

**Anuradha Gobin, *Picturing Punishment: The Spectacle and Material Afterlife of the Criminal Body in the Dutch Republic*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021, 304 pp. 75 b&w & 25 colour illus., \$80.00 (hardcover) ISBN 9781487503802 \$80.00 (ePub) ISBN 9781487518813**

Stephanie S. Dickey

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→ Elizabeth Anne Cavaliere *Photogenic Montreal: Activisms and Archives in a Post-industrial City*

issues in part from the very processes from which they have emerged” (255).

The final two essays by the volume’s editors act as a kind of epilogue, but also as an invitation. Langford meditates on the photographs of empty lots—from those razed by the Great Fire of 1852 to artist Isabel Hayeur’s 2014 public projection, during the 2014 Montreal Biennial, of still and moving images drawn from the Occupy movement, which was then taken down at the request of the property owner—as interstices ripe with opportunity and potential yet laden with the (often violent) spectres of the past, now erased though somehow even more present. In Sloan’s examination of the residua of Expo ‘67, a moment that signaled to the world Montreal’s emergence as a modern metropolis, we find again the notion of potential, here framed as an envisioning of the city’s utopic future. Sloan remarks that “futurity has become a part of our heritage” (309). Potential binds together the past, present, and future; drives both the activist and archival impulses that call for ordered preservation and radical progress; and exists sometimes overtly and oftentimes latently in the photographic medium.

It is also in the idea of potential that these last two essays extend an invitation. While the authors and photographers featured throughout the volume are predominantly white and settler, the work of *Photogenic Montreal* as a reflective and reflexive investigation intentionally opens up histories and imaginings

of the photographed city to encompass a plurality of possibilities and perspectives. The thoughtful and thought-provoking essays that make up this extraordinary volume are only the beginning. While one might wonder what a volume so concerned with the specificity of place might offer to those beyond the physical and metaphorical island of Montreal, taken as a whole the essays deliver a proposition and a precedent that urges us to rethink understandings of photography’s role in heritage and activism, challenge what and whose stories are being told through photographic archives, and wonder what histories and futures are yet to be developed in the photographs.

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Anuradha Gobin  
***Picturing Punishment: The Spectacle and Material Afterlife of the Criminal Body in the Dutch Republic***

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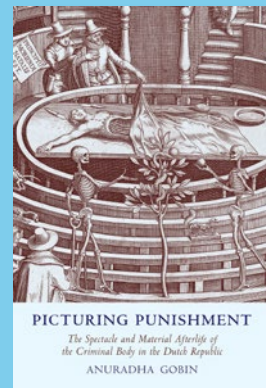
Stephanie S. Dickey

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This ingenious study weaves together the visual history of four distinctive features of the urban landscape in the Dutch Republic: the town hall, the house of correction, the gallows field, and the anatomy theatre. Each site has its own tradition of visual

representation that has typically been treated separately, but Gobin links these sites as loci for the performance of civic justice.<sup>1</sup> Taking Amsterdam, the Republic’s largest city, as her central case study, she charts the movement of the criminal body from trial to imprisonment, execution, and finally to a punishment that persisted beyond death in the form of dissection and denial of burial. The book derives from the author’s dissertation research at McGill University, a portion of which first appeared in this journal.<sup>2</sup>

The journey begins at the town hall, a focal point of urban life that typically housed a court of law and a jail as well as government offices. In her first chapter, Gobin describes the imposing classical building that was erected in the 1650s on the Dam Square in Amsterdam. Throughout its public spaces, sculptural reliefs



and paintings promoted themes of justice and good government to the building’s many visitors. In Chapter 2, Gobin follows the path of an accused criminal through the building from arrest to sentencing, emphasizing the public visibility

that characterized the process from start to finish. On the lowest level of the Town Hall, the city jailer presided over cells and a torture chamber where interrogations were conducted. Citizens passing by could glimpse prisoners through the basement windows. Trials took place in the magistrates' hall on the main floor above. After a death sentence was pronounced in the *vierschaar*, a room designed for that purpose, a scaffold was erected in front of the building, bells were rung to advertise the event, and crowds of onlookers came to witness the execution. Gobin argues that these public spectacles served to assert governmental authority while offering a moral warning to observers.

Following execution, some criminal bodies were transported to the gallows field, where they would hang until thoroughly decayed (Chapters 3–4). The denial of a proper burial thus served as a further form of punishment while the body continued its function as public admonishment. Gobin shows that the motif of bodies on the gallows was both a theme in itself (for instance, Anthonie van Borssum's watercolour sketch, *Gallows Field on the Edge of the Volewijk*, 1664–65, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, fig. 42) and a surprisingly frequent background motif, even in ostensibly carefree scenes such as Hendrick Avercamp's painting, *Enjoying the Ice near a Town*, ca. 1620 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, fig. 58). Downplaying the obvious connotation of *memento mori*, Gobin recasts this motif as an allusion to civic authority: gallows fields such as the Volewijk, situated on the bank of the river IJ near the harbor of

Amsterdam, served to advertise the city government's power to punish transgression. These liminal sites also drew urban dwellers for recreation, and Gobin contrasts images of travelers contemplating bodies on the gallows with scenes in which leisure-seekers ignore their looming presence. She argues that the latter suggest indifference to civic authority but, for this viewer, the very heedlessness of merry-makers seems an ironic reinforcement of the *memento mori* theme. A curious folkloric tradition associated the Volewijk with childbirth, new life emerging from decay. Here, Gobin's analysis builds on an earlier study by Angela Vanhaelen, who interprets midwives' appropriation of this legend as a protest against the rise of academic medicine.<sup>3</sup> Like Vanhaelen, Gobin views the gallows field as a contested space that testifies to both civic power and its limitations. In this context, the recurring motif of a figure defecating at the foot of a gallows post-convincingly figures subversive rejection of authority since it illustrates a colloquial expression of defiance, "to crap on the gallows," that dates back at least to the mid-sixteenth century (128–134).<sup>4</sup>

