

# **The Spaces of Renaissance Anatomy Theater**

Edited by

**Leslie R. Malland**

University of Texas Permian Basin

**Series on the History of Science**



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After the 2020 *Renaissance Society of America* conference was postponed due to COVID, William Whitehead reached out to me with an invitation to assemble an edited collection of essays themed around my planned conference panel, “Amputation, Queer Anatomy, and Winter Cadavers from Italy to England.” This project came together through our common interest in anatomy: the spaces of intersections within the anatomy theater - such as botany and anatomy, - aspects of gender present in anatomical discourse and images, and our shared interest in the physical body and its parts. Thus, this project would not be possible without the support and encouragement of William Whitehead, Javier Rodriguez, Victoria Echegaray, and Argiris Legatos of Vernon Press. I am thankful for each scholar and all their hard work for this collection. I am also thankful for Emily DeHaven, Whitney Sperrazza, Emily Shortslef, Joyce G. MacDonald, and Lauren Cagle for their expertise and guidance.

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# Introduction: Defining the Spaces of Renaissance Anatomy Theater

This collection offers insight into the myriad of conversations taking place in and around Renaissance anatomy theaters. The *space* of Renaissance Anatomy is not solely in the physical theater. As this collection demonstrates, the *space* of the theater encompasses every aspect of Renaissance culture, from its education systems, art, and writing to its concepts of identity, citizenship, and the natural world. Renaissance anatomy theaters were spaces of intersection that influenced every aspect of their cultures, and scholars should broaden their concept of anatomy theaters to include more than the physical space of the theater. Instead, we should approach the anatomy theaters as spaces where cultural expression is influenced by the hands-on study of human cadavers.

The primary materials for this book present a telling indication of the increasing importance and pervasiveness of medicalized representations of the body in early modern culture at large. We examine not just the power that anatomy itself swayed over society, but the power of the anatomist to codify terminology and establish societal norms, thus, disciplining spaces beyond the anatomy theater, beyond the public sphere, and into the bedrooms and private lives of citizens. Many of our scholars turn to Jonathan Sawday's influential work, *The Body Emblazoned*, as a building block for discussion. In *The Body Emblazoned*, Jonathan Sawday shows how anatomical study fashions a new image of the human interior in the Early Modern period and argues that this leads to a reconfiguration of self-hood. In addition, Sawday argues, "because of the old correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm...the anatomists, then, interprets not just the corpse on the dissection table, but through that corpse he begins to interpret the world itself."<sup>1</sup> He views anatomies with a Foucauldian lens when he asserts, "the anatomist is not simply a disinterested investigator of the natural world; he is fully implicated, as the extension of the law's revenge, in the re-assertion of

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Sawday, "Bodies by Art Fashioned: Anatomy, Anatomists and English Poetry 1570-1680." (PhD Diss, University of London, 1988): 16.

the rights of sovereign power over the body of the condemned criminal.”<sup>2</sup> Building from this approach, we continue to situate the theater as a space of discipline, knowledge acquisition, and empirical understanding where early moderns used anatomy as a lens for better understanding themselves and the world itself.

In addition to Sawday’s work, we build upon critics such as Gail Kern Paster, Katharine Park, Michael Schoenfeldt, Andrea Carlino, and Nancy G. Siraisi. Each chapter demonstrates a thorough review of relevant literature to present a new and unique approach to the anatomy theater’s role in Renaissance society. Padua in Italy is often viewed as the central hub for anatomical study throughout much of the Renaissance. Even before commissioning the first permanent anatomy theater, the University of Padua had a very old and illustrious tradition of anatomical education: “Annual anatomies (that is, dissections) became part of the formal academic curriculum” in the fourteenth century, and “[s]tatutes of the arts and medicine branch of the University of Padua, dating 1465, refer to the annual anatomy as a well-established practice.”<sup>3</sup> The earliest anatomies took place in the houses of professors or students, and even after the first anatomy theater was built, anatomical demonstrations would take place in a variety of locations, including churches, pharmaceutical venues, and temporary theaters. Padua received its study material from executions and hospitals. People were eager to study the human body and challenge long-held traditions of anatomical research, so the occasional grave robbery took place.

In England, the Barber-Surgeons were established as a guild in 1540 and began anatomies whereas the College of Physicians was established by a Charter of 1518, but it did not receive bodies for dissection until 1565 through an order by Queen Elizabeth.<sup>4</sup> Because of Thomas Vicary’s service to Henry VIII’s gangrenous wound, the Company of Barbers and Surgeons was granted four bodies a year from Tyburn for the purpose of dissection by Henry’s 1540 Act of Parliament. This act was later extended by James I to six bodies per year.

