THE BODY EMBLAZONED

Dissection and the human body in Renaissance culture

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THE REALM OF ANATOMIA

Dissecting people

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MYTHS OF DIVISION AND ORIGIN

Anatomia was a woman. We have already seen her allegorized and enthroned on the title-page of Julius Casserius' Tabulae anatomicae of 1627 (Figure 7), where she sits flanked by Diligentia and Ingenium, holding a mirror and a skull: an elaboration on the traditional vanitas figure. In the engraving of the Leiden anatomy theatre, Anatomia is present in the guise of the two women who have visited the theatre, one of whom carries a plumed mirror, whilst the other surveys a flayed human skin (Figure 5). Much later, in the seventeenth century, we see her at work on her art on the title-page of Theodor Kerckring's Spicilegium anatomicum (Amsterdam, 1670) (Figure 22). As she flays a suspended male figure, putti offer her scythed corn, as though attempting to distract her from her business.1 Pausing only to note their offerings, flaying knife in hand, she continues with her task of revealing the inner man—preferring the role of goddess of knowledge to that of Ceres, goddess of fertility. On the title-page of Govard Bidloo's Anatomia humani corporis of 1685, Anatomia is revealed by Time, who draws back the curtain to show her enthroned, once more, and holding a scalpel, as Fame celebrates her prowess, and her assistants (three small putti) study a skull, a dissected arm, and an anatomical engraving.2

The attributes of Anatomia—the knife and the mirror—return us to the Medusa myth, and that structure of reflective glances and reductive instruments associated with the donations of Athené and Hermes to Perseus—the hunter of the Medusa. The title-page of Casserius' Tabulae anatomicae (Figure 7) indicates the extent to which Anatomia, emblematically, inherited the attributes of Athené. The mirror which she balances on her knee allows the onlooker to see the skull, in just the same way that Perseus could see (and defeat) the Medusa with the help of Athené's polished shield. Like a personification of Justice, Anatomia stands equil poised, a scalpel in lieu of a sword, fulfilling her role in the anatomy theatre as an extension of the Law.
THE BODY EMBLAZONED

But, as we have also seen in the writings of Gascoigne, Donne, Nashe, Davies of Hereford, and Lovelace, Anatomia was also a mistress of erotic reduction - a fantasy expression of male surrender - whose chief attribute was the power to divide. As such, she may be associated with other Renaissance figures of division - all of them female once more - who are invocations of doubleness: Cowley's Alecto, in his abandoned epic The Civil War, or Spenser's Ate in The Faerie Queene. The function of both Alecto and Ate was the ability to cause a bifurcation or dissection of entities which were once whole and united. So, Anatomia's origins were doubled. She was, on the one hand, a figure whose ancestry might be traced back to benign images of justice, prudence, and wisdom - goddesses associated with Apollo, the god of clear sight, and Hermes, the god of understanding, interpretation, and healing. The association of Anatomia with Apollo, however, alerts us to her iconological role in her darker form, as the deity of reductive division; it was Apollo who punished the satyr Marsyas by flaying him - a story made familiar in the Renaissance by Ovid (Metamorphosis VI.384-5). In her darker form, too, she was associated with the fury Alecto, daughter of Zeus in the Aeneid (VIII.323ff.) who appears in the Iliad (XIX.91-4) as Ate - a dream-inducing and protean figure.

This ancestry of Anatomia - with its negative and positive aspects - seems to express the ambivalent status of anatomy in early-modern culture that we have already explored through images, rituals, architecture, and literary texts. At which point, though, did the female deity Anatomia become separated from a male progenitor? As recounted in Hesiod, the first anatomy was also a birth: Hermes split open the head of Zeus to release Athene. But it was surely Jove/Jahweh/Zeus (as Renaissance commentators remind us) who performed the first anatomical division of the human creature in order, paradoxically, to create anatomical difference. In Plato's Symposium we read that the founding moment of all difference, the creation of the attraction of both opposites and similarities, originated in the divine anatomical separation performed by Zeus in exasperation at the insolence of humanity which was originally a tri-sexed and spherical species. Zeus, as Aristophanes recounts, found a means of preserving the human race by making them weaker: 'I will cut each of them in two... they shall walk upright on two legs. If there is any sign of wantonness in them after that, and they will not keep quiet, I will bisect them again, and they shall hop on one leg.'

But, of course, Zeus never went that far, contenting himself with a bisection assisted by Apollo who positioned the face of the newly formed creature so that 'having the evidence of the bisection before his eyes he [sic] might behave better in future'. Was this the first moral anatomical demonstration? Certainly, it was the first encounter with that other 'half' which was to haunt the European literary imagination in the Renaissance. The
THE REALM OF ANATOMIA

Aristophanic fable, interpreted with the help of Christian Neoplatonic exegesis, became a key text of origin to Renaissance commentators; a narrative of division in which could be located the origin of sexual difference. In the judaeo-Christian tradition, too, *Anatomia* as a function of the deity’s creative power makes a fleeting appearance at the moment of human sexual origin. As the story was told in Genesis, God’s first intervention in the life of his human creature was the act of separation by which the body was opened, its integrity disturbed, in order to produce sexual difference. As Mieke Bal has persuasively argued, it is important to realize that the creation of sexual difference in Genesis does not of necessity need us to posit the priority of male over female. The first body, that of *ha’adam* was ‘unique and undivided ... the body of the earth creature’. Possessing no mark of sexual differentiation, *ha’adam* waited for sexuality to be conferred upon it through its maker’s intervention:

it is the tension between the *same* and the *different* that creates sexuality. The earth-being has to be severed, separated from part of itself in order for the ‘other half’ of what will then be left to come into existence.

In Bal’s account of the origin of sexual differentiation, as it was told in the Genesis myth, we can trace the shadowy outlines of a series of chronologically later, interlocking stories of separation and division. The creature which waited in a trance-like state (akin to Christ before the Resurrection), had to be ‘separated from part of itself’ by Jahweh, a division which allowed it to live and witness its own separation. This separation ‘from part of itself’ was echoed in Ovid’s version of the Marsyas myth, at the point when Apollo’s flaying prompted the satyr’s agonized cry: ‘Quid me mihi detrahis?’ – a phrase which may be translated as ‘Who is it that tears me from myself?’

The story of the punishment of Marsyas is easily understood as a tale of both separation and origin. The attraction of the Marsyas myth for Renaissance artists lay not only in the scope it afforded for exploring the human figure in anatomically explicit contortions, but in its affinity with Dionysian ordeals, reinterpreted within a scriptural framework, which could then be understood as a paradigm of the artist’s own self-figuration. The duel between Marsyas and Apollo was, after all, a test of skill – *techne* – in which each strove to outdo the other in the production of art. Marsyas, having lost to the superior *techne* of Apollo, was then transformed into the matter of art. But, as Edgar Wind has observed, the story also expressed the process ‘by which the terrestrial Marsyas was tortured so that the heavenly Apollo might be crowned’. Understood thus, the Marsyas story can be related to Christian agonies of the passion – the torture of the mortal God who was then reborn in his divinity. Titian’s *Flaying of Marsyas* (c. 1570–5), now in the Archiepiscopal palace at Kremsier, is the most famous painterly rendition of the
story which has come down to us. But the theme was attempted by Giulio Romano (c. 1526), Raphael in his fresco in the Stanza della Segnatura in the Vatican (c. 1510), and Melchior Meier (c. 1581).

As Arthur Golding retold the Marsyas myth in his 1567 translation of Ovid, the agony of living anatomical reduction was evoked in all its horror:

For all his crying ore his eares quight pulled was his skin.
Nought else he was than one whole wounde. The griesly bloud did spin
From every part, his sinewes lay discovered to the eye,
The quierving veynes without a skin lay beating nakedly.
The panting bowels in his bulke ye might have numbred well,
And in his brest the shere small strings a man might tell.9

The horror of this passage is also suffused with a frisson of the erotic, which jostles uncomfortably with an emerging discourse of scientific exploration. Science informs the discovery, the numbering, and the telling (recording) of the body's organs. But the body is also caught in a moment of violent homoerotic possession; stripped of his skin, Marsyas is transformed into 'one whole wound', into which curious spectators gaze. Organic features - veins, bowels, sinews - are 'quierving', 'beating nakedly', and 'panting'. This is a fantasy of anatomical separation - a vivisection which lays open the still functioning body in order to possess its core.

The function of such a representation within the discourses of judgement, sentencing, and execution is clear: first comes the trial of Marsyas, then the sentence, then the ordeal itself.10 Its manifestation in the anatomy theatre was equally evident. In the interior view of the Leiden anatomy theatre, a female figure gestures in benediction over a flayed skin, whilst the rendition of Anatomia on the title-page of Kerckring's 1670 text is reminiscent of the Marsyas–Apollo confrontation. Not surprisingly, Marsyas had appeared in earlier anatomical textbooks. In the 1555 (second) edition of Vesalius' Fabrica, the confrontation can be seen in the form of an historiated initial letter 'V' - an appropriate choice given the author's name. A less explicit reference to the Marsyas story can be seen in an illustration which had appeared ten years earlier when Charles Estienne's De dissectione partium corporis humani was published at Paris in 1545 (Figure 23). Here, a male figure has been suspended against a tree, with the abdomen slit open to reveal the interior organs, a pose visually reminiscent of Golding's (later) evocation of the 'panting bowels' of Marsyas, as well as the historiated figure which appeared in 1555. In Valverde's Spanish textbook of 1556, and in keeping with the convention of self-dissection, Marsyas and Apollo have merged into a single flayed figure who holds a knife in one hand and in the other, his own skin (Figure 24) - an image which, it has been suggested, forms a complex allusion to Michelangelo's ironic self-portrait in the écorché.
THE REALM OF ANATOMIA

figure of St Bartholomew in the Sistine chapel paintings. It is not, I think, coincidence that the interest in Marsyas on the part of artists in the sixteenth century should have arisen at the moment when the anatomical exploration of the human frame was reaching a pitch of excited discovery. The confrontation between Marsyas and Apollo perfectly expressed the contradictory emotions to be uncovered in the realm of Anatomia. Her servants were dedicated to achieving knowledge of the human body in order to alleviate pain and suffering, and yet that knowledge was only gained at the cost of enormous pain to the victims who, eventually, arrived in the anatomy theatres. As extensions of the law, the anatomists were part of the apparatus of trial, judgment and sentence. Marsyas, too, was tried and found wanting, and executed by the superior knowledge of the god of clear sight who had been the assistant of Zeus at the first anatomical division of male and female.

