Death, Torture and the Broken Body in European Art, 1300–1650.
John R. Decker and Mitzi Kirkland-Ives, eds.
Visual Culture in Early Modernity. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015. xvi + 264 pp. $109.95.

The nine essays in this volume examine representations of bodily violence in European art of the late medieval and early modern eras. In the introduction to the volume, John R. Decker offers a suggestive reading of Dirc Bouts's *Martyrdom of Saint Erasmus* (ca. 1458) and Gerard David's *Justice of Cambyses* (1498), in which he draws attention to the interplay between identification and abhorrence that both works elicit in the beholder. This interplay has broader relevance for the period: depictions of broken bodies in late medieval and early modern works of art frequently work in such a way as to "bring viewers closer and push them away simultaneously" (10). While such works depict violence and bodily pain in frequently shocking ways, and the *Justice of Cambyses* is a particularly apt case in point, they also invite viewers to imagine that pain for themselves, to imagine it as their own. Indeed, it is specifically by means of its precise, graphic details that a painting like the *Justice of Cambyses* generates an almost physical response in the viewer.

This push-pull effect means that visual representations of bodily violence were an important instrument in the creation of religious and civic identities, and the volume's two parts are devoted, respectively, to these themes, with a focus on martyrs in the first section. Depictions of martyrs invite viewers to identify with their physical suffering, and, through that suffering, to rally to a particular religious cause. In this way, viewing the suffering of others in a sustained, empathetic manner serves as a way of forging collective religious bonds. Conversely, depictions of corporal punishment and executions confirmed and clarified boundaries between a community, on the one hand, and its abject others, on the other hand, with the tortured or executed criminal exorcised from the social order through the destruction of his or her body. This becomes clear from Maureen Warren's analysis of Claes Jansz. Visscher's news prints of executed "Arminians," etched and published in

1623. As she convincingly shows, these prints "served to shame [the convicts], thereby denying their suitability to govern or even to exist as part of the community of respected citizens in the Dutch Republic" (225). They are metaphorical continuations, therefore, of the executions themselves. Yet paradoxically, such images, too, were dependent for their effect on the viewers' close, ruminative looking at the bodily destruction depicted in them.

Death, Torture and the Broken Body in European Art, 1300–1650 offers strong readings of an admirably wide range of visual materials, as well as an informative and witty essay by Natalia Khomenko on *The Lattre Examinacyon of Anne Askew*, published in 1546 by John Bale. The volume does not explicitly address the question of how representations of broken bodies changed over the 350 years that form its chronological focus. It is clear, for example, that the forging of civic and religious identities through physical suffering became a more urgent, dominant, and politically fraught issue during the religious struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and I would have been interested in reading more about this. A second important issue, examined in detail only by Renzo Baldasso in his essay on Rubens's *The Death of Decius Mus*, is the power of art to challenge or question dominant modes of identity formation through bodily suffering, rather than serving as a confirmation of them. Baldasso convincingly demonstrates that the visual rhetoric of Rubens's painting kindles the viewers' "awareness of what it takes to kill another human being" (153), and encourages them to reflect critically on the morality of war and on the idea that suffering and dying a heroic death on the battlefield is commendable.

While it would have been interesting to see more sustained engagement with these topics, it is a testimony to the scholarly value of *Death, Torture and the Broken Body in European Art* that its insights prompt readers to pose questions for further research. The volume as a whole is recommended reading for anyone interested in the cultural history of the body and in the entwined visual and religious cultures of the late Middle Ages and the early modern period.

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