Contestation Between Religions

Understanding the Horrors of the Theaetrum Crudelitatum Nostri Temporis

Ellie Thorson       April 8, 2020

Introducing the Theaetrum Crudelitatum Nostri Temporis

History of the Text
During the long and violent English Reformation, both Catholics and Protestants suffered for their faith. The torture and deaths of these martyrs became a source of propaganda for both sides.

Published in 1592, the *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis* is thought to be the Catholic response to the Protestant John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, which was published twenty-four years prior.

While there is much speculation around the *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis*, it is certain that this book served doubly as devotional work and propaganda during the late fifteen-hundreds.

Much of the history of this book revolves around the biography of the author. In other words; in order to understand the *Theatrum Crudelitatum* it is necessary to understand the author.

**History of the Author**

The *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis* was written and illustrated by an Anglo-Dutch, Catholic named Richard Verstegan.

Richard Verstegan studied English at Oxford University without obtaining a degree. It is thought that he left due to his religious beliefs.

After leaving university, Verstegan worked for a time as a propagandist for the Catholic Duke of Guise, Henry I, a leader of the anti-Protestant faction in the French Wars of Religion.

In the mid-1580s, Richard Verstegan settled in Antwerp, Belgium where he published and illustrated this book of horrors.
Place and History

Place and history go hand in hand when considering the *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis*, which in turn allows the reader to develop a deeper understanding of the text.

The setting of this rare text takes place in multiple countries throughout the European continent. Those places can be seen in the map to the right.

As we dive deeper into this horrifying book, we will travel to each place where certain tortures were inflicted upon the heretics. There, you will find the English translation of the text, notes regarding certain tortures and the unique qualities the *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis* offers.

So, without further ado, follow along as we discover the rich history and places tied to this book of horrors!
Preface

Majority of the Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis is written in dactylic hexameter; the same form of poetry Homer uses in the Iliad. This form of writing is extremely apparent within the preface, suggesting it is meant to be read out loud, just as a poem would. Unfortunately, dactylic hexameter doesn't work as well when being translated from Latin to English. This is due to the flexibility within Latin. Latin is more flexible with word order and often there are few exact word parallels with English. Below is a translated portion of the preface.

What is Dactylic Hexameter?

A Translation

"You whoever will come into this theater desiring to witness a spectacle, Remember first that you harden yourself, and that your eyes be firm To themselves, lest the spectacles of our cast offend you being astonished, Lest an unaccustomed horror torment, and visions not before foretold for viewing. No actors vow laughter to amuse minds with some novelty Nor do our pulpits promise salty wit, Nor will our story be played in comic dress: The orchestra will
not present the faithless family of the Pelops, Or the fates or that savage family of Oedipus, Nor the discordant funeral pyre at Ogygia (Cerci), nor the one seeking Dire hospitality and the avenger, Hecuba, the avenger of her own son. But this scene will concern the great task of virtue Surpassing Sophocles’ drama in seriousness. Through slaughters, torments, tortures, through chains, flames and into the sky The journey will be spread, where the high path leads And bloody paces wear out your feet. Thus God, the creator of nature, exhausts the disciples whom he has chosen from all numbers and he shapes them and with the serious habit of a father Who, in no light fashion, raises beloved children and he hardens them Having been accustomed to torments and by that example he makes them worthy of himself and makes them heirs of his kingdom."

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**Torture in England**
The title page of this section translates to: 'The Description of Cruelty and Brutality of the English Schismatics during the reign of King Henry the VIII. A specific and particular description.' It is then accompanied by two bible verses; Romans 11 and Psalm 78.

**Time Period**

For this section of the book, the English were under the rule of King Henry the VIII.

**The Torture**

There are many other tortures throughout the English portion of the *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis*. Found
on page twenty-five, the image below depicts the beheading of the countess of Salisbury for having testified and having born witness to the truth. The "truth" referring to the Catholic church.

The poem below the engraving translates to: 'No honor is given on earth to prophets by their own people, Yet what a shame and disgrace it is to the city, Which ignores how to shield from the sword men most famous by virtue, But cruelly slaughters her inmates however noble? Neither sparing the neck of the guiltless nor the head of the sacred, Thus spreading the fame of her rage all over the world.'