If we return to that myth of separation and origin, as retold by Milton in Paradise Lost, we can see how elements of all these disparate accounts – the Aristophanic account, the Genesis story, the living dissection of Marsyas in Golding’s translation of Ovid, the sexualization of science – were combined. When Milton came to rewrite the scriptural account of origin, in Book VIII of Paradise Lost, his verse seems to invoke a dream of dissection, comparable to those other dreams we have encountered in English poetry of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. But the difference is that Adam’s experience of the creative anatomist, who embarks on his task of constructing a body in much the same way as the reader of an anatomical text such as Vesalius’ Epitome was encouraged to construct a body, begins with a gentle sleep of surrender rather than a shiver of horror:

Mine eyes he closed, but open left the cell
Of fancy my internal sight, by which
Abstract as in a trance methought I saw,
Though sleeping, where I lay, and saw the shape
Still glorious before whom awake I stood,
Who stooping opened my left side, and took
From thence a rib, with cordial spirits warm,
And life-blood streaming fresh; wide was the wound,
But suddenly with flesh filled up and healed:

(Paradise Lost VIII. 460-8)

The potential violence of the act of creation has been suppressed by Milton in favour of a rapt and trance-like meditation on the nature of mortal surrender to divine knowledge. And yet, the congruences between Golding’s violent version of Ovid, and Milton’s dream-like version of Genesis are startling. God/Apollo has created within the male body a ‘whole wound’ (Golding) or a ‘wide... wound’ (Milton). But where, in Golding’s verses,
THE BODY EMBLAZONED

the subject is left quivering vulnerable to the compulsive gaze of science, in Milton’s much later account the subject is allowed the possibility of witnessing not only his or her own bodily dispersal, but also a recompilation as another, a sight which allows the closure of the wide wound with suddenly tumescent ‘flesh’.12 Just as in the Aristophanic account of the creation of human sexual difference, here in Milton’s version, the disruption of the body by the ‘shape’ is followed by an act of healing and (partial) restoration. But the account also echoes another manifestation of divine anatomy – the act of self-demonstration performed by the second Adam: Christ whose body was also dispersed and punctured by ‘the wound’, which, as Richard Crashaw understood the metaphorical transformation, became the ‘doors’ (Crashaw, Poems, 44) through which believers gained salvation.

These texts of division, separation, creation, and restoration transport us far away from the anatomy theatres of early-modern Europe, for all that those theatres sought to express the iconography of sacrifice and redemption. But were they so far removed? Was the culture of dissection only to be found in the ornate buildings and texts of the anatomists? A clue to the diversity of that culture – its manifestation in distinctly different spheres of activity – is provided if we concentrate on the question of gender. In both the Aristophanic and the Miltonic text, divine anatomy was male – an extension of the creative power of Jove/Jehova – whilst in the Renaissance anatomy theatre, Anatomia rather than Anatomius was the deity of the place. Anatomia – symbolizing the cultural domain of the Renaissance science of the body – was a goddess who appeared in a variety of guises. She might be the dream of a male creative force subsumed into the mythological practice of a female vindicatrix. Or she might appear as a benefactor of humanity. As the judaeo-christian God, she was present at the creation not only of difference, but division and disunity within Paradise in opening and dividing the Adamic body, so that ‘it’ might become ‘he’, and ‘he’ might encounter ‘she’. But how were these circulating discourses of gender, origin, and separation expressed within the Renaissance culture of dissection? If anatomy was the science of revelation of the secrets of the body and the process by which (as in the Marsyas myth) a hitherto concealed clarity was revealed, then what became clear about the nature of human sexual difference in the anatomy theatre? How did the culture of dissection conspire in the creation of sexual difference and the construction of gender?

DECAYED APPETITE: THE FEMALE BODY IN THE RENAISSANCE COURT

If Anatomia was the goddess of reductive division, she presided over a court that was stridently masculine. And as we have seen, a male fantasy of
THE REALM OF ANATOMIA

anatomical surrender to the cruel diligence of a mistress of erotic reduction was at least an imaginative possibility. The task, now, is to trace that fantasy to its roots in the culture of the Renaissance court. Why the court? In order to understand the ways in which the 'culture of dissection' could flourish under such a different guise, we need to make a slight detour from the anatomy theatre into an altogether more precious (and increasingly precarious) world: in particular, the courts of François I of France, and the English courts of Elizabeth I, James I, and Charles I. In the extravagant literary creations of these aristocratic and privileged cultures, the more brutal dissective culture which we have been tracing was still present, but it appeared in a different form, concealed beneath a glittering literary culture of artifice which existed as a highly wrought means of allowing the inhabitants of the court to communicate a set of crucial aesthetic and social values amongst themselves.

Anatomy theatres and the court were closely linked with one another, in the early-modern period, for a wide variety of legal, medical, professional, and, above all, symbolic reasons. The anatomy theatre as a register of a community's intellectual prowess explains something of that affinity. Moreover, the theatres formed part of the apparatus of punishment which stemmed from the sovereign's power over the bodies of his or her subjects. Intellectually, the anatomy theatres provided a forum in which one of the chief ideological claims of the sovereign could be tested. If the sovereign's power was rooted, ultimately, in God, then the ability of the anatomist to trace the lincaments of the divine in each individual body became an important part of the mechanism by which that power was reinscribed, over and over again, upon society at large. Each body dissected within the ornate surroundings of the Renaissance anatomy theatre represented a triumph of the sovereign's power over criminality. With each dissection, the onlookers were reminded of the great super-structure of religious authority which linked the bodies of the subjects to the incorporeal body of the king. If, from the pulpit, subjects were reminded of their duty to the monarch, then from the well of the anatomy theatre (as much as from the scaffold) they were reminded of the penalty of failing in that duty. Moreover, the court could also be a place of healing. The monarchs who, in England, 'touched' their subjects for the 'King's Evil' were not simply victims of the superstitions of a traditional society. Instead, both subject and monarch were re-enacting the framework of belief in which the sovereign acted as 'physician' to the political body. The 'healthy' nation depended on the power of the 'sovereign-physician' to remedy ills within the body-politic. How important this framework of belief was, as part of the political order of things, is indicated by those occasions when the healing nexus between monarch and subject was challenged in any way. Subjects who claimed such power for themselves were
liable to be investigated by the Privy Council itself, as happened in the autumn of 1637 in a case in which William Harvey was directly involved. The sovereign was God's representative on earth. As such, he or she possessed something of the attributes of Christ in his guise as 'Christus medicus' – Christ the Physician. Holbein's 'Great Picture', representing the Union of Barbers and Surgeons in 1540, perfectly expressed this relationship. In Holbein's portrait, Henry VIII sits, surrounded by his Physicians, Surgeons, and Barbers. Above the group, on the king's left hand, is a tablet which addresses the monarch:

Sadder than ever had the plague profaned the land of the English, harassing men's minds and besetting their bodies; God, from on high pitifully regarding so notable a mortality, bade thee undertake the office of a good Physician. The light of the Gospel flies round about thee on glowing wings; that will be a remedy for a mind diseased, and by thy counsel men study the monuments of Galen; and every disease is expelled by speedy aid.  

Holbein's portrait represents a statement of the ideal relationship between the monarch and the political nation. That it was an ideal which still informed the views of Henry's descendants is suggested by the fact that, in 1617, James I applied to the Company of Barbers and Surgeons to have the painting copied, and in 1627 the painting was borrowed and taken to Whitehall 'for the Kinge to see'.

The final reason for the existence of a link between the court and the anatomy theatres lay in the reality of preferment and patronage. Obviously, in early-modern societies, anatomy theatres were entirely urban phenomena. The theatres of dissection were constructed in the great metropolitan centres – Paris, London, Amsterdam, Rome – or else where there already existed universities and medical schools such as Oxford, Leiden, Montpelier, Padua, or Bologna. They occupied a position in the urban community analogous to the playhouses. The anatomy theatres were fashionable places in which to see and be seen. Those who practised within them were also recipients of that structure of patronage which dominated the law, the church, and the universities in the political life of the community. In Holland, of course, the anatomy theatres tended to register civic status. But in England, Italy, and France, anatomists such as Vesalius, or, later, Harvey, enjoyed the protection and even the friendship of the monarch or those close to the sovereign power. The court, even in England during the early seventeenth century, when court and country were supposedly growing apart from one another, still represented the route of preferment for a clever and ambitious physician who had learned his trade, in part, in the anatomy theatre. To hold one of the important medical offices in the court – King's
happened in the directly involved. Thus, he or she as 'Christus-representing the physician, Sergeant-Surgeon, Royal Surgeon, or King's Barber – represented the height of professional achievement.

