

Sarah Covington. *Wounds, Flesh, and Metaphor in Seventeenth-Century England*.

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During this year's general election campaign in the UK, politicians promised to fix broken Britain, a body politic wounded by parliamentary scandal, financial crises, and two apparently endless wars. As Sarah Covington's book reveals, this metaphor of the wounded body politic was very familiar to seventeenth-century readers of political propaganda. But it also appeared in legal argument, epic, love poetry, and conversion narratives in this period.

Although her book makes reference briefly to Spenser, Donne, and Stuart poetry, and her conclusion takes an extremely long view (through to twentieth-century avant-garde art), Covington's main concern is with midcentury Britain. This period was characterized by "linguistic fragmentation, as writers attempted and failed to reach for meaning wherever they could find it" (41). The civil wars "shattered" (42) shared rhetoric and linguistic consensus, she claims, with the result that woundedness became central to the expression of all forms of uncertainty. The wounds of love, for example, reflect how the self in love is subject to "alienation, breakage, sudden incursion, and irreparable damage" (119). Wounds open up the interiority of the body, breaking through the skin and rupturing the boundaries of the individual. In love or in intense devotion, the self is likewise broken open by forces that seem to come from without. Covington's book invites us to consider how modern discourses ranging from psychoanalysis to postmodernism, which postulate a damaged or fragmented subject, partake of this long tradition of wounded selves.

At the same time, because of the ancient tradition of venerating the wounds of Christ, wounds were seen as restorative. Wounds can allow grace to penetrate the carapace of the sinner; they can be badges of valor, or used in martyrological display. Even the absence of wounds can be instructive. Covington reexamines the iconography of Charles I in this light, moving backwards from his woundedness in the *Eikon Basilike* to assert that "the king's self-projections through paintings and masques during the first decade of his reign also presented to the world a highly opaque, polished, and impenetrable — woundless — façade of royal distance" (37).

At times Covington's book strains to accommodate all these kinds of wounds, as well as other metaphors (walls and labyrinths in legal discourses, for example) and

forms of mental and physical illness. Her introduction compresses a long history of woundedness, from its associations in classical antiquity through the Reformers' injunctions to meditate on one's own spiritual deformities rather than Christ's wounds. This synoptic treatment leads to some dubious but interesting claims, such as: "for Protestants, metaphor, if it was not rejected altogether, was therefore to be avoided in its metaphysical sense as implying any kind of transubstantiating process" (4). The chapter on love is particularly hectic. In its first nine pages, we read among other things about Carew's market-driven notion of the individual lover; insanity caused by love; love in Plato, Ovid, and Augustine; Neoplatonic love in the Caroline court; Jonson's masques; Neo-Stoicism; Hobbes's critique of the passions; Puritan iconoclasm; and attacks on Henrietta Maria's chapel. This list shows how meticulously researched the book is, with every possible context for wounds, flesh, and physical distress under investigation, but at times it is also overloaded: a single sentence on page 74 includes five footnotes.

The fifth chapter on religious invocations of woundedness unfolds more slowly and persuasively. Covington argues there that the "Catholic dwelled in a liquid world" (168), relating Crashaw's famously liquefactive imagination to a general confessional tendency. The interplay between ancient devotional practices and the experience of war (the theme of her third chapter) also yields interesting insights. Covington discusses the cost of treating battlefield wounds and the effects of specific weaponry, reminding us that many seventeenth-century bodies bore the scars of battle. It is worth reflecting on these broken and maimed men when we consider the poetry of love and beauty in this period.

Covington carefully combines contemporary linguistic theory and philosophy of the abject with extensive archival research to demonstrate that metaphor, in Paul Ricoeur's words, "shatter[s] and increase[s] our sense of reality by shattering and increasing our language." Likewise, this book increases our sense of the reality of early modern woundedness.

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