Amsterdam and other Dutch cities maintained houses of correction where men and women convicted of lesser offences were sentenced to hard labour. Gobin links these public institutions with the anatomy theatre as sites in which the criminal body was exploited for public benefit (Chapters 5–7). Despite scientific advances in the seventeenth century, the dissection of a human body was still a transgressive act

fraught with moral implications; like executions, it was also a popular public spectacle. The bodies examined were typically those of executed criminals such as the thief Aris 't Kint (roughly, "Harry the Kid") whose corpse appears in Rembrandt's famous *Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632, The Hague, Mauritshuis). Here, Gobin argues that by providing public benefit, "the actions of the anatomist redeem the sinful actions of the criminal" (170). In Chapter 6, she emphasizes that meaningful accoutrements displayed in the anatomy theatre included not only skeletons but also flayed skins. Once again looking beyond the obvious connotation of *memento mori*, she invokes the theoretical concept of the "skin ego," whereby skin is construed as both boundary and interface, a barrier ruptured when the flayed skin is offered up to be seen and touched by visitors to the anatomy theatre (178–179).

Overall, Gobin's analysis demonstrates strong critical thinking and thorough research into her specific themes, but a broader grasp of Dutch art and cultural history is sometimes lacking. For instance, the term *Stadhouder* is mistranslated as "city holder," and Gobin suggests this administrator should have had an office in the Amsterdam Town Hall (46). In fact, the *Stadhouder*, based in The Hague, held broader authority as military governor of the Dutch Republic; the ambitions of the Princes of Orange who occupied this role often brought conflict with the power-hungry city fathers. Jan Zoet was a poet, not an artist (p. 3), and Cornelis Anthonisz's view of Amsterdam is a painting, not a map

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(fig. 33). More significantly, I wonder if more attention might have been given to the condemned person's point of view. To illustrate the transportation of corpses to the Volewijk, Gobin chooses a book illustration, *The Bodies of the Anabaptists on the Gallows*, but does not identify it fully (fig. 34). Executed following a riot in 1535 that culminated in occupation of the old town hall of Amsterdam, the deceased in this case were religious dissidents; while their actions were seditious, the event took place during the Reformation, when Anabaptists were being tortured and killed for their faith. In the 1570s, Anabaptists condemned as heretics were burned at the stake on the Dam Square (another form of admonitory public spectacle).<sup>5</sup> In 1664, when 18-year-old Elsje Christiaens struck and killed her landlady in an altercation over unpaid rent, she was an illiterate, unemployed immigrant struggling to make her way in a foreign, unforgiving place. Her dangling corpse was recorded at the Volewijk by Rembrandt and other artists (figs. 38–39, 42). There is tragedy here on both sides. Still, the weaving together of Gobin's themes produces some intriguing insights. Dr. Nicolaes Tulp was not only a celebrated anatomist but also a magistrate who presided over trials and sentencing in the Amsterdam Town Hall (149–156). Today, this dual role might seem a conflict of interest, but it illustrates how wealthy oligarchs controlled the power centers of the growing metropolis. Their effectiveness was linked to the maintenance

of civic order, and this book clearly shows how the public punishment of the criminal body was deployed to serve that goal.

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Elsa Guyot  
**Rejouer l'histoire. Le Moyen Âge dans les musées du Québec**

Montréal, Leméac Éditeur, 2021

182 pp.

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Roxanne Mallet

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Dans *Rejouer l'histoire*, Elsa Guyot retrace les éléments clés de la réception et de la mise en scène du Moyen Âge au Québec. Son analyse est axée sur le milieu muséal de la province, principalement de 1944 à nos jours. L'objectif de l'auteur : mettre en lumière la façon dont s'est développée l'histoire médiévale localement, notamment en considérant le développement de collections phares, leur mise en place et leur diffusion, en insistant sur le contexte et l'intention discursive de leur expographie ainsi que sur les personnes clés derrière leur mobilisation.

Cette recherche s'inscrit dans le courant médiévaliste, qui analyse l'histoire médiévale dans une perspective critique. Cette approche contemporaine réfléchit à la réception du Moyen Âge en tant que construction, parfois motivée par des desseins esthétiques et religieux, politiques ou encore touristiques et

ludiques, tel que souligné dans les perspectives explorées par l'auteur dans ses cas d'études (p. 11). Ainsi faut-il rappeler que cette période est souvent perçue comme regroupant des événements et des styles se développant essentiellement en territoire occidental, voire euro-



péen. Une approche historique plus globale permet aujourd'hui de souligner que cette délimitation eurocentrique peut et doit être remise en contexte en regard de la production extra-européenne. À titre référentiel, la bibliographie ciblée que présente l'auteur en fin de livre est divisée en deux sections, dont la première, titrée « Sur l'étude et la réception du Moyen Âge », est majoritairement orientée sur ces enjeux dans un contexte nord-américain. Aux côtés de publications telles que *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: The Idea of "the Middle Ages" Outside Europe* (2009), codirigé par Kathleen Davis et Nadia Altschul, ou *Mapping Medievalism at the Canadian Frontier* (2010), de Kathryn Brush et ses collaborateurs, Guyot propose une analyse micro et locale, qui