Thus, a cycle of symbolic and actual power united the anatomy theatre and the royal court. The monarch held the nation's 'health' in charge, on behalf of God. The monarch, too, commanded the bodies of the subjects. Subjects who failed in their duties towards the monarch might find themselves, eventually, on the dissection slabs of the anatomists. The anatomists traced the handiwork of God in each body brought to them, and thus reaffirmed the monarch's power over the bodies of the people. It was the anatomists who were responsible for training the physicians who, in turn, if they were clever enough, ambitious enough, or simply adroit courtiers, might win the right to attend the monarch's corporeal body, just as the monarch attended the incorporeal body of the nation.

This, of course, was the theory. The reality of the culture of dissection as it flowed through the rarefied atmosphere of the court was somewhat different. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as we have seen in the poetry of Donne and his contemporaries, a strange fantasy of anatomical surrender seems to have, briefly, flourished. How did this fantasy relate to the world of Greenwich or Whitehall? Poetry, or, more specifically, poetic fantasy of male surrender to female division, provides an answer. Male surrender to female dissection should be understood as a simple reversal of a familiar Renaissance poetic trope – the 'blazoning' of the female body. The blazon as a poetic form – usually understood as a richly ornate and mannered evocation of idealized female beauty rendered into its constituent parts – may seem worlds apart from the corporeal reality of an anatomy theatre. But, as we have already seen, the anatomy theatres themselves were decked out with all the ornate trappings of what we might call a corporeal aesthetic. If Spenser's 'House of Alma' could help to structure an anatomical investigation, then, in similar measure, the blazon formed a significant part of the culture of dissection which produced the partitioned body. But the importance of the blazon lay in its partitioning not of any indiscriminate body, but of a specifically female corpse.

To use the word 'corpse' to describe the poetic object of the blazon may seem deliberately reductive. After all, was not the blazon form, beloved of Renaissance poets, a delicate orchestration on the theme of the life-enhancing qualities and virtues of the mistress who was the subject and (on occasion) recipient of the blazon? In the hothouse atmosphere of the French court in the early sixteenth century, however, and in the English Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline courts of the seventeenth century, something far more sinister was on display. The ancestry of the blazon was by no means rooted in literary idealism. The word 'blazon' was derived from the heraldic device worn on a shield (OED). But this meaning was itself
THE BODY EMBLAZONED

derived from the literal sense (in Old French) of shield itself, so that the ‘blazon’ was not originally a proclamation, an ornamentation, an illumination, or a device for ‘blazoning’ heraldic codes. All of these were much later senses. Instead, the ‘blazon’ was the shield, a protective instrument for use in war. But protective of whom and against what? David Norbrook has observed that:

the vogue in the sixteenth century for the blazon, the detailed enumeration of the parts of the woman’s body, can be seen as reflecting the new scientific mentality with its mastering gaze, its passion for mapping the world in order to gain power over it.16

This comes close to the mark. The ‘vogue’ for the blazon was a part of the scientific urge which was displayed in Renaissance anatomy theatres. Not surprisingly, then, this new, scopic, regime of division and partition was reflected in a surge in popularity of the blazon in the second half of the sixteenth century, particularly in France. During the fifteenth century no more than two or three blazons – that is poetic collections or individual poems which featured the French word blason in the title – were written. During the early years of the sixteenth century, however, a growing number of such titles began to appear, so that, by 1530, something like twenty or so blasons had been produced. Between 1550 and 1580 – the Vesalian period – the genre seems to have simply exploded. By 1580, it has been calculated that over 250 French blasons had been produced or were circulating.17

The ‘blazon’ as a shield – a meaning which was to be appropriated for heraldic purposes – allowed men to vie with one another in the production of art. Female body parts – eyes, eyebrows, breasts – could be bandied about in poetic blasons and contreblasons. More often than not, this poetic contest, in which the competitors traded their mistresses (real or imagined) bodies with one another, disguised what Thomas Laqueur has described as ‘a powerful homoerotic quality as women seemed to mediate and create bonds between men’.18 Women, however, had little active say in this process. Indeed, women appear to have been little more than (in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s words) ‘a more or less perfunctory detour on the way to a closer but homophobiaically proscribed bonding with another man’.19 The female body may have been the circulating token, but it was male desire which valorized the currency. Furthermore, for all that the literary historians have understood the blazon as associated with an idealization of female beauty, its origins were, in reality, rather more corporeal. So, although Guillaume Coquillart’s Blason des Armes et des Dames (composed for the coronation of Charles VIII at Rheims in 1484) took the form of a debate between war (‘armes’) and love (‘dames’), the poetic contest between the poets Alexis and Estées, which began two years later, was of a rather different quality. The
THE REALM OF ANATOMIA

Grand Blason de Fauoles Amours (1486) by Alexis was a satire and apology for women, conducted in the form of a debate between a gentlewoman and a monk. But the answer of Estées, Contreblason de Fauoles Amours (1512), recast the terms of the contest: the protagonists were a prostitute and a nun debating the topic of carnal love. The Contreblason of Estées set the tone for succeeding exercises in the genre, which became more and more obviously sexualized. Pierre Danché’s Blasons de la Belle Fille (1501), for example, set out to enumerate the erotic attractions of young women, and was the precursor for the most famous (and notorious) series of blasons – those gathered under the title Blasons Anatomiques des Parties du Corps Féminin – the ‘anatomical blazons of the female body’ – which first appeared in 1556.20

The Blasons Anatomiques began life as the creation of Clément Marot, one of the so-called Grands Rhetoriqueurs associated with the courts of François I and his sister Marguerite d’Angoulême (later Navarre).21 In 1535, whilst in exile in Ferrara, Marot composed the erotic Blason du Beau Tétin, said to have been inspired by Olympe da Sassoferato’s praise of the breasts of Madonna Pegasca.22 The following year, the first edition of Blasons Anatomiques appeared, an anthology which, by the time the 1550 edition was published, contained poems by Scève, Belleau, Chapuys, and, of course, ‘anon’. Blasons Anatomiques was, then, an anthology which, with each successive edition, grew to include the work of more and more poets anxious to be associated with this flourishing genre. Blason produced contreblason, contreblason gave way to contre-contreblason, an ever expanding exercise of male wit, flourishing the female anatomy before the eyes of other, admiring, male readers. The ‘shield’ (in both the protective and heraldic senses) which the female body provided for these poets was composed of an amalgam of features and organs. Foreheads, eyebrows, mouths, teeth, sighs, stomachs, thighs, knees, and feet gave way to more sexually overt exercises: Rochetel’s ‘Blason du Con’ was answered by Chapuys’s ‘Du Con de la Pucelle’ and ‘Autre du Con’. The anonymous ‘Blason du Cul’ was answered by ‘Aultre Blason du Cul’, and so on. Chapuys’s ‘Blason du Ventre’ is representative of these texts:

Ventre plus blanc que n’est pas albaste,  
Ventre en été plus froid que plastre,  
Dont le toucher rend la main froide,  
Et je ne scay quoy chaud et roide;25

Male desire (‘chaud et roide’) was the true subject of these verses. But desire for what? Men read each other’s blasons in order to become ‘chaud et roide’ – hot and rigid. The emblazoned female body was the locus of desire, as (in Nancy Vickers’s words) each ‘celebratory conceit inscribes woman’s body between rivals: she deflects blows, prevents direct hits, and constitutes the field upon which the battle may be fought.”24
THE BODY EMBLAZONED

These texts appeared within the court culture of François I, in the first half of the sixteenth century. The culture of the French court, Frances Yates has argued, was one which self-consciously proclaimed itself as instituting 'an imperial renovatio', an aggressive appropriation of letters, arts, and science which would herald a revitalized sense of national destiny. Within this context, the blason and the anatomy text soon begin to appear as different sides of the same coin. In the production of both poetic blason and anatomic text, male competitors within this intensely competitive culture strove to outdo one another, using images of the fragmented body as their currency. This currency circulated within the court at Fontainebleau, where François had gathered together poets and artists such as Marot, Leonardo, Andrea del Sarto, and Cellini, together with a remarkable devotion to the production of printed works. Leonardo's anatomical notes and drawings, in particular, were known in the French court, where a contemporary (the Cardinal of Aragon) records having looked at his drawings and notebooks. At the same moment that the poetical dissection of the female body was being celebrated as the height of taste, fashion, and wit, the Fontainebleau milieu was also encouraging the production of costly anatomical scientific texts. Undoubtedly, these scientific texts were influenced by the 'sexualized' culture of the court. The images of the dissected female form to be found in Estienne's *De dissectione* of 1545, for example (Figure 25), were not merely posed in an extravagantly sexualized manner, but they were also reinterpretations of a 'key' Renaissance erotic text: Perino del Vaga's sequence of engravings showing gods and goddesses copulating with one another. As Laqueur has observed, Estienne's images were produced within a court culture which can be understood as a 'powerfully gendered cultural venue', where the Diana in Benvenuto Cellini's *Nymph of Fontainebleau* presided over the entrance to the palace as 'the object of an unmistakable male gaze'. Significantly, in this context, Cellini claimed that the highlight of his own career was the casting of the statue of Perseus - the conqueror of the Medusa's gaze - for the Loggia de' Lanzi in Florence. Cellini's *Perseus*, though it was commissioned in 1545 by Cosimo I, at the end of the artist's Fontainebleau period, and was designed for a Florentine rather than French setting, was nevertheless iconic of the masculine culture of the court of François. Here was the classic gesture of the blazonneur: Cellini's *Perseus* (Frontispiece) towers over the contorted and decapitated body of the Medusa, brandishing her head aloft, his sword unsheathed and poised in an exaggerated display of phallic power over his female opponent. Cellini's *Perseus* echoed the anatomical blazoning of the female body in which the court of François I delighted. It is not difficult to see Cellini's image as an essay in aggression and conquest, where the disturbing female gaze is mastered by a mythic hero who can thus demonstrate his masculine potential for all of France.
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potency.31 At the same time, Cellini's figure is a strangely androgynous icon, for all its triumphalist posturing. It is the Medusa who faces the world, not Perseus. Modestly, he lowers his eyes and seems to shelter behind her blazoned head. But the Medusa, rather than glaring out into the world, has herself been mastered. Her eyes are lowered (echoing the bashful visage of her victor) as though she and her conqueror have both become objects of consumption - 'an emblem of... political and sexual specularity.'32 As in the myth, the Medusa, eventually, protects Perseus. But protects him from what? The tradition of the blason provides an answer. Cellini's Perseus flourishes aloft part of a once beautiful woman - now transformed into a monstrous figure of antique myth - whilst his own youthful body, with lowered eyes, is consumed by the gaze of other men.

