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Comptes rendus Reviews

Michel Porret, (Ed.), *Le corps violenté. Du geste à la parole*. Genève, Librairie Droz, 1998, 370 p., ISBN 2-600-00276-6.

In his interdisciplinary anthology of a cultural history of the body, Michel Porret has gathered eighteen fine essays taken from anthropologists, historians, practitioners, and literary writers. The essays are well written in terms of both their style and the differentiated argument they present. They provide a fresh and sometimes startling look at a topic that has been receiving increasing attention from scholars in different disciplines over the last two decades. The authors, most of whom teach at the University of Geneva, contribute and respond to this discussion by illuminating well-chosen cases dealing with the medical discourse and practice between the 17th and the late 20th centuries, with the discourses surrounding capital punishment in the 18th and 19th centuries, and with representations of violence and the body in literary writings from the Middle Ages and the 19th century.

This volume goes well beyond a general discussion of body and violence by systematically incorporating the religious field into its organization, thus providing some thought-provoking reflections on the role of the Christian tradition in conceptualizing violence and the body from the Middle Ages onwards. Porret has not limited his selection to essays in which a Western-Christian tradition of bodily experiences and their representations is reconstructed from different angles, he has succeeded in obtaining case studies on non-Western experiences. The discussion of conceptualizations of monsters in China (Frank Dikötter) and of the colonialists' view of the body of Indian people (David Arnold) helps the reader to develop a fresh and critical look at the ways in which one's own experiences of the body are culturally framed.

A similar distancing from common-sense notions of the body is induced by the discussion of those men and women of the 19th and 20th on whose bodies the stigmata of Christ appeared (Karel Bosko). In these cases, the medical-physiological understanding of the body is strongly challenged by a sudden breaking of the skin, which was not related to either external violence or internal pathologies. The difficulties contemporary observers experience in coming to terms with the phenomenon is explained by K. Bosko with reference both to a specific, medical attitude towards the body, and to the dominant framework of religious thought, in which the personal identification with the physically suffering Christ appears as a kind of atavism. The religious part of his argument is strongly supported by two other essays, in which the representation of body and violence in Christian iconography is analyzed. Jean Wirth describes the changing representations of the body of Christ. Since the Renaissance, Christ's crucified body has appeared as less and less violated and

suffering. On a different time scale, from the 18th century onwards, the illustrations of the Bible have become less and less violent, as Max Engammare argues. As we can learn from the discussion of the people showing the stigmata of Christ in the 19th and 20th centuries, the mystical identification with the bodily suffering of Christ did not completely disappear, even though a secularized view of the body and a different attitude towards the Christian tradition offered different possibilities for conceptualize one's body and one's relation to God.

Christian reflections on the soul and the body also strongly influenced the conceptualization of personal identity, as we can learn from Fernando Vidal's essay. Vidal traces the roots of modern attempts to locate a person's identity in the brain to the lasting discussion of theologians about resurrection and which parts of an individual will be resurrected. The secularized, utilitarian version of the idea of a resurrection of body and soul is represented by Jeremy Bentham in his concept of the *auto-icon*, discussed by Cyprian Blamires. Bentham suggests that the embalmed body of great minds might be exposed in shrines of science and knowledge to further the enlightenment of the popular spirit and aspiration to progress.

It is impossible to do justice to all eighteen essays in this review. I would therefore like to close with a few reflections on three other lines of argument in this volume, focussing on literary representations, penal practice, and medicine. The three essays on the body and violence within the realm of medical practice raise some very important questions. Through their reflections, we develop new insights into the application of violent means to make some 'deserving' bodies finally comply with normative ideas about the body (Beat Rüttimann). From the discussion of practitioners' ideas, we can start to understand the precarious language games and nonverbal interactions between patient and physician, do violence to both the patients and their doctors (Gérard Danou). And finally, the role of the medical expert performing autopsies is presented both as exerting 'violence' on the corpse – at least from the viewpoint of family members – and as repairing the consequences of previous violent attacks on the dead body (Timothy Harding/Romano La Harpe).

It is a strength of this volume that all the contributors avoid a linear, reductionist narrative. Moreover, there are many implicit cross-references between the individual essays. Issues, such as the conceptualization of the ways in which institutional settings structure the experience of the body, are looked at from different perspectives. The philosophical analysis, criticizing M. Foucault and P. Bourdieu, (Mark Hunyadi) is accompanied by a differentiated look at the discourses and practices of penal institutions. Four fine essays – on legal medicine in the early modern period (Alessandro Pastore), on the figure of the executioner (Michel Porret), on public executions in France in the 19th century (Laurence Guignard), and on the concentration camp experience (Jean-Claude Favez) – trace different institutionalized modes applied to the politically legitimized annihilation of human bodies and the links with the production of knowledge and discipline.

The essays dealing with the ways in which violence and the body is represented in literary writings suggest an increasing attempt to understand violence in pathological terms. The Medieval epic poem (Yasmina Föhr-Janssens) stands in stark contrast to the writings of Sade and their reception in the 20th century (Marcel Cottier) and to a novel by Émile Zola (Arielle Meyer). These three essays are certainly not intended to be comparative. From the reader's point of view, an additional element of comparison would have helped better to understand continuities and

ruptures in the representation of violence within specific contexts, such as the epic poetry discussing the challenges of warfare to the 'hero'.

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Gwenda Morgan, Peter Rushton, *Rogues, thieves and the rule of law. The problem of law enforcement in north-east England, 1718-1800*, London, UCL Press, 1998, xiii + 287 p., 17 tables, 12 illustrations, ISBN 1857281160.

Published studies of crime and punishment in eighteenth-century England have for the most part concentrated on London and its environs, so this study of crime, justice and punishment in north-east England is especially welcome. In this thoroughly researched book, Gwenda Morgan and Peter Rushton analyse patterns of prosecutions at the assizes courts and quarter sessions for the counties of Northumberland and Durham, as well as the separately governed cities of Newcastle and Berwick, noting both differences within the region and contrasts with other parts of England.

Contemporaries thought the north-east was a 'strange, wild and dangerous' place, where distance from London and the instability of the border with Scotland led to considerable lawlessness. In contrast, and following the arguments of Alan Macfarlane's study of the Smorthwait gang in the neighbouring county of Westmoreland in the late seventeenth century¹, Morgan and Rushton argue that the area was predominantly law-abiding: 'crime rates seem much lower than elsewhere... local methods of law enforcement, despite having to police a large, thinly populated territory, were surprisingly effective' (216). This, of course, raises the question of whether it is possible for historians at this remove to measure crime. Morgan and Rushton argue strongly, but not persuasively, that a quantitative analysis of the judicial records can, with due caution, provide a reasonably accurate indication of the level of crime committed, since other records which document crime, such as newspapers, do not report a significant number of crimes which were not prosecuted. This conclusion is undermined, however, by the point that newspapers tended to report crimes only after suspects had been arrested, and by evidence that most criminal accusations recorded in notebooks kept by justices of the peace (which rarely survive) were resolved without a formal prosecution; that many parts of this region were not served by resident justices (to whom criminal accusations were typically reported); and that despite strong traditions of riot and industrial unrest in this area few prosecutions for riot were initiated. The fact that most people, including law enforcement officials, preferred to respond to crime with negotiation rather than formal prosecution clearly calls into question the value of the formal judicial records in providing a reliable quantitative picture of the nature and extent of crime.

For the most part, patterns of prosecuted crime in the north-east were similar to those found in other parts of the country. Thefts predominated, with rural areas experiencing primarily thefts of animals, clothing, and ironware, including occasio-

¹ Macfarlane (1981).