**Highlighted Features**
Click the highlighted section of the map (right) to unveil interesting features the *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis* offers.

Tortures in France
This title page translates to: 'Certain horrible crimes of cruelty in Gaul having been done against the Catholics by those people called the Huguenots from that time when at first they rebelled against the King in the year 1562.' It is then accompanied by bible verse Ezekiel 2, which reads: “You therefore, o son of man, lest you fear them or their speeches, since they are incredulous people and traitors among you, and you live with scorpions.’

**Time Period**

This section of the book takes place around the year of 1562 under the reign of King Charles the IX.

**The Torture**
Just as the English section of this book, the French portion has endless amounts of horrifying tortures. Found on page fifty-three of the *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis* we find an engraving of certain huguenots being tortured alive. On the previous page there is a key corresponding to each letter found in the engraving. These letters describe, in detail, what the torture is. Those translations can be found underneath the image below.
“A. The shamelessness and barbarity of a certain Huguenot was so great that he made for himself a necklace from the ears of priests, in the presence of important people the army openly exalted in this as if it were a valorous deed.

B. From many holy people who serve god, they cut off many noses and ears and dug out their eyes.

C. Of a certain priest when he was alive, they opened his belly with a sword. And oats were placed in a manger and they offered fodder to his horse.

D. (Many Martyrs) Of the heretic city Nîmes in Languedoc, they murdered with daggers and they submerged them very deeply half-dead in a large well in that same city and in two ways they (killed) the same man.”

**Highlighted Features**

Click the highlighted section of the map (right) to unveil interesting features the *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis*
Tortures in the Netherlands

Time Period

During this section of the text, The Netherlands was not a country yet. In fact, The Netherlands did not become a country until 1648. However, by using context clues within the text of the title page, we are able to understand when and where these specific torture took place. Below is an image of the title page coupled by a translation.
"A specific description of certain cruel things done by the rebellious sycophants of Calvin who are commonly called the sea beggars committed in Belgium under the usurped authority of William of Nassau, Prince of Orange, the hostile tyrant of the Divine God against the Catholic Church, and who has well earned his title as a rebel against his natural, legitimate king." The title is then accompanied by Psalm 105.

The Torture

In this specific torture, a person is bound by ropes and laid on their back. A dish is then turned over, covering living rats and fastened to the abdomen. A fire is lit on top of the reversed dish. The heat from the fire becomes too much for the rats and they begin to bite and
dig their way through the abdomen to escape the heat. Below is the engraving.

**Highlighted Features**

Click the highlighted section of the map (right) to unveil interesting features the *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis* offers.
Tortures in Ireland

(And Parts of England)
"The Descriptions of the English Inquisition and of the cruel Machiavellian crimes committed in England and Ireland by Calvinist Protestants, under Elizabeth who is still reigning." The title is then followed by two scriptures; Psalm 43 and 101.

**Time Period**

This final section of the text takes place under Queen Elizabeth, who is still reigning. The English Inquisition of the late sixteenth-century is in full force.

**The Torture**
Just as the other sections of this book, this specific section contains many engravings depicting horrifying tortures on Catholic martyrs. Found on page eighty-one, the engraving depicts an image of a man by the name of Dormitius Hurle. In the engraving, Dormitius Hurle is placed in a type of foot hold, while boots soaked in oil are placed on his feet. A fire is then lit, consuming both the boots and his flesh. He was then later hanged. The engraving can be found below.
Click the highlighted section of the map (right) to unveil interesting features the *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis* offers.

**Lasting Effects**

As we have seen, the *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis* is certainly a unique book. This relatively small book of horrors has left an impact and continues to leave and impact on many historians of all types and genres. Within it’s pages we have found endless stories to be told and stories to be learned; whether they be stories of history, contentions between religions, or the remembrance of martyrs. Whatever the story, whatever the lesson, the *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis* has created a space where we, as humans, are allowed a factual view into the world in which it was created. Through this text, we are able to learn from history and apply its teachings to our lives today.
Credits

Images of the book are provided through Utah State University Special Collections and Archives under Col. number 473.

All translations were provided by the Utah State University Latin Lab under the direction of Dr. Mark Damen as well as historian Dr. Norman Jones.

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