The Blasons Anatomiques operated within a very similar sexual economy: female body parts were held aloft as tokens of intellectual mastery. Male opponents, like the rivals to Andromeda or the guests of Polydectes in the Perseus myth, could (it was hoped) be silenced by the badge of mastery which the female body in the hands of the male betokened. But in what ways did this highly wrought, masculine culture mesh with the world of the anatomy theatres? In 1543 the 'definitive' edition of Blasons Anatomiques appeared.33 This, of course, was the year of publication of the Vesalian Fabrica. In more ways than one, however, the erotic Blasons Anatomiques and the career of Vesalius seemed to correspond. The medical career of Vesalius had, effectively, begun in Paris, where (in 1533) he had commenced his studies under Guiterius Andernacus (Günter of Andernacht), Jean Ferrel, and the foremost anatomist in Europe: Jacobus Sylvius (Jaques Dubois). It was at Paris, in the medical school, that Sylvius established a reputation such that, in the words of a contemporary (Loys Vassé): 'From everywhere flocked to him Germans, English, Spaniards, Italians and others of all nations who all agreed that the like of this admirable and almost divine man was not to be found in the whole of Europe.'34 Within the cosmopolitan culture of the Paris of François I, Vesalius developed his practice of nocturnal raids on the cemeteries and gibbets of the city, intent on gaining body-fragments. His most frequent haunts were the great gibbet at Montfaucon, to the north of the city, and the Cemetery of the Innocents.

In 1536, the same year in which the Blasons Anatomiques began to circulate, and following the outbreak of war between the Emperor Charles V and François I, Vesalius left the city and returned to Louvain. It was there that he embarked upon his sensational 'construction' of a cadaver:

While out walking, looking for bones in the place where on the country
highways eventually, to the great convenience of students, all those who have
been executed are customarily placed, I happened upon a dried cadaver....
THE BODY EMBLAZONED

With the help of Gemma, [the mathematician, philosopher, and physician Regnier Gemma] I climbed the stake and pulled off the femur from the hip bone. While tugging at the specimen, the scapulae together with the arms and hands also followed, although the fingers of one hand, both patellae and one foot were missing. After I had brought the legs and arms home in secret ... I allowed myself to be shut out of the city in the evening in order to obtain the thorax which was firmly held by a chain. I was burning with so great a desire ... that I was not afraid to snatch in the middle of the night what I so longed for. ... The next day I transported the bones home piecemeal through another gate of the city ... and constructed that skeleton which is preserved at Louvain.\(^{35}\)

This Frankenstein-like story is reminiscent of Leonardo's account of similar secret, nocturnal, dissections, while it is also a foretaste of a later 'construction' of a female body which Vesalius was to undertake in preparation for the Fabrica. Here, though, was the practical realization of Leonardo's intellectual programme of 'building up' a human image ('crescere l'uomo'). Vesalius' act of construction might also remind us of the project which lay behind the cumulative Blasons Anatomiques that were now appearing in Paris. With each edition of the Blasons, so a new addition to the eroticized female body was produced. Just as Vesalius was, later, to encourage his readers to 'construct' their own anatomized bodies from the sheets made available in the Epitome of 1543, so the courtier-poets of François constructed a more and more complex and explicit image of the female form with each printing of the poetic collection. But the comparison between the poets and the anatomist can be taken further. In Vesalius' own account of constructing a body, there is a disturbingly predatory tone. His exploits on the gallows, outside the city walls of Paris and (later) Louvain, were undertaken in the cause of knowledge. But this knowledge was hardly innocent, as the terms in which Vesalius himself describes the Louvain episode demonstrate so adroitly. Just as we have remarked upon the frisson which Leonardo seems to have experienced as he cut up bodies in the privacy of his studio, so there is something more than urgent about Vesalius' self-presentation, swinging like a carrion crow on the gibbet, 'burning with so great a desire ... that I was not afraid to snatch in the middle of the night what I so longed for'.

The culture of dissection could encourage strange intellectual bedfellows. Vesalius' embrace (for that is what it must have been) of the corpse of an executed criminal did not involve merely the conquest of natural repugnance. It was likely that he was running a considerable personal risk. To be shut outside the city at night constituted just a small part of that danger. The penalties for removing the bodies of executed felons from the gibbet were high, as Vesalius must have been aware when he claimed that his Louvain 'construction' originated in Paris. In a bizarre series of parallels, however, we are able to dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches they dismiss him as a poet who in their erotic poetic researches
we are able to reconstitute the culture of dissection as it flowed between the erotic poetic texts of the court of the French king, and the scientific researches of the great anatomist. Both sought to gaze upon the body which they dismantled, piece by piece. Both, too, progressively 'constructed' a new body made of the parts which they had examined. Just as Vesalius was to dismiss his scientific rivals in anatomical demonstrations, so the poetic texts struggled in competition with one another, brandishing the dissected female form as a token of mastery. Finally, we have to note that the language with which Vesalius arranged the nocturnal rendezvous with the object of his desire is the language of courtly love: illicit, secretive, impelled by 'so great a desire . . . to snatch . . . what I so longed for'. All that is missing is the balcony – an office supplied, however, by the gibbet upon which Vesalius clambered.

The fashion for the blason appeared in England in what might be thought of, initially, as a much less highly wrought ambience. Certainly, the immediate conjunction of anatomical investigation and erotic love – so apparent at the court of Francois I – seems, at first, to be absent. The English blazon, however, partitioned the female body within an atmosphere which was, if anything, even more erotically charged than that which prevailed at Fontainebleau. Elizabeth I, the 'virgin queen', was the ideal subject for the poetic blazon, a vehicle for the demonstration of a male wit which encircled the queen's body in a fetishistic adoration of her power, her virtue, her attraction, and (of course) her sexual allure, made all the more potent through her unavailability. The queen provided the perfect vehicle for initiating a complex linguistic interchange, uniting partition and division with the emerging, and determinedly expansionist language of colonization. And, just as in their French originals, within the English blazons the erotic and the anatomic were to co-exist, feeding off one another as female bodies were divided in a riot of aesthetic and scientific exploration.

But there was one crucial difference between the activities of the blasonneurs at the court of Francois, and Elizabeth's petrarchan sonneteers. That difference resided in the biological sex of the queen. The corporeal presence of the queen's body was linked to the vitality of the nation through metaphors of nutrition, partition, and commercial exchange – a variation on the familiar 'imperial' iconography surrounding the queen in portraiture. Here was a paradox which ran deep into the heart of Elizabethan culture. The court of Elizabeth, just like the court of Francois I, was an eroticized venue, a place of competing male sensibilities despite (or, rather, because of) the central presence of the female monarch. As Louis Adrian Montrose observes, the queen presided over a court in which she 'was the source of her subjects' social sustenance, the fount of all preferments . . . part Madonna, part Ephesian Diana'. The queen's natural body was presented to her surrounding
THE BODY EMBLAZONED

courtiers (by Elizabeth herself) in a fetishistic display. Bare-breasted, as were all her ladies at court prior to marriage (an event for which her permission was required), the queen circulated amongst her subjects. In 1597, a visiting French ambassador (Montrose records) described her as wearing:

black taffeta, bound with gold lace . . . a petticoat of white damask, girdled, and open in front, as was also her chemise, in such a manner that she often opened this dress, and one could see all her belly, and even to her navel . . . she has a trick of putting both hands on her gown and opening it insomuch that all her belly can be seen.87

Chapuys’s earlier poetic praise of the female stomach, the procreative focus of male fantasy in the period, is here endowed with a kind of visible blazon, which the queen controlled. Teasingly, she blazoned her own body, revealing to her courtiers what was at the same time denied to them. In essence, she had become a true anatomist of the body-politic, since, like the anatomical figures which populated the scientific texts of the age, Elizabeth appeared to control her own self-blazoning. It was she who, metaphorically, held the knife to her own body, and thus provided the pattern which her courtier-poets proceeded to embellish.

