

Anuradha Gobin

## Death Ambushed: Sex, Fertility and Laughter in the Shadow of Pained Bodies

The bodies of criminals who had committed particularly egregious crimes were moved to the gallows fields, located just beyond the city walls, following execution in the Dutch Republic. This was meant to serve as a warning that criminal or perceived deviant behavior would not be tolerated by authorities. Given the presence of decomposing human remains, it is thus striking that the edges of city limits attracted large numbers of the public. People would gather not only to visit the gallows as a site of display of authority over criminal actions, but also to play games and enjoy leisure activities with family, friends and strangers. The site and the activities occurring there were frequently represented in a range of genres and media. The edges of the city, therefore, offered a place for diverse groups of people of varying social status and backgrounds to mix and interact with each other while still remaining literally in the shadow of pain and torture. This article examines examples of images that recorded the liminal spaces outside the city walls and considers the manner in which the punished criminal body came to be framed in relation to the leisure activities that occurred there. It also interrogates the use of unsanctioned actions at the gallows as a means by which concerns over the tortured body in pain could be mediated.