

Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen. *Pain and Compassion in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*.

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Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen's excellent study of pain and compassion in early modern English literature and culture will be of great interest to all scholars concerned with the relationship between embodiment and its various cultural codings. Readers acquainted with the work of Elaine Scarry, Mitchell Merbeck, Roselyne Rey,

David Morris, and others will be completely at home methodologically in van Dijkhuizen's study. Proceeding from the premises that pain acquires its significance through cultural discourses and that the responses to pain can range from isolation to community-building compassion, the study builds its arguments upon close readings of early modern texts in order to present a compendious, nuanced, and historicized survey of early modern English pain discourse.

Arguing that early modern religion far more than early modern medicine provided the discourses by which pain was given meaning in the period, van Dijkhuizen focuses on the culturally central model of Christ's Passion. The Reformation, van Dijkhuizen argues, rendered this model problematic: "The identification with the Passion had been a way of enlisting the body as a spiritual tool — of attaching meaning to bodily sensation and integrating it into an overarching theology. The Protestant emphasis on God's otherness, by contrast, made both the preoccupation with bodily religious experience and the notion that humans can truly comprehend and even share in the pains of Christ problematic if not blasphemous" (25). The responses of early modern English writers to this schism were complex and contradictory. Nonetheless, Christ's Passion remained central to the cultural coding of pain. Particularly illuminating is van Dijkhuizen's analysis of the shifting boundaries between those included within the communities created by compassion and those placed beyond the pale of commiseration. The study also usefully complicates any linear, progressive history of pain. The cultural appropriation of pain did not proceed monologically toward modern medical understandings of pain.

The study's first chapter after the introduction lays the groundwork by examining Reformation and Counter-Reformation works on *imitatio Christi*. For Catholic writers, Christ's bodily pain invites compassion and meritorious imitation. For Protestants, Christ's sufferings (considered to be primarily spiritual) are neither humanly comprehensible nor imitable, and sin places the believer in the position not of an empathetic witness but of one of Christ's torturers. Even so, Protestant martyrologists present martyrdom as a kind of *imitatio Christi*, thus "reclaiming the body for the Protestant cause" (83). With the martyr, at least, pain in Protestant culture becomes a way of constituting an elect community. The following three chapters take up the poetry of Alabaster, Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, and Lanyer, illustrating the variety of literary responses to the problem of pain and the centrality of religious models to those responses. Van Dijkhuizen shows that even a poet like Donne, who in his prose rejects the late-medieval and post-Tridentine interpretation of Christ's Passion, cannot in his poetry fully reject the model. Donne's poetry registers the loss of the certainty provided by pain in *imitatio Christi* and demands that God inflict pain on the speaker to restore some of that certainty. These chapters also thematize the poetry's response to pain at a formal level. This is particularly prominent, unsurprisingly, in the chapter on Herbert, whose poems, van Dijkhuizen contends, attempt to imitate Christ's sufferings at the level of poetic form. Many of the poets on whom these chapters focus are also concerned with the role of pain in the construction of community. This emerges forcefully in the

discussion of Lanyer, who uses participation in Christ's and Mary's sufferings to construct a specifically female spiritual community, and the following chapter's discussion of the function of compassion in Spenser and Milton. If for Spenser pity is instrumental in the formation of national bonds yet dangerously threatens to exceed those bonds, Milton rejects pity outright, critiquing *Eikon Basilike's* attempt to appropriate the *imitatio Christi* model to form a (royalist) political community and arguing that compassion has no place in the public sphere. The study concludes with an insightful examination of pain and pity in Montaigne, who in his *Essais* rejects neo-stoic and Christian conceptions of pain alike in order to articulate a secular ethics of compassion grounded in the suffering body and extending across religious and political divides to include all humans and even animals.

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