In the English blazon, the female body was partitioned once more, but partitioned in accordance with a political imperative which circulated around the temporal and spiritual body of the queen. Petrarchan conventions of poetic praise of the attributes of the beloved – hair, face, hands – had been appropriated by English poets since the time of Surrey and Wyatt, and they fed into the genre.88 In England, the language of the blazon developed poetic tropes which were peculiarly consonant with an emerging ‘science’ or knowledge of the body. Discovery (in the geographical and rhetorical senses) determined this trope, which was soon allied with emerging discourses of commerce and trade. The English blazon, then, divided the female body to celebrate its partitioned exploration as a geographical entity. This organism could be ‘discovered’ (literally ‘disclosed’ – rendered open to sight) and then subjected to an economy of trade, commerce and mercantile distribution. Significantly, the terms in which this process was described – discovery, division, disclosure, distribution – were all rhetorical terms, so that the resources of charged, rhetorically apposite, poetic language seemed naturally embedded within a colonizing process of appropriation and exploitation.89 Indeed, so interconnected were the circulating metaphors that it sometimes becomes difficult to decide what the poet was celebrating: are we reading about female bodies which are metamorphosing into continents, or continents which are to become bodies? Is the queen an emblem of the diversity of the world, or is the complexity of the world emblematic of the queen’s dominance?
THE REALM OF ANATOMIA

The free-flow of language within the blazon form over the female body was not a celebration of ‘beauty’ (the ostensible subject), but of male competition. This competition was located both within and on the surface of the blazoned body of the queen, where a language of sexual union and commerce met. And the queen could be glimpsed in the most unlikely contexts. So, the blazon section of Spenser’s celebration of wedded love in the ‘Epithalamion’, which closed the collection Amoretti and Epithalamion (1595), and which celebrated the wedding of Spenser and Elizabeth Boyle in June 1594, praised the woman in the iconic language of the portraiture of Elizabeth I:

Her long loose yellow locks lyke golden wyre,  
Sprinkled with perl, and perling flowers a tweeene,  
Doe lyke a golden mantle her attyre,  
And being crowned with a girdle greene,  
Seeme lyke some mayden Queene.

(Shorter Poems, 668)40

Of course, the queen would not appear with her hair in ‘long loose yellow locks’ – that was Spenser’s adaptation to the moment – but the gown ‘sprinkled with perl’, the crown, the image of the ‘mayden Queene’ were designed to remind Spenser’s readers (amongst whom was the queen) of the truest image of earthly divinity. Surrounded by ‘so many gazers, as on her do stare’, Spenser deployed the language associated with the queen to praise his bride. The effect was to achieve a deliberate gesture of disavowal which the queen and her courtiers would understand. This gesture managed to suggest that this queen for a day was modelled on a real queen, before whom even his bride had to give place. As the poem moved into the blazon section proper – the praise of eyes like sapphires, an ivory white forehead, apple-like cheeks, lips like cherries which (a sudden erotic charge can be seen breaking through) charm ‘men to byte’, breasts like cream or lilies, a neck like marble – the woman became arrayed as an object of consumption for other men, flaunted before an audience as something not only there to be looked upon, but eaten. And with the smilies of fruit and flowers, came the evocation of a mercantile world, for she was displayed before an audience which was addressed (and constructed) as part of a thriving metropolitan commercial culture:

Tell me ye merchants daughters did ye see  
So fayre a creature in your towe before,  
So sweet, so lovely, and so mild as she,  
Adorned with beautyes grace and vertues store . . .

(Shorter Poems, 669)
THE BODY EMBLAZONED

To which the answer was, of course, ‘Well, yes, the last time we saw the queen, or read *The Faerie Queene*. No matter that the town where the wedding took place was Cork. Imaginatively, this was a public royal progress through the streets of London, or through the pages of Spenser’s epic. So, the blazoned woman was paraded before the eyes of men and other women – the daughters of merchants – as an ideal of virginal womanhood who was nearly as ideal as the queen, evoked a few lines later as enthroned elsewhere in solitary grandeur, where, like virtue, she ‘giveth laws alone’.

Controlling the steady progress of similes and metaphors in Spenser’s text were the twin dynamics of partition and commercial consumption. Presiding over these metaphors (or hovering in the background) was the glittering form of the queen. The queen, of course, had already been the subject of one Spenserian blazon by the time the ‘Epithalamion’ was published in 1595, and one that was overtly erotic – the description to be found in *The Faerie Queene* of Belphoebe (FQ II.iii.21–31) which had appeared just five years earlier. In Belphoebe/Elizabeth all the attributes of the bride who was to be blazoned in the ‘Epithalamion’ are discovered, but evoked at greater length and in more detail: the golden hair like wire (‘crisped’, rather than ‘loose’, however), the ‘besprinkled’ gown, the ivory forehead, and so on. It was as if, in a poetic fantasy, Spenser had imagined the possibility of partitioning his bride so that she could be re-created as a second Belphoebe/Elizabeth, and what greater compliment could the old queen have enjoyed?

The creation or ‘construction’ of the ideal woman, then, was the axis upon which the blazon turned. The ‘Epithalamion’ carried forward the rhetoric of division, partition, and construction which was such a feature of its co-text – the sonnet sequence ‘Amoretti’. Within the oxymoronic language of ‘Amoretti’, the petrarchan oscillation between a cruel mistress and a compliant and ensnared woman, lay the image of trade, once more:

Ye tradefull Merchants that with weary toyle
do seeke most precious things to make your gaine:
and both the Indias of their treasures spoile,
what needeth you to seeke so farre in vaine?

*(Shorter Poems, 609)*

So begins Sonnet XV of ‘Amoretti’, a blazon which divides the female body into a pile of treasure: sapphire eyes, ruby lips, pearl teeth, ivory forehead, gold hair, and silver hands. Once more, the familiar conceit of a poem which flourishes the divided female before other men is apparent. The narrator of the sonnet ‘owns’ a capital investment (the heaped up body-treasure) which makes all the merchants’ wearying ‘toyle’ (a word frequently reserved for sex), their restless search for precious ‘things’, futile by comparison. The poet’s hoard is more costly than theirs, and it is to be found safely at home.

200
THE REALM OF ANATOMIA

The sonnet marks a moment of conspicuous consumption, a chance for the narrator to 'display' his wealth. And, as though to stamp the mark of ownership, the sonnet cannot resist one last triumphant proclamation:

But that which fairest is, but few behold,
her mind adorned with vertues manifold.
(Shorter Poems, 609)

Of course, it was her mind – what else could it have been? By playing off the convention of physicality against the petrarchan convention of idealized female virtue, Spenser created the classic double-entendre – a snigger of male complicity.

These Spenserian blazons are representative of the English appropriation of the genre to be found in texts published, or circulating, throughout the late sixteenth century. Sidney, Shakespeare, Daniel, Drayton, Barnabe Barnes, Bartholomew Griffin, Thomas Campion, John Marston, the list of competing poets whose sonnet sequences blazoned their mistresses (real or imagined) seems endless. Very rarely (as in Surrey's elegy 'Wyatt resteth here, that quick could never rest' or Shakespeare's homoerotic Sonnet 20) do we find men blazoning one another. Rarer still are the occasions when women emblazoned men, as did Lady Mary Wroth. In the hands of Gascoigne, Davies of Hereford, and Donne (as we have seen) a 'reverse-blazon' could be attempted, where the iconography of anatomic science seemed to step into the courtly world, in a masochistic display of a partitioned male body. The dominant conceit, nevertheless, was that of competing males exercising their wit at the expense of partitioned females. But the blazon did not only flourish within the refined atmosphere of the sonnet. It was possible to witness the partitioning of the female body on the stage. In its early performances, Twelfth Night would have offered a singularly powerful moment of emblazoning. Viola (a boy actor disguised as a woman disguised as a boy) confronts Olivia (another boy actor in disguise) who refuses at first to show her face. But, lifting the veil, the familiar gesture of both scientific revelation and erotic encounter, Olivia reveals 'the picture' which prompts Viola to embark upon a conventional blazon:

Viola. 'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white
Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on.
Lady you are the cruellest she alive
If you will lead these graces to the grave
And leave the world no copy.
(Twelfth Night I.v.242-6)

But there she is interrupted. The entirely appropriate echo of Shakespeare's Sonnet 20 ('A woman's face, with nature's own hand painted') in which a
man offers another man an erotic blazon, is stilled by Olivia, who proceeds to (ironically) divide her own body according to a commercial schedule:

Olivia: O sir, I will not be so hard-hearted: I will give out divers schedules of my beauty. It shall be inventoried, and every particle and utensil labelled to my will. As, item, two lips indifferent red; item, two grey eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth. Were you sent hither to praise me?

(Twelfth Night I.v.247–53)

The force of the joke resides in the very impropriety of this appropriation of such a determinedly male form. If the blazon was a form of homosocial mediation amongst men, in which the female body was the currency, then here, on the contrary, two women (who are not women) have commandeered both the form and the competitive nature of the contest. Viola begins with the formal opening of a blazon, but is immediately trumped by Olivia’s linguistic refusal to play the game, and to assert her ‘will’. Rather than submit to the rich adjectival partitioning of her body, she counter-attacks by reducing the blazon to its essential components: a spare commercial division of the female body. This formal appropriation of a male genre, a blazoning competition which doesn’t quite take place between the two women characters, serves to underlie the complex erotic negotiations of ‘mastery’ and ‘submission’ which the play seems intent on exploring. For the courtly audience before whom Twelfth Night was played in the early years of the seventeenth century, the joke would have been even better had it been played out before the ageing queen who (like Olivia) controlled with such skill the blazoning of her body before her court.