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Sawday, “The Fate of Marsyas: Dissecting the Renaissance Body,” *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture c. 1540-1660*. Edited by Lucy Gent and Nigel Llewellyn. (Reaktion Books, 1990), pp. 111-35: 116.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval & Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990): 88; Klestinec, “A History of Anatomy Theaters in Sixteenth Century Padua,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 59, no. 4 (2004): 394.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the history of England’s Company of Barbers and Surgeons, see their website at [barberscompany.org](http://barberscompany.org).

As a result, Vicary became the first Master of the Company of Barbers and Surgeons. Dr. Caius was “the first man to lecture in public on the new anatomical methods of Vesalius...He began a series of lectures in the Barber-Surgeons’ Hall in 1546 at the personal request of Henry VIII.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, Henry VIII remained directly involved in the lectures of the Barber-Surgeons after granting the bodies for dissection.

Like the Barber-Surgeons, the College of Physicians was eventually granted bodies for dissection. As the translators of William Harvey’s *Prelectiones Anatomiae Universalis* note, the lectures of the College of Physicians were a direct result of an endowment from Queen Elizabeth in 1581.<sup>6</sup> In fact, all power endowed upon anatomists stems from the sovereign.<sup>7</sup> By sponsoring anatomies, the sovereign vicariously establishes the “truth” about the human body that anatomists discover. Italy and Spain quickly developed anatomical programs in universities in stride with anatomy’s growing popularity across Europe. While anatomists were acting as agents of the sovereign in a public and political deployment of punishment, they were actively researching the bodies granted to them in order to discover knowledge of the human body. *The Space of Renaissance Anatomy Theater* locates how the advancement of anatomical research influenced European culture within the space of the theater, spaces of justice, spaces of education, and more.

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<sup>5</sup> Antonia McClean. *Humanism and the Rise of Science in Tudor England*. (New York: Neale Watson Academic Publications, Inc., 1972): 196.

<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Harvey took over these lectures in 1615 (3-6). The College required Harvey to “dissect and lecture on the trunk and all the organs contained therein at the end of his second year (1617), on the head only at the end of the third year (1618), and on the leg and arm, with special reference to the muscles, sinews, and ligaments, at the end of the fourth year (1619)” (Charles D. O’Malley, F.N.L. Poynter, and K.F. Russell, “Introduction,” *Lectures on the Whole of Anatomy*. Translated by Charles D. O’Malley, F.N.L. Poynter, and K.F. Russell, [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961], pp. 1-19: 8-9).

<sup>7</sup> Florike Egmond’s work finds that “neither [executions nor public dissections] could have taken place without the active involvement of the authorities - who, after all, not only arrested, sentenced and executed, but also provided the physicians with dead bodies, contributed in various ways to the construction of the anatomy theaters, and sanctioned the public dissections with their presence” (“Execution, Dissection, Pain and Infamy- A Morphological Investigation,” in *Bodily Extremities: Preoccupations with the Human Body in Early Modern European Culture*, edited by Florike Egmond and Robert Zwijnenberg. [Ashgate, 2003], pp. 92-127), 123.

## Chapter Summaries

This collection is organized in three sections, each divided by unique artwork that adds visually compelling evidence to our written words. The first section, “The Intersections of Anatomy Theaters and Universities,” investigates the educational spaces of anatomy theater. Those three chapters discuss the circulation of anatomical material, the relationship between the supply and demand of university cadavers, and the development of anatomy on the Iberian Peninsula. Chapter One traces the story of the anatomical tables that John Evelyn bought during a study trip in Padua and details their popularity. In this chapter, Giulia Mari argues that the level of celebrity achieved by these unique anatomical curiosities in learned and, most importantly, in non-learned circles, reflects how “medical knowledge could be and indeed was organically integrated into the early modern world” (2). Her work offers a unique contribution to the study of medical artifacts and their influence in early modern society.

Chapter Two challenges Jonathan Sawday’s assertion as the theater as a space of justice by investigating the supply in criminal bodies from the administrator of local justice in Italy. David Soulier studies a valuable question in the history of anatomical research: how many bodies could an anatomist procure for dissections and lectures? He notes, the “condition of supply turned out to be so problematic that the selection criteria of anatomical material were not aimed at local criminal bodies and the anatomists had to pass through literal underground means...the difficulties the anatomists encountered in obtaining cadavers to dissect reflects a difference in fascination with death between academic world and State power” (26). The answers to his questions beg us to rethink the relationship between science and justice within the space of the Renaissance anatomy theater and to “redefine the space of anatomy theater in Renaissance Italy as dedicated to science and/or justice by taking into account the availability of the anatomical material from acts of justice” (26). Soulier offers archival research that reflects the supply and demand trends in Italian anatomical studies.

