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Symposium: The Sacred Body in Law and Literature - Introduction

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Symposium
The Sacred Body in Law and Literature

Introduction

In this issue, the Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities features many of the papers given at our April 1994 symposium, The Sacred Body in Law and Literature. The symposium drew together literary, theological, and legal scholars to examine, from a variety of perspectives, the intersection between “sacred” bodies and various realms of order.

Over one hundred people attended the symposium, held on April 2nd at the Whitney Humanities Center at Yale University. The symposium papers were divided among three panels. The first panel, entitled “The Body Politic,” was moderated by Reva Siegel and focused on social and legal methods of constraint and compulsion placed on the human body. Julia Epstein explored historical conceptions of the pregnant female body, and Jonathan Weinberg investigated connections between homosexuality, art, and the law.

The second panel, “The Scriptural Body,” included Ronald R. Garet’s examination of gnostic ideas and jurisprudential notions of privacy, and Richard Leppert’s consideration of the spectacle of Christ’s corpse. Jim Rossi read Kenneth Morrison’s paper, which
discussed the concept of the sacred body and embodiment in Yaqui Catholicism. Wayne Meeks served as moderator for this panel.

In the final session, participants analyzed aspects of "The Gendered Body" with the assistance of moderator M. Shawn Copeland. Ruth Colker developed her idea of an embodied bisexual perspective, while Richard Rambuss drew connections between John Donne, homosexuality, and law. Linda C. McClain examined the importance of images of the temple and the castle for legal conceptions of the inviolability of the female body.

Many individuals and institutions kindly contributed to the success of this conference. In particular, the Journal would like to thank the Whitney Humanities Center, Yale Law School, and Yale University, particularly its Departments of French, English, Comparative Literature, Renaissance Studies, American Studies, and History. Much necessary aid was given by past and present Journal members, especially James Anderson, Mary Bly, Carmine Boccuzzi, Rima Canaan, Michael Fehner, and Jim Rossi. The Journal would also like to acknowledge Alan Freeman and Elizabeth Mensch, who were unable to attend the conference at the last moment.

By presenting the following papers, some of which have been substantially revised, we hope to introduce our readership to the intriguing and diverse ideas that were exchanged at the symposium and to create new opportunities for dialogue.

*The Editors*