In England, in the last years of the sixteenth century and the early years of the seventeenth, the anatomic intensity of the blazon became a more overtly misogynist exercise, particularly in the hands of John Donne. Under a different, masculinized, court culture, the blazon began to shift its focus. Donne, though clearly not a ‘court’ poet in the sense of Marot, nevertheless moved within the enclosed circles of court wits, lawyers, and place-men. Famously, he was, eventually, to write of his poetry (particularly his satires) that in them was matter for ‘some feare’ – a classic anxiety of the courtier-poet. But of his elegies which were the chief vehicles for his exercises in the blazon form and which circulated amongst a select group of male wits, there was not only fear but cause for ‘perhaps shame’. Of what order was this ‘shame’? Did it lie (as modern criticism has tended to assume) in the heterosexually explicit nature of the verses? Or was it, rather, the recourse to a language of profound misogyny – tempered by homophobic anxiety – from which Donne was seeking to disengage?
THE REALM OF ANATOMIA

So, the anti-blazon which is Elegie VIII (‘The Comparison’) carved up one female body, Donne’s mistress, at the expense of another, the body of the mistress of the male rival with whom Donne was competing. Female body-parts are traded between the two poets in a violent, explicit, series of images which leave two female bodies in metaphorical tatters. Whilst his competitor penetrates the mistress (whom Donne has dismembered) in an act which is ‘harsh and violent./As when a Plough a stony ground doth rent’, the narrator’s own moment of congress moves from the kisses of turtle-doves (‘devoutly nice’), through the sacramental act of the eucharist, to a chillingly cold image of penetration:

And such in searching wounds the surgeon is
As we, when we embrace, or touch, and kisse.
(Donne, Poems, 82)

The anatomic core of the blazon has returned. John Carey writes of this image that Donne was:

trained to regard a body as a specimen you dissect as well as a sensitive envelope you walk around in. . . . An image such as that of the surgeon’s probe inserted into the girl, in ‘The Comparison’ unites the technical and the tender.46

Well, perhaps. But what is at issue in the ‘comparison’ of the poem’s title is not the comparison of the women’s bodies, but the comparison of two degrees of male discrimination: an anatomical confrontation over the female body which (in its final lines) begs the competitor to leave his mistress in a plea for the reassertion of the ties of male friendship: ‘Leave her, and I will leave comparing thus/She, and comparisons are odious’.47 Which prompts the question: to whom does the ‘wee’ of the last line of the poem actually refer? Donne and his mistress? Or Donne and his male friend now that mistresses have been fragmented?

Donne’s ‘The Comparison’ made explicit what the blason or blazon evoked implicitly in a formal context. Comparisons in these poems appear to be metaphorical tournaments, but, as Donne’s Elegie demonstrates, the true comparison was not between tenor and vehicle (eyes and sapphires, say) but between women’s bodies as they were claimed in ownership by men. Hence the circulation of tropes around richness or wealth. If a man’s social status in the courtly world inhabited by the blasonneur was trumpeted not just by his deeds, but by his possessions, then the mistress formed part of that commodificatory process. A glance at any contemporary advertisement for motor cars will remind us that such forms of sexual commodification are still with us. In the Renaissance court, in much the same way, not only a man’s prowess at arms, his lands, his horse, his armour, his scholarship, and his wealth, were to be displayed, but also his mistress. But, lurking within the
rhetoric of consumption, was the fear of appearing too much the courtier, 
of tottering over the edge into a grotesque parody of gentility. It was this fear 
which animated the aggression of the *blasonneur*, and underlined the 
importance to these poets of the female body as the site where masculinity 
could be displayed. Castiglione’s manual of courtship, the *Libro del Cortegiano* 
(1528), offered clear guidance on this point. The courtier’s ‘countenance’ 
(by which Castiglione’s English translator, Sir Thomas Hoby, meant 
‘demeanour’) must not be:

so soft and womanish as many procure to have, that doe not only coure the 
haire, and picke the browes, but also pamper themselves in everie point like 
the most wanton and dishonest woman in the world: and a man would think 
them in going, in standing, and in all their gestures so tender and faint, that 
their members were ready to flee one from another.48

Castiglione’s image reveals the interior anxiety at the core of the blazon. To 
be too much the courtier is to risk being made a subject of a blazon oneself, 
to have one’s own ‘members’ scattered over the countryside in satiric asides, 
gossip, or comment. Against this possibility, therefore, the courtier deployed 
a rhetoric of aggressive masculinity. If, like the subject of a blazon, the 
courtier had to be ‘displayed’, as Castiglione goes on to remark, ‘in open 
shewes in the presence of people, women, and princes’, he had to control 
the display at every point in open competition with his fellow courtiers. To 
be, for example, ‘a perfect horsemman for everie saddle’ and thus to ‘wade in 
everie thing a little farther than other men’ might counter the charge of 
effeminacy.49

This anxiety motivated Shakespeare’s satirical deployment of blazon-like 
structures when he evoked the French court in that most stridently mascu-
line of plays, *Henry V*. Waiting for battle, the Dauphin – the image of 
effeminacy – tries to provoke his fellow-knights into a blazon-contest. The 
contest centres, absurdly, around whose horse is the finest. Seizing on this 
icon of masculinity, Shakespeare suggests that, in a series of blazon-like 
comparisons, the heir to the French throne has a relationship with his horse 
which verges on the unnatural. So, like Viola in *Twelfth Night*, the Dauphin 
embarks upon a sonnet which is interrupted by the Constable: ‘I have heard 
a sonnet begin so to one’s mistress’ (*Henry VIII*.vi.41), which prompts the 
surrounding courtiers to vie with one another in a series of comparisons 
between mistresses and horses, in an attempt at recouping the masculinity 
which their prince has so foolishly undermined. Against the *blasonneurs* of 
the French camp, is set Henry – the ‘bawcock’, the ‘lovely bully’ – the true 
chivalric hero, casting off the earlier charge of effeminacy, who circulates 
through the night amongst his men, and yet manages to forestall (as Alan 
Sinfield puts it) ‘the disastrous slide back into the female’.50 That sexual
security (which emphatically does not involve a valorization of women in the play since this a play for and about men) is possible because the French have been displayed as sexually ‘other’, feminized and effete. It is this confrontation between overt masculinity and covert effeminacy which is displayed in the meeting between Henry’s messengers and the French court prior to Harfleur. France has become, in the words of the Dauphin, like Castiglione’s effeminate courtier: a ‘sick and feeble’ disjointed confederation of ‘parts’ (Henry VII.iv.22). Amongst these parts, like a terrible blazoner, Henry will rummage, raking for the crown and scattering the anatomy of the polity, in a tumble of ‘hearts’ and ‘bowels’ which will prompt (in a sexualized pun) ‘the privy maidens’ groans’ (Henry V II.iv.97–107). France will be distributed, like the mistress’s body, in a refashioned and war-like blazon, as Exeter promises in his telling description of the ‘caves and womby vaultages’ of France once it has been emblazoned by England, and transformed into an eviscerated and hollowed female body (Henry V II.iv.124).

In Henry V we can see the stirring of an anti-court aesthetic which is, again, deeply misogynistic. Henry’s wooing of Katherine at the close of the play is another demonstration of masculinity. But it is also emblematic of a view of men’s relationships with women which will, eventually, abandon the concealed gestures of the blasonneur, and refuse to ‘rhyme’ itself into ‘ladies favours’. Katherine, the French princess who had earlier rehearsed with her maid the components of the blazon on her own body, must learn that this seemingly delicate language of courtly gesture is now out of fashion. But such a refashioned language of the body – the plain speaking of the soldier king – in reality, lay in the future. If we return to Donne’s texts of comparison, we can see how the homosocial bond of the blazon still offered itself as a ready means of asserting male prowess through the commodification of the female body. In Donne’s Elegie XVIII (‘Loves Progress’), the blazon is harnessed to a commercial rather than a warlike venture. ‘Loves Progress’ is an erotic voyage of discovery down the female body which finally encounters the object of desire, which all such blasons evoke even as they pretend (as Spenser pretended in ‘Amoretti’ XV) to be interested in abstract virtues. The physicality of the form – the fact that its setting is corporeal – precludes such abstract and innocent meditations from being taken at face value. At heart, as every blasonneur knew, the goal was conquest, the end result a mocking male laughter at the ways in which a courtly language of adoration could be deployed to such purely physical ends. This is where Donne’s Elegie XVIII is, if nothing else, honest. The poem knows its readers, and knows that those readers know its devices for what they are.51 Sailing from the north to the south of the female body, crossing the meridian on a voyage of commerce ‘towards her India’, intent on arriving ‘where thou wouldst be embayed’, the voyager at last arrives:
THE BODY EMBLAZONED

Rich Nature hath in women wisely made
Two purses, and their mouths averley laid:
They then, which to the lower tribute owe,
That way which that Exchequer looks, must go:
He which doth not, his error is as great,
As who by Clyster gave the Stomack meat.

