



The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe

By Mitchell B. Merback

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Christ's Crucifixion is one of the most recognized images in Western culture, and it has come to stand as a universal symbol of both suffering and salvation. But often overlooked is the fact that ultimately the Crucifixion is a scene of capital punishment. Mitchell Merback reconstructs the religious, legal, and historical context of the Crucifixion and of other images of public torture. The result is a fascinating account of a time when criminal justice and religion were entirely interrelated and punishment was a visual spectacle devoured by a popular audience.

Merback compares the images of Christ's Crucifixion with those of the two thieves who met their fate beside Jesus. In paintings by well-known Northern European masters and provincial painters alike, Merback finds the two thieves subjected to incredible cruelty, cruelty that artists could not depict in their scenes of Christ's Crucifixion because of theological requirements. Through these representations Merback explores the ways audiences in early modern Europe understood images of physical suffering and execution. The frequently shocking works also provide a perspective from which Merback examines the live spectacle of public torture and execution and how audiences were encouraged by the Church and the State to react to the experience. Throughout, Merback traces the intricate and extraordinary connections among religious art, devotional practice, bodily pain, punishment, and judicial spectatorship.

Keenly aware of the difficulties involved in discussing images of atrocious violence but determined to make them historically comprehensible, Merback has written an informed and provocative study that reveals the rituals of medieval criminal justice and the visual experiences they engendered.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Pain and suffering are popular motifs in Western art. Indeed, the predominant Christian theme in medieval art is the Crucifixion of Christ. To understand better this ritualization of pain and death, Merback (art history, DePauw Univ.) attempts a serious study of the Crucifixion, the execution of the two thieves, torture, and the spectacle and ritual of punishment in medieval art. While the subject matter is gruesome and distasteful, this highly specialized study does bring to light symbolic meanings of the medieval depiction of pain and punishment, and Merback does a good job of explaining pain in the context of medieval life and philosophy. In the end, however, he's trying to do too much. Despite his efforts to tie together all the historical, theological, and social elements, the text ultimately meanders. Only for specialized academic collections. AKaren Ellis, Baldwin Boettcher Lib., Humble, TX
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Review

'This is a rich and learned book - whose lively contemplations make well-known images of the past pulsate vibrantly, as they must have done for some who viewed them half a millennium ago.' - TLS 'This powerful and well-illustrated work probes the relationship between images of the Crucifixion and the understanding of pain, suffering and justice - fascinating.' - History Today 'Merback's analysis is intelligent, stylishly written, and - theoretically informed - this imaginative study contain[s] chunks of extremely insightful analysis, which in combination with its sheer readability, makes it the best account of medieval penalty to come out in a very long time.' - Art History 'a well produced volume with excellent use of images, both black and white and colour, to embellish the text, but a reader will need a strong stomach to attempt to digest the material it contains. This is a horrific book, as it is intended to be.' - Art Newspaper 'This is a shocking and absorbing book, strikingly illustrated - Not for the squeamish.' - Good Book Guide 'Merback's scholarship ranges widely, and with ease.' - Church Times

About the Author

Mitchell B. Merback is associate professor of the history of art at Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* and editor of *Beyond the Yellow Badge: Anti-Judaism and Antisemitism in Medieval and Early Modern Visual Culture*.

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John Stanley:

The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe can be one of your beginning books that are good idea. All of us recommend that straight away because this reserve has good vocabulary that can increase your knowledge in vocab, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nonetheless delivering the information. The copy writer giving his/her effort to put every word into satisfaction arrangement in writing The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe but doesn't forget the main point, giving the reader the hottest in addition to based confirm resource facts that maybe you can be among it. This great information can easily draw you into fresh stage of crucial considering.

Kimberly Mason:

The book untitled The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe contain a lot of information on the item. The writer explains the girl idea with easy technique. The language is very clear to see all the people, so do certainly not worry, you can easy to read the item. The book was written by famous author. The author provides you in the new age of literary works. You can read this book because you can keep reading your smart phone, or gadget, so you can read the book inside anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can open their official web-site and order it. Have a nice go through.

Leroy Raymond:

Is it you who having spare time and then spend it whole day simply by watching television programs or just lying on the bed? Do you need something totally new? This The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe can be the answer, oh how comes? A fresh book you know. You are consequently out of date, spending your extra time by reading in this fresh era is common not a geek activity. So what these books have than the others?

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