

WOMEN AND WATER

BY JAYNIE ANDERSON

The recent University of Melbourne Library exhibition, **Significant Others: the Representation of Women in Early Printed Books**, was opened by Jaynie Anderson during one of the rainiest Octobers in recent memory. This seemed appropriate for an exhibition that featured water and fountains in the majority of items in the display. This exhibition showed some of the oldest books in the Library's collection — a rare treat for art and architecture history students and lovers of old books. Jaynie Anderson's opening address is reproduced here.

THIS CHARMING AND elegant exhibition of illustrated

Renaissance books was curated jointly by Luke Morgan, a doctoral candidate in the School of Fine Arts, and Merete Smith, the Curator of Rare Books at the University of Melbourne Library. Merete Smith is well known through the innovative exhibitions that she has consistently prepared for the University Library, whereas my doctoral student perhaps needs some introduction. Luke Morgan began his undergraduate studies in art history at Auckland University. He came to Melbourne in 2000 to embark upon a doctoral dissertation on the Renaissance architect and fountain designer Salomon de Caus. Two of De Caus' works are represented in the exhibition, namely the *Hortus Palatinus* (1620) and the *Raisons des Forces Mouvantes* (1615). De Caus is a fascinating subject for a doctoral dissertation. To date there is no monograph on him. He wrote a great deal and designed gardens in Heidelberg, London, and in major French cities. Today, garden architecture and history is



Exhibition catalogue no. 15: Illustration in *Hieroglyphica, Sive, Antiqua Schemata Gemmarum Anularium...* by Fortunio Liceti, published 1653. (Rare Books Collection, University of Melbourne Library.)

a topical subject. During the first eight months of Morgan's candidature he has written a major article on contemporary New Zealand art for the Australian New Zealand Art journal. In addition to co-curating this exhibition he has conceptualised his thesis.

Initially I had the idea to stage an exhibition on the representation of women in

Renaissance books to coincide with a fourth year honours subject that I teach on the same theme.

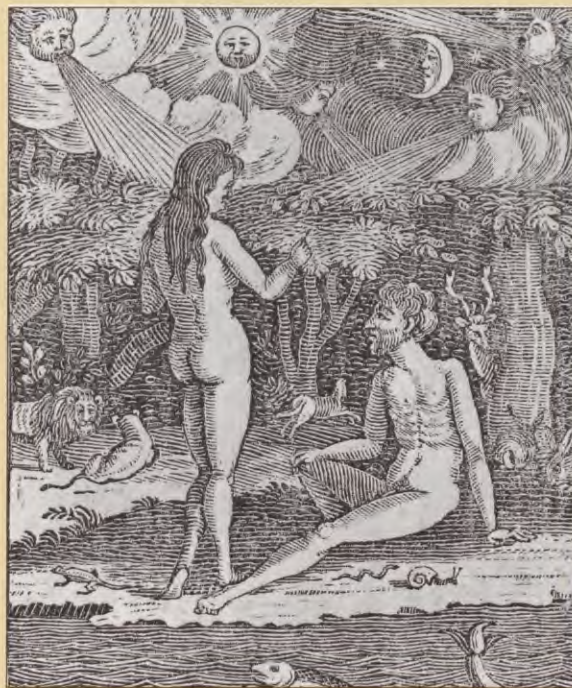
Morgan's passionate interest in fountains developed the subject to include a large section on architecture and fountains and the women who adorn them. "Women and water" might be said to be the subtitle to the show. The exhibition's catalogue is an informative read. It is theoretically sophisticated and full of interesting novel observations about the books on exhibition. Smith has written an excellent catalogue that will make the treasures of the University Library better known to a wider audience.

Morgan's catalogue essay "Significant Others" takes its title from the French theorists H el ene Cixious and Lucie Irigaray that women as "other" (man's opposite) are inscribed negatively in culture through language. It begins with an account of mythical women whose life stories are about loss, who are emblematic of Cixious' thesis, Echo and Andromeda. Narcissus is

Exhibition catalogue no. 7:
Woodcut illustration in
Andrea Alciati's *Omnia
Emblemata, Cum
Commentariis...*, Paris
1589. (Rare Books
Collections, University of
Melbourne Library.)



Exhibition catalogue no. 9:
Woodcut illustration in
*Emblems of Mortality, rep-
resenting in upwards of
fifty cuts, death seizing all
ranks and degrees of
people...*, by John
Berwick, London, 1789,
(Rare Books Collection,
University of Melbourne
Library.)



represented in the Roman de la Rose, a
mediaeval love story, in a facsimile of a
manuscript made for the French King,
François I. Morgan tells us in his essay
that Echo,

suffers not only from unrequited love of
Narcissus, and from his loss, but from a
linguistic impediment which enables her
to only ever repeat the last words
spoken to her. Thus in response to

Narcissus's vehement "Hands off!
Embrace me not! May I die before I
give you power over me!", Echo can
only respond: "I give you power over
me!" Her heartfelt reiteration draws
attention to an implicit theme of many
of the images exhibited here. In these
plates, nymphs, nereids, mermaids,
Andromeda, and even nature are nearly
all powerless; sometimes literally
bound; always, in one form or another,
objects of desire.

Although the selection of books exhib-
ited was chosen to demonstrate a partic-
ular thesis, the exhibition is open to a
number of different interpretations, one
of which would be that it represents the
art historian's laboratory. These books
can all be used by art historians as
sources for ideas. Their images, with
their accompanying explanations, shed
light on larger works of art, buildings,
gardens etc. The books chosen for exhib-
ition are the classical sources, such as
Virgil and Ovid, from which artists took
constant inspiration. One of the best
introductions to Renaissance art is
Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. Ariosto's
Orlando Furioso was a contemporary
Renaissance text of the same order.
There is also an excellent selection of
emblem books, for example: the famous
Iconologia by Cesare Ripa, Francis
Tolson's moral emblems, Andrea
Alciati's *Emblemata*, and Fortunio
Liceti's *Hieroglyphica*. These books all
contain images, with accompanying
mottos, that have often provided art his-
torians with help for interpreting
images. Boccaccio's book *Concerning
Famous Women* established the cannon
of famous women for the Renaissance,
and indeed for many centuries to come.

The final section of the exhibition is
about architectural treatises. The famous
Venetian incunabula the
Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, is seen here
in various facsimile editions. Another
notable treatise exhibited is by Du
Cerceau, the greatest architect of the
French Renaissance. Visitors will also
see Dezallier D'Argenville's work on
how to lay out a garden, Piranesi's
engravings of the Amorous Tritons for
Fountains, and of course some of the
published writings by De Caus.
All in all this is an exhibition that
presents erudite and beautiful books in
a way that makes them accessible to
undergraduates and scholars alike. ♦

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