Carlos Alves examines the educational spaces affiliated with anatomical study in Spain and Portugal in Chapter Three. He sheds new light on the economic and educational considerations universities undertook to develop the study of anatomy on the Iberian Peninsula. Alves conducted extensive archival research and elegant translations of primary texts to share the universities’ history, including the importance of the proximity of the anatomy theater to the hospital and cemetery, transportation costs, and textbook selections. He finds “a significant development of anatomical studies in Coimbra and Salamanca from the fifteenth century until much of the next, although it was marked by some problems. Both Universities, during this

period, managed to modernize their teaching, getting it closer to the main European centers” (66). This original work offers an important contribution to the study of Western anatomical research and education.

The second group of chapters makes up the section “Spaces for Female Bodies in Anatomy Theaters.” Though living females were excluded from the anatomy theaters, their cadavers were readily welcomed. Chapter Four locates correlations between the blazon as a textual form and the eroticizing of female executions through anatomical descriptions. Jennifer Lodine-Chaffey rediscovers a classic poem by Edward May to argue that May effectually silences the woman burned at the stake by partitioning her body, interpreting her physical reactions, and employing her corpse as an emblem of martyrdom. Building upon Chapter Four, Chapter Five argues that anatomical research furthered the suppression and oppression of women and their bodies. Malland finds evidence in the anatomy manuals of Andreas Vesalius, Thomas Raynalde, and others, and she applies biopolitical theories from Michel Foucault to argue, “early modern England witnesses state-authorized agents collecting knowledge from female cadavers that they codify into medical terminology in a new regime of knowledge whose audience is educated, wealthy men. In turn, those men (many members of court) use this knowledge to uphold beliefs about women’s inferiority” (105). These two chapters share a particular interest in the male-dominance of not only female bodies, but interpretations of female bodies.

Chapter Six introduces the final and longest section, “The Anatomy Theater as a Space for Understanding the World.” Gilad Gutman helps us understand Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* and the Midland Revolts of 1607 through the lens of anatomy theater, tracing the steps from the outer layers of the city to the inner layers of *Coriolanus*’ body, somographically replicating the steps of an anatomical demonstration. His chapter “considers the enclosures [of land and city spaces] as a long-standing phenomenon and their relation to the social space of the dissected body in the anatomical demonstrations, situating this relation within a network of spatial relations in early modern England, through which *Coriolanus* constructs the Roman body politic” (110). He expertly cites historical documents alongside Shakespeare to offer both a historical and literary perspective.

Chapters Seven and Eight offer not just a thorough reading of Montaigne, but also beautiful translations of evidence from the texts. Elizabeth Anne Kirby’s translations and contextualization of Montaigne’s words work to seamlessly reflect Montaigne’s interests in skin, nakedness, and boundaries as Montaigne and readers alike try to make sense of the human body’s relation to the world around it. Kirby reads Montaigne’s *Essais* alongside artistic renditions of “The Flaying of Marsyas” to craft a discussion of artistic expression, written words,

and the various spaces where skin is laid bare. The final offers exquisite insight into the emerging importance of botanical gardens alongside anatomy theaters: “The theater was open for anyone who wanted to learn about the human body, themselves, wondrous aspects of nature, or God through both observation and contemplation, with both dissections and the collection of curiosity” (176). Universities began using the anatomy theaters to better understand botany, their relationship to the natural world, and their relationship to God. Kaleigh Hunter reveals how studies of the natural world were approached in The Netherlands during the sixteenth century, especially the ones of the botanical garden and anatomy theater.

The Conclusion to this collection offers a look forward at where anatomical research can lead us as we consider various spaces of intersection. Thus, this collection situates itself within the space of the Renaissance anatomy theater and locates cultural intersections from within that space, looking outward to spaces beyond the theater to identify the cultural impacts of anatomical research in Europe throughout the sixteenth century.

## Chapter 1

# Let His Body be Unburi'd: The *Tabulae Evelinianae* and the Allegory of the Anatomized Body in Early Modern England

Giulia Mari

*Independent Researcher*

**Abstract:** Giovanni Leoni d'Este prepared the *Tabulae Evelinianae* during his time as a dissector for the Professor of Anatomy at the University of Padua. The tables are currently owned by the Royal College of Surgeons and are on display in Hunterian Museum in London. This chapter looks at the *Tabulae Evelinianae*, unique anatomical tables of veins, arteries, and nerves that John Evelyn brought back from a period of study in Italy in the 1640s, following the paper trail that they left in their journey from anatomical specimens to celebrated curiosities. This chapter discusses the tables alongside other cultural products that demonstrate the pervasiveness that medicalized representations of the body stemming from universities had in early modern culture at large.

