

ANURADHA GOBIN

Picturing Punishment: The Material Life of the Criminal Body in the Dutch Republic

Criminal punishments in the early modern Dutch Republic were carefully formulated public spectacles aimed at providing maximum visual impact to viewers. Depending on the severity and nature of the crime, the criminal body could be encountered in a number of publicly accessible spaces throughout the city. Unlike contemporary punishments of criminals which generally occur behind closed doors with limited audience, early modern punishments were rituals that attracted spectators and prompted the production of a range of both official and unofficial visual culture. This proposed project seeks to examine these rituals and representations associated with the criminal body as it traversed the city during punishment rituals in the Dutch Republic. In contrast to the perceived life cycle of virtuous men and women, the premature death of criminals doomed them to a different afterlife. The condemned corpse was believed to be barred from entering heaven after death, and did not find rest and reward through burial and resurrection. Instead, the criminal corpse was reactivated, reanimated and in many ways reintegrated into civic life. It thus experienced a particular type of fate, and the stages of this peculiar afterlife are the focus of this project.

Picturing Punishment: The Material Afterlife of the Criminal Body in the Dutch Republic seeks to consider a wide range of images and objects associated with criminal punishment rituals at three key sites—the Town Hall, the gallows field and the anatomy theatre—in order to explore the complex relationship of the criminal to early modern public life. Focus on these objects and rituals will allow exploration of a myriad of overlapping issues including: post-Reformation theological discourses on the nature of the body after death; the assertion of state authority following the separation from Hapsburg rule and the establishment of a Republic; the unintended outcomes of rituals; and the changing nature of knowledge acquisition in the Dutch Republic.

The overarching aim of this project is to consider how and if the circulation of visual media related to criminal punishments was a particularly potent means of generating discourse and formulating public opinion, especially regarding the efficacy of civic authority. Certain types of visual media related to criminal punishments served a key role in asserting republican ideals and demonstrating the ability of civic officials to maintain order and control. Conversely, the circulation of other types of visual culture, especially inexpensive paintings and printed imagery, had the potential to subvert official messages through their ability to solicit the engagement of an expanded audience interested in various issues of relevance to civic life. The widespread circulation of various forms of visual culture related to criminal punishments thus facilitated a space in which potentially dissenting positions could be formulated. It also brought together seemingly disparate groups of people in a quest for new knowledge. This may reflect an expansion of the public sphere to include wider segments of the population, as opposed to older notions of public life based on status and hierarchy.

The content explored in this proposed project seeks to offer a unique discussion of punishment rituals and the role of visual culture in a number of publicly accessible spaces across the city. It brings together a variety of issues related to the visual culture of the criminal body more commonly addressed in the distinct disciplines of art history, criminology and the history of medicine. *Picturing Punishment* thus seeks to fill an existing scholarly gap by highlighting the intersections between art, medicine and criminality in the Dutch Republic. It also seeks to broaden the scope of images discussed in early modern European art history which has tended to privilege "high" art such as painting and sculpture. Through discussion of paintings alongside material culture such as inexpensive prints or preserved body parts which were actively circulated and collected in early modern Europe, a more detailed understanding of the uses and impact of visual culture can be developed beyond the established canon of art of the period. The narrative and content of *Picturing Punishment* is also accessible to audiences outside academia, expanding historical awareness of the potential repercussions and unintended afterlife of acts of punishment.