(Donne, Poems, 106)

Even by Donne's standards, the syntax here is remarkable for its involuted quality. For Donne, gold and wombs (as John Carey observes) were topics that 'he could seldom stop thinking about for long'. Gold and wombs were precisely the *topoi* of the blazon. Yet, only rarely does an English example of the form approach such homophobic anxiety - such sudden awareness that the boundary between 'friendship' and 'sodomy' may have been crossed - and all concealed behind the familiar snigger of the *blasonnier*. Displayed for other men, the woman lies with her vagina and her anus available: 'aversely' meaning backwardly (OED) and not, as some commentators have insisted, at an angle. To perform anal intercourse with her, the poem advises, the man must 'go' in the same direction 'that Exchequer looks' - i.e. from behind. The female body has become a receptacle into which (literally) the male can deposit his treasure. But to 'go' to the woman from any other direction is to fall into an error as great as to attempt to gain nutrition via an enema. At which point, unable to resist the joke, Donne invokes a secondary series of puns (circular around 'clyster' - the tube inserted into the anus - and 'meat') to close the poem off with an allusion to the 'error' of anal intercourse, which the poem seems, nevertheless, to be endorsing as a problem of technique rather than morality. Quite clearly, Donne's blazon was meant for an anatomically and sexually literate audience, who would have appreciated the teasingly convoluted language within which the joke was encloaked.

Donne's Elegie XVIII, with its anxious closing series of ambiguous sexual puns, seems to underline the truth of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's perception:

The heterosexuality that succeeded in eclipsing women was also... relatively threatened by the feminization of one man in relation to another. To be feminized or suffer gender confusion within a framework that includes a woman is, however, dire; and... any erotic involvement with an actual woman threatens to be unmanning. Lust itself (meaning, in this context, desire for women) is a machine for depriving males of self-identity.

It might be possible to quarrel with that 'relatively', but only briefly. For Sedgwick has identified, here, the animating force of the *blasonnier's* hatred for the object of his ostensible veneration. What he claims, again and again, to desire so completely, may also (he senses) lead to his own loss of identity.
'Treasure' was, by now gaining a new set of connotations. The treasure of the pillars of Hercules, as the title-page of Bacon's Instauratio magna (1620) eloquently demonstrated, was to become the preserve of courtly science. The union of natural science to the science of anatomy - the science of the human body - was seen as the key to the destruction of the inhuman world of the Caroline court. Only the poetry of Thomas Carew, written in the 1630s (or 1640s) do we approach any cycle of texts which are both spiritually and intellectually linked. The poetry of Carew was the key to the wider cultural context in which the poems of Herbert's Description are set. The poem of Carew, and the poems of Herbert, are both set in the context of the courtly circle, and the poems of carew are the key to the wider cultural context in which the poems of Herbert are set. The poems of Carew are the key to the wider cultural context in which the poems of Herbert are set.

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volume of erotic and occasional poems appeared in 1640, the Caroline court was itself soon to become a dismembered entity. During the 1640s, Carew's erotic raptures, together with the anxious familiarity with court personalities which he sought to display in his verses, were features which were to be held up (by puritans) as emblematic of all that was most degenerate about Royalist culture. This was the closet world in which (so one story goes) Carew, lighting the king on his way to bed, stumbled upon Henrietta Maria in the arms of her favourite. In accordance with the courtly code, Carew pretended to fall, extinguished the candle, and thus allowed the queen's lover to escape — an act for which he received the queen's devoted admiration. Carew, a devoted admirer of Donne, as his 'Elegie upon the death of the Deane of Pauls' proclaimed, glanced backwards to the homosocial world of the blasonneurs which the civil war was to destroy almost completely. Carew's poetry (like that of Herrick) celebrated the fetishistic moment — objects glimpsed from the corner of the eye, a voyeur's fantasy of glances and blushed, the queen half-glimpsed in an illicit embrace, the sight of a damask rose 'sticking upon a Ladies breast', a meditation on a fly 'that flew into my Mistris her eye', a poem upon a ribbon revered at night in a 'superstitious kisse', and, above all, the reflective exchange of the mirror. Beyond the mirror, however, a different kind of exchange was to be found. It was not enough to seduce the object of desire, rather, the stages of seduction had to be seen (or reflected) in order to be appreciated by the poet's peers. The event, in other words, had to be rehearsed for the poet's public — exactly the dynamic of display which lay behind the blason. So, in the second poem of the 1640 collection ('To A. L. Perswasion to Love'), other connoisseurs — other men — are evoked in the opening lines, even while the desired woman is the ostensible addressee: 'Thinke not cause men flattering say, /Yare as fresh as Aprill sweet as May' (Carew, Poems, 3). It was what other men said which was important in this competition. Sometimes the exchange was overtly commercial, as in the poem 'My mistris commanding me to returne her letters' which begins:

So grieues th' adventrous Merchant, when he throwes
All the long toyld for treasure his ship stowes,
Into the angry maine, to save from wrack
Himselfe and men . . .

(Carew, Poems, 12)

Love letters, the spoils of a prosperous commercial adventure, are sacrificed in order to save, inevitably, not just the poet-lover but his fellow adventurers. The long 'toyld' (in the sexual sense) must be abandoned. The poem 'Secresie Protested' may begin 'Feare not (deare Love) that I'le reveale/
Those houre of pleasure we two steale' (Carew, Poems, 16) but, in the very
act of protestation, the curtain has been twitched aside and the intimate moment transformed into a public spectacle.

Carew’s ‘The Comparison’ (Carew, Poems, 168–9) is his most obvious appearance as courtly *blasonner*. Here, he glances knowingly at the literary tradition (‘Dearest thy tresses are not threads of gold’) in the poem’s opening, before proceeding to catalogue that to which she is not to be compared. Such (false) comparisons – eyes like diamonds, cheeks like roses, teeth like ivory, skin like alabaster, and so on – are reserved for other men’s mistresses: ‘Such may be others Mistresses, but mine/Holds nothing earthly’. The competition between men has become an issue of fashion. Other men who praise women in these terms, Carew insists, are failing as poets, failing as lovers, and failing (above all) to keep abreast of the latest fashion. But, in the poem’s final lines, the familiar male anxiety surfaces. What if, for all his reduction of the opposition, he is betrayed by the very object of his desire? Hence the urgent plea of the last couplet:

But as you are divine in outward view  
So be within as faire, as good, as true.  
(Carew, Poems, 169)

It is possible (as Kevin Sharpe has attempted to demonstrate) to read Carew’s poetry – particularly lines such as those which close ‘The Comparison’ – as being part of a ‘quest for a reconciliation of sensual passion and virtue’. Understood thus, Carew becomes the spokesman for a courtly aesthetic of regeneration circulating around a cult of Platonic love. But, as Sharpe also acknowledges, Carew’s poetry offers itself as a series of ‘mirrors for men and magistrates’. Sharpe’s image is telling. Like the corrupt magistrate Angelo, in *Measure for Measure*, Carew’s poetry may have acknowledged the place wherein virtue resided, but its very understanding of the rigours of virtue makes its manipulation as part of the rhetoric of seduction all the more powerful, and the joke (at women’s expense) all the more acute. Whether, then, we can read Carew’s two most famous (or notorious) erotic poems – ‘A Rapture’ and ‘The Second Rapture’ – as being (as Sharpe insists) a vision of a ‘paradise in which man’s innocence removes the need for a restraint’ is, at least, open to a fairly basic series of objections. This may be the critic’s fantasy, but it is not Carew’s. Carew’s fantasy is more violent, more sinister, and more consuming. The titles of Carew’s two essays in erotic conquest make this obvious enough. In the seventeenth century the word ‘rapture’ carried a dual connotation. In its primary sense it meant capture, particularly capture of a woman. In effect the term was a euphemism for rape. The sense of ecstatic transportation, the sense upon which the ‘innocent’ reading of Carew turns, only became current in the later seventeenth century and during the eighteenth century. That is not to say that Carew’s
THE BODY EMBLAZONED

'raptures' are not ecstatic transportations, but the female ecstasy promised in 'A Rapture' is contingent upon her submission to the imperious command of the male narrator with which the poem opens: 'I will enjoy thee now my Celia, come'.

'The Second Rapture', by the same token, far from being a vision of innocence, is an essay in violence, couched in the language of mythic seduction. Here, a man reprimands another man in order to demonstrate his virility. In keeping with this programme, and in the characteristic convention of the blazon, the poem opens by addressing not the woman, but another man.

No wordling, no, tis not thy gold,
Which thou dost use but to behold;
(Carew, Poems, 182)

Nowhere in the poem's twenty-eight lines is the young girl who is the object of desire addressed. Instead, the text (like the girl) exists only for consumption amongst other men:

Give me a wench about thirteene,
Already voted to the Queene
Of lust and lovers, whose soft haire,
Fann'd with the breath of gentle aire,
O're spreads her shoulders like a tent,
And is her vaile and ornament:
Whose tender touch, will make the blood
Wild in the aged, and the good.
Whose kisses fastened to the mouth,
Of threescore yeares and longer slouthe,
Renew the age, and whose bright eye,
Obscure those lesser lights of skie;
Whose snowy breasts (if we may call
That snow, that never melts at all)
Makes Joce invent a new disguise,
In spite of Juloes jealousies:
Whose every part doth re-invite
The old decayed appetite:
And in whose sweet imbraces I,
May melt my selfe to lust, and die.
This is true blisse, and I confesse,
There is no other hapinesse.
(Carew, Poems, 182–3)

Lifting the veil with all the scopic intensity of the blasonneur, or the aged Volpone, the poem must 'use' rather than simply 'behold' the body. That demand for a thirteen year old girl has caused not a few critical anxieties.
Sharpe, in his determination to exonerate both the poem and the court culture which produced it, has provided, no doubt unwittingly, the paedo-phile's charter: 'For all the explicit eroticism of the imagined sexual union with a young girl, the imagery is religious and the maiden remains chaste.' But the 'true blisse' of the poem (for all its religious imagery) is to 'melt' and 'die' – an explicit rejection of any higher metaphysic. Sharpe's defence of the poem, however, continues a critical tradition which has sought to brush under the carpet what the text so clearly wants to place in the open. Thus, Carew's nineteenth-century editor – Joseph Woodfall Ebsworth – did not hesitate to rewrite the text. In Ebsworth's 1893 edition, 'about thirteen' became 'above thirteen' since, as the editor notes, 'Carew could have had no tainted passion for unripe fruit.' But then neither was Carew (who died in 1640 aged forty-five) actually 'of threescore years and longer' when the poem was composed. The point is that these verses are imaginative exercises pandering to the tastes of fellow courtiers. Those tastes, which 'The Second Rapture' evokes in such detail, circulate the female body as a collection of fragments so that 'every part doth re-invite/The old decayed appetite'. Private fantasy circulates within the public domain, just as Carew and Suckling, in a poetic dialogue published in Suckling's posthumous collection, *Fragmenta Aurea* (1646), fantasized on a woman walking in Hampton Court gardens, mentally undressing her in order to see 'the parts denied unto the eye', creating the homosocial bond, once more, around which this culture revolved.