**Keywords:** John Evelyn, Evelyn Tables, Medical Curiosities, Anatomical Specimens

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### Introduction

In the winter of 1645-46, twenty-five-year-old John Evelyn, at the time in the midst of his European Grand Tour, spent Shrovetide – the last cathartic celebration before the beginning of Lent – in Venice, a city famous for its extravagant Carnival celebrations. A week into Lent, Evelyn took his leave from Venice and returned to Padua – where he had enrolled in the university over the previous summer, receiving his *matricula* on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1645 – in order

“to be present at the famous anatomy lecture, celebrated [there] with extraordinary apparatus, lasting almost a whole month.”<sup>1</sup>

Using this crucial part of John Evelyn's Grand Tour as a starting point, this chapter closely follows the acquisition, return to England, and subsequent history of the rare tables of veins and nerves, unique and fascinating anatomical souvenirs that Evelyn purchased during his time in Padua. The story of the tables' enthusiastic reception in the upper echelons of the early modern London society is paired with a reading of excerpts from Phineas Fletcher's *The Purple Island*, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, and William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* – extraordinary literary works that merge allegorical poetry with masterful anatomical knowledge and painstaking somatic descriptions. Positioning itself at the intersection of history of medicine, material culture, and literary studies, this chapter discusses the burgeoning relevance that anatomical investigations and discourses gathered in medical and, crucially, non-medical circles in England throughout the early modern period, proving that medical knowledge could be and indeed was organically integrated into the early modern vision of the world.

### **'At the foot of the gallows': A Brief History of Anatomical Investigations in Early Modern England**

Anatomy was a topic of enormous fascination in the seventeenth century, and historians have extensively mapped the demand in bodies to be anatomized for educational purposes, starting in the sixteenth century, and exponentially increasing after 1600. One of the first institutions to be granted access to cadavers was the Edinburgh Guild of Surgeons and Barbers, which in 1505 started receiving one body per year. In London in 1540, Henry VIII enshrined the surgeons' right to

have and take, without contradiction, four persons condemned adjudged and put to death for felony by the due order of the King's laws of [the] realm for anatomies [...] to make incision of the same dead bodies [...] for the further and better knowledge, instruction, insight, learning, and experience in the said science or faculty of surgery.<sup>2</sup>

Another four bodies among those of the criminals hanged at Tyburn were allocated to the capital's physicians for the same purpose. Andrew Cunningham

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<sup>1</sup> Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, 215.

<sup>2</sup> Cunningham, *The Anatomist Anatomis'd*, 224 (citing George Charles Peachey, *A Memoir of William and John Hunter* [Plymouth: William Brendon and Son, 1924]), 2: 4.

argues that the right to the eight bodies was exercised irregularly during the sixteenth century. By the seventeenth century, however, anatomies were much more regularly performed, and “other City guilds and companies, including the butchers, the tailors, and the wax chandlers, seem to have had a more than passing interest in obtaining bodies to develop the (lucrative) skills of embalming.”<sup>3</sup> The fear of becoming the subject of a post-mortem dissection gradually became ingrained in society as punishment even worse than the hanging itself. Such fear was capitalized on for its potential to act as a deterrent against the most heinous crimes, and in 1751 the English Parliament passed the Murder Act, instituting the practice of “penal dissection” and stating that “in no case whatsoever shall the body of any [executed] murderer be suffered to be buried,” destining such corpses for anatomies or to be hanged in chains for the crowds to behold, reintroducing “to the spectrum of punishment available to the authorities something of the spectacle of [Elizabethan and Jacobean] public dismemberment.”<sup>4</sup> In the same year, William Hogarth concluded his series *The Four Stages of Cruelty* with an engraving entitled “The Reward of Cruelty” that shows Tom Nero, the protagonist of the series, being dissected in the Cutlerian theater near Newgate prison, his bowels carelessly shoved in a large bucket and his stomach bitten into by a dog, an ever-present animal in dissection engravings (Figure 1.1).

In much different fashion but similar spirit, in 1759, the Master of Anatomy at the Royal College of Surgeons discussed the “moral role of anatomy” in one of his lectures.<sup>5</sup> Not only was dissection now being used as an “added dimension to capital punishment,” but through the enactment of the Murder Act, “[t]he criminal could, even after the point of death, be made to perform a public service” by contributing to the advancement of medical and anatomical knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Despite this widespread fear of being subjected to dissection, throughout the early modern period and into the eighteenth century “viewers [...] were absolutely fascinated by it,” displaying on the one hand “loathing for those who came to the foot of the gallows in order to claim the dead for science,” and on the other, “intense interest” for the object and methods of their investigation.<sup>7</sup> Anatomical lectures were open to the public and while title pages such as that of Vesalius’s *Fabrica* or images such as

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<sup>3</sup> Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, 57.

<sup>4</sup> Cunningham, *The Anatomist Anatomis'd*, 225.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>6</sup> Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, 55.

<sup>7</sup> Cunningham, *The Anatomist Anatomis'd*, 226; Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, 59.

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