speaks to the purpose and meaning of art, and most importantly, this print speaks to the relationship between text and image.

---

<sup>49</sup> Dirck Coornhert, *Ethics: The Art of Living Well by means of Knowledge of the Truth about Man, Sin, and Virtue* (Utrecht: Gerrit Voogt & Verloren Publishers, 2015), 1.

<sup>50</sup> Kopenol, “Living to the Letter,” 284.

As this paper has shown, the transference of Coornhert's themes was not from text to image, but from image to text. Coornhert used his earlier artistic works as direct inspiration for his later texts, and these prints served as a way to test and spread his ethical ideas before he could publish them in the written word. While the limited primary-source material available in English proved challenging, I hope that this paper serves as a springboard for future research into the artistic works produced by Dirck Coornhert. Further research into Coornhert and Heemskerck's prints, I hope, can help explore the intellectual culture of the Netherlands, as well as the relationships between image, idea, and audience in early Modern printmaking. Finally, I hope that this paper will help shed light on the creative role that engravers, printmakers, and publishers played in the final product of the artistic work they were 'reproducing,' and inspire research into these unsung and often forgotten artisans and artists.

*Dean Messinger is an MA student with the Division for Late Medieval and Reformation Studies at the University of Arizona. Dean received his BA in History with minors in Theological Studies and German from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California. He currently studies the cultural and religious history of the German-speaking lands in the late medieval and early modern periods. Dean has a special interest in the political, religious, and social history of Austria, where he will be conducting research in the summer of 2019.*

“And the Rich Man’s Heart Sorrows and Grieves”

Appendix



Figure 1: Dirck Coornhert & Maarten van Heemskerck, *Satan Filling Man's Heart with Worldly Things*, 1550, engraving, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum





Figure 2: Dirck Coornhert & Maarten van Heemskerck, *Desire Tempting Man with Money*, 1550, engraving, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

“And the Rich Man’s Heart Sorrows and Grieves”



Figure 3: Dirck Coornhert & Maarten van Heemskerck, *Man Placing Hope on Money*, 1550, engraving, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



Figure 4: Dirck Coornhert & Maarten van Heemskerck, *Money is of no Avail in the Sight of Death*, 1550, engraving, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

**"And the Rich Man's Heart Sorrows and Grieves"**



Figure 5: detail of Dirck Coornhert & Maarten van Heemskerck, *Satan Filling Man's Heart with Worldly Things*, 1550, engraving, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



Figure 6: Dirck Coornhert & Maarten van Heemskerck, *Knowledge of God bringing forth Charity*, 1550, etching, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

“And the Rich Man’s Heart Sorrows and Grieves”



Figure 7: Dirck Coornhert & Maarten van Heemskerck, *The Consequences of Drunkenness*, 1551, engraving, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



Figure 8: Dirck Coornhert & Maarten van Heemskerck, *God's Pre-Existing Mercy Engenders Self-Knowledge*, 1550, etching, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

**"And the Rich Man's Heart Sorrows and Grieves"**



Figure 9: Dirck Coornhert & Maarten van Heemskerck, *Self-Knowledge Inspires the Conscience with Abhorrence*, 1550, etching, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



## Bibliography

- Berryman, Jim. "Gombrich's Critique of Hauser's Social History of Art." *History of European Ideas* 43.5 (2017): 494-506.
- Bonger, Henk. *The Life and Work of Dirck Volkertszoon Coornhert*. Translated by Gerrit Voogt. 1978. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004.
- Cassidy, Brendan, ed. *Iconography at the Crossroads: Papers from the Colloquium Sponsored by the Index of Christian Art at Princeton*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Coornhert, Dirck Volckertszoon. *Ethics: The Art of Living Well by means of Knowledge of the Truth about Man, Sin, and Virtue*. Utrecht: Gerrit Voogt & Verloren Publishers, 2015.
- Edwards, Elizabeth and Jan Hart eds. *Photographs, Objects, Histories: On the Materiality of Images*. Edited by Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart. New York: Routledge Press, 2004.
- Hermans, Theo and Reinier Salverda eds. *From Revolt to Riches: Culture and History of the Low Countries, 1500-1700*. London: UCL Press, 2017.
- Kaminska, Barbara A. "Looking Beyond Confessional boundaries: Discourses of Religious Tolerance in Prints by Dirck Volkertsz. Coornhert and Adriaan de Weert." in *Renaissance and Reformation* Vol. 36 No. 3 (2013): 83-126.
- Knipping, John B. *Iconography of the Counter Reformation in the Netherlands: Heaven on Earth*. Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1974.
- Koppenol, Johan. "Living to the Letter: The Correspondence of Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert." In *Between Scylla and Charybdis: Learned Letter Writers Navigating the Reefs of Religious and Political Controversy in Early Modern Europe*. Edited by Jeanine De Landtsheer et al. 281-301. Leiden: Brill, 2011.
- McGee, Julie L. *Cornelis Corneliszoon van Haarlem: Patrons, Friends, and Dutch Humanists*. Nieuwkoop: De Graaf Publishers, 1991.

## **“And the Rich Man’s Heart Sorrows and Grieves”**

- Miller, Olivia. “Influence and Audience in *The Allegory of Hope for Gain*.” (University of Arizona, 2014). Unpublished.
- Moxey, Keith. *The Practice of Theory: Poststructuralism, Cultural Politics, and Art History*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- *Peasants, Warriors, and Wives: Popular Imagery in the Reformation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- North, Michael. *Art and Commerce in the Dutch Golden Age*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Price, J.L. “Printing and Graphic Art.” In *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2011.
- Riggs, Timothy and Larry Silver, *Graven Images: The Rise of Professional Printmakers in Antwerp and Haarlem, 1540-1640*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993.
- Stronks, Els. “Literature and the Shaping of Religious Identities: The Case of the Protestant Religious Emblem in the Dutch Republic.” *History of Religions* 49.3 (2010): 219-253.
- Tucker, Shawn R. *The Virtues and Vices in the Arts: A Sourcebook*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2015.
- Van Thiel, Pieter J.J. “‘Poor Parents, Rich Children’ and ‘Family Saying Grace’: Two Related Aspects of the Iconography of Late Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Dutch Domestic Morality,” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* Vol. 17 No. 2/3 (1987): 90-149.
- Veldman, Ijja. *Maarten van Heemskerck and Dutch Humanism in the Sixteenth Century*. Dublin: European Printing Corporation Ltd, 1977.
- *Images for the Eye and Soul: Function and Meaning in Netherlandish Prints (1450-1650)*. Translated by Michael Hoyle. Leiden: Primavera Press, 2006.
- Wolff, Janet. *The Social Production of Art*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981.