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**Dillon, Anne. Michelangelo and the English Martyrs**

Sarah Rolfe Prodan

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[See table of contents](#)

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poems was innovative, since previously responses had all been gathered together after the poems.

As mentioned, the book includes ten letters by d'Aragona, nine of which are to her "dear patron" Varchi. Although quite general, the letters have some biographical and literary interest. Hairston believes there are more letters out there in the Italian archives ready to be discovered.

ANN CRABB

James Madison University

**Dillon, Anne.**

***Michelangelo and the English Martyrs.***

Farnham, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012. Pp. xxvii, 356 + 81 ill. ISBN 978-0-7546-6647-5 (hardcover) \$134.95.

Anne Dillon's *Michelangelo and the English Martyrs* is a rigorous and illuminating study of an Italian broadsheet from the mid-sixteenth century on the execution of (Catholic) Carthusians in Henrician England. Created in Rome in 1555 by key religious, intellectual, and artistic figures whose respective activities and spheres of influence converge in the figure of Michelangelo, the print as explicated by the author offers a rare and surprisingly comprehensive glimpse of life in Rome in the 1550s.

A truly compelling analysis of a sophisticated print, Dillon's book opens with all the excitement of an erudite whodunit by a seasoned investigator. Much like a work of micro-historical detective fiction, the study begins *in medias res*; in the opening acknowledgements, readers learn how the author made use of forensic photographic resources at the Metropolitan Police Service's labs in London to assist in determining the print's identifying watermark.

The mystery surrounding the broadsheet's production history is evocative of the enigmatic features in and behind the work itself. Dillon's scholarship is uniquely impressive in its interweaving of precise (and abundant) historical detail with focused textual and visual analysis, on the one hand, and broad yet informative overviews of daily life, scientific research, and currents of thought in Rome in the 1550s, on the other. Dillon convincingly argues that the print, destined for an erudite readership, doubled as a descriptive device with

expressly socio-political intentions and as an orthodox devotional tool with (possibly) heterodox content.

Rich in images and colour plates, the visually attractive book is comprised of nineteen core chapters, which are preceded by an introduction and followed by an appendix featuring the broadsheet script. Its organization is inspired by the manner in which the broadsheet unfolded for the author during the course of her research. Given the gentle ebb and flow of various topics as the discussion progresses, one cannot group these chapters formally into “parts,” but collectively they cover—in addition to the historical event depicted—the form and content of the print, and the circumstances of its production and reception: key agents (artists, scholars, clerics, regents); prime influences (theological, anatomical, scientific); and Rome itself (landscape, religious history, and contemporary practices and rituals). If pressed, one could reduce the main themes of the study to its two dominant threads: *martyrdom* (and the related matters of dissection, anatomy, and salvation); and *Michelangelo* (his artistic style, Nicodemism, and knowledge of the human body).

The care Dillon took in thoughtfully structuring the work is evident even in its preliminary pages, where the author included a carefully selected quatrain from Vittoria Colonna’s sonnet 63 for Michelangelo that suggests a meaningful link between missionary work and martyrdom as it identifies the origin of the engraving behind the print in the context of the *Spirituali*, or reform-minded Catholics who gravitated around Cardinal Reginald Pole and engaged in dissimulation of their crypto-Protestantism. The author even signed her introductory address on the feast of St. Bartholomew (whose flaying relates both to ideas on the spiritual value of martyrdom and related practices informing the broadsheet, and to a detail of Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*).

There are many layers of meaning discernible in the broadsheet. Dillon successfully parses and lays bare its various components. From her study, we learn that the broadsheet was commissioned by an important and powerful Spanish cardinal at the Vatican, created by his fellow compatriots in Rome, and offered to a staunchly and militantly Catholic king of Spain who saw himself as God’s appointed instrument to heal Christendom from the fracture created by the advent of Protestantism. Though the author has presented her case well for the simultaneous presence of subversive crypto-Protestant elements in the print, one does wonder how much reform theology would have been intentionally incorporated into the broadsheet given the intended recipient. Might this

reformist dimension have been more accidental than strategically subversive, owing perhaps to the very homage paid in the print to Michelangelo as artist and anatomist?

This minor query results not from any weakness in the author's argumentation but from the reviewer's own sense of how jealously guarded Michelangelo was about his spirituality for both personal and political reasons. Would a Spanish artist in Rome, even if he had trained under Michelangelo's close friend and assistant Daniele da Volterra, have knowingly introduced a reformist element through the figure of Michelangelo? If he had known of Michelangelo's leanings, would he have chosen to embed them in a document meant to celebrate obedience to a Rome that rejected justification by faith? Had Michelangelo been directly involved in the creation of this work, would he have sanctioned this?

These questions ultimately amount to speculation on the reviewer's part—a point of reflection and curiosity. If the mark of important scholarship is that it gives rise to sustained thought or to intriguing questions, then Dillon's contribution achieves that rank. It has the additional merit of being a pleasure to read.

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**Erasmus, Desiderius.**

***The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 2204 to 2356: August 1529–July 1530.* Trans. Alexander Dalzell, annotated by James M. Estes.**

Collected Works of Erasmus in English 16. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. Pp. xxv, 440 + 18 b/w ill. ISBN 978-1-4426-4749-7 (hardcover) \$175.

When you're used to hunting through the indices of Erasmus's correspondence for a certain name or a term, and thumbing through several volumes to follow a particular thread, reading through a whole volume from cover to cover is a real treat. It gives you a chance to follow the day-to-day life of a leading Renaissance humanist, from the most grandiose statements of humanist principles to the mundane details of quotidian life, and just about everything in between. This