To see 'the parts denied unto the eye' was, of course, the mainspring of the licensed explorations of the anatomist. Like the courtier, the anatomist's scopic desire alighted on the object, and took that which was once whole into pieces, so that it could be re-created as a new 'body'. In the court, this new body was constructed as a fantasy of male consumption and pleasure. The Elizabethan court, in contrast to its Caroline successor, manipulated the same set of poetic and aesthetic registers, but allowed those fantasies of domination and dissection to flow in a more complex articulation of fantasy around the queen's body. In the anatomy theatre, on the other hand (whether it is an Elizabethan, Jacobean, or Caroline structure that we have in mind), the re-created body was a fantasy object of knowledge, from whence flowed control and mastery. But the two worlds, the theatre of the court and the theatre of dissection, did not operate in divergent universes. Carew's poem 'Celia bleeding, to the Surgeon', was emblematic of the correspondence we are tracing. The surgeon and the courtier-poet confront one another over the prone female body. 'Celia' is no more than a 'Crystall case' which the surgeon's 'steele' can 'incise'. But the compulsion to lay claim to the female body was impossible to resist on the part of either science or poetry. The dissective power of the surgeon (so the poet claims) is weaker

211
THE BODY EMBLAZONED

than the dissective gaze of the poet. To the surgeon's exclamation 'Behold she bleeds', the poet replies contemptuously:

Fool, thou'rt deceived...
Thou struckst her arme, but 'twas my heart
Shed all the blood, felt all the smart
(Carew, Poems, 42)

No clearer expression of male fantasy forcing female experience into redundancy could be imagined.

Female bodies were not just cut up within anatomy theatres. Within the court, they were cut up in literary texts in order to be circulated as a specifically male knowledge of women. The fact that this knowledge was grounded in fantasy is crucial to the symbolic representation of Anatomia, since the fantasy dissection of the female body in literary texts helped to fashion the actual dissection which took place in anatomy theatres. The European courtly tradition of the blason which we have traced through the courts of François I, Elizabeth I, James I, and Charles I, foregrounded, then, an erotic mode of partition and division of the body. Without an understanding of the courtly milieu in which women's bodies were both the vehicle and the currency of wit, it is difficult to understand the symbolic dimension of anatomy in the later seventeenth century. The court world may have been a closed book to most people alive in the period, but its values, nevertheless, permeated the community at large, even when the response to those values was resistance or even outright 'rebellion'. To those involved in the culture of dissection, moreover, the court was a magnet. Physicians anxious to gain preferment were, as would be expected, alert to the subtle nuances of meaning located in the court. And the anatomy theatres, second only to the playhouses as sites of large-scale public performances, provided the perfect stage upon which clever and ambitious men could demonstrate their skill. Just as the courtiers relished the opportunity to demonstrate their wit over and above the female body, so the physicians and anatomists could consume bodies — particularly female bodies — in front of an admiring, and largely male audience. Out of those scattered organs a career could be built, and even wealth, honour, and nobility attained. If a poetic reputation could be constructed, in the court, via the fantasy reduction of the female body into its constituent parts, then a scientific reputation could also be built at the expense (this time) of real as opposed to literary bodies. How, then, were the actual bodies of women understood in the seventeenth century? And what happened to the voyeuristic gaze of the courtier-poet, once the anatomists had provided him with something entirely fresh to gaze upon?

212
THE REALM OF ANATOMIA

PITILESS RIGOUR: THE REPRODUCTIVE BODY

The erotic partition of the female body, which male poets of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries indulged to such extravagant lengths, was part of a wider regime of manipulation and control of women’s bodies which stretched back through the European religious, philosophical, and literary traditions to St Paul and even earlier. The female body was, of course, somehow different from its male counterpart. But what, exactly, was the nature of that difference? In exploring that difference, the natural philosophers of the Renaissance could not shrug off either the erotic dimension which we have encountered in the courtly blazon, nor the scriptural tradition. But the two—the erotic and the scriptural—co-existed in an uneasy tension which circumscribed the female body. Any account of that body in early-modern culture has to be alert, first, to the competing influence of Aristotelian and Galenic theories of biological reproduction; secondly, to the tradition of patriarchal control grounded in St Paul’s interpretations of the fall of humankind; and, thirdly, to religious traditions of representation of the Female both as the allegorized ‘church’—the ideal partner of Christ—and as the ideal figure of womanhood: the Virgin. Woven within these three domains, however, was the more intangible (and for that very reason, more pervasive) tradition of the female body as the licensed site of male erotic desire, manifest, as we have seen, in the Renaissance penchant for erotic partition and division. But for the male body to become the explicit focus of male desire (where ‘desire’ could encompass both knowledge and sexuality) it first had to be re-created as female. It is this fourth element, for example, that helps us to understand the ‘feminization’ of the male body (akin to that ‘feminization’ of Christ in the passion which we have already encountered) when it lay on the dissecting slab; or the transformation of the body of Marsyas in Golding’s translation of Ovid into ‘one whole wound’. This ‘feminization’ of the male body was most apparent in the frontispieces to Renaissance anatomical works. Often, it is only with great difficulty that we are able to tell whether the subject of the dissection represented on the title-pages of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anatomical texts is male or female. As Thomas Laqueur has reminded us, the politics of gender in anatomical illustration is not a simple matter.68

Modern commentators on Renaissance ideas about sexual difference have become increasingly indebted to the ‘one-sex’ model of understanding early-modern biology. Thus, so the argument goes, prior to the eighteenth century, there was only one sex, and that sex was male. As Laqueur has written:

Sometime in the eighteenth century, sex as we know it was invented. The reproductive organs went from being paradigmatic sites for displaying
hierarchy... to being the foundation of incommensurable difference. Here was not only an explicit repudiation of the old isomorphisms but also, and more important, a rejection of the idea that nuanced differences between organs, fluids, and physiological processes mirrored a transcendental order of perfection. Aristotle and Galen were simply mistaken in holding that female organs are a lesser form of the male's and by implication that woman is a lesser man.69

Setting aside the problem of whether or not it is possible to talk about a single, unified, theory of reproduction in the period (or, indeed, in any period), the 'one-sex' model rests on the interpretation of the Aristotelian idea that (as Constance Jordan writes) the female was 'by nature a defective male', and that, in the act of generation, a hierarchy of functions could be observed with the male contributing 'motion and form to the embryo, and the female only matter'.70

But, in exploring the 'one-sex' model, we need to be aware of the status of metaphor within scientific discourse.71 With more than thirty years of practical experience behind her, the seventeenth-century English midwife, Jane Sharp, described conception as an undeniably hierarchical process: 'Man in the act of procreation is the agent and tiller and sower of the ground, woman is the patient or ground to be tilled'. But is this evidence for the 'one-sex' view? Sharp suggests a more complex exchange. The woman's role in conception is, she continued, to bring seed 'as well as the man to sow the ground with'.72 The key term, here, is 'ground' – Jane Sharp's word for the specific anatomical structure which is the uterus. In fact, attending to Jane Sharp's richly metaphoric language, it becomes apparent that her biological theory is far more complex than the 'one-sex' model tends to allow, since that model tends to ignore the quasi-autonomous nature of the uterus – that Medusa's head – in early-modern physiological discourse. Equally the 'one-sex' model tends to ignore the fluid metaphoric language with which men and women in early-modern culture described their own bodies. An illustration from a much earlier anatomical work makes the point. Figures 26 and 27 show sequential dissection figures from Berengarius' Isagoge Brevae (1522). In the first image, the classical figure emerges from under a cloak, and, like Pygmalion's unnamed creation, she steps down from her pedestal in the familiar gesture of art becoming life. In the second image, the woman gestures towards the excised uterus which has been placed in the ground from which she herself has just stepped. As in all such images, the details rehearse a complex pattern of meaning. The woman's left foot comes to rest on closed books, whilst she gestures with her right hand towards her uterus. A great cloak which she supports swirls about her. What is she telling us? First, she demonstrates the primacy of ocular evidence – the evidence of dissection – over classical (written) authority.
THE REALM OF ANATOMIA

Secondly, the vigorous gesture with which she points to the uterus seems to demonstrate her mastery over that organ, an erstwhile independent agent of the body. But the conjunction of the two images points to a third meaning which centres upon the folds of the cloak. In the first image, the woman seems to step out of the cloak and into ‘life’, so that what we see is an image of birth. In the second image, the cloak still enfolds her, whilst the uterus is in the position she once occupied, signifying the belief that the cloak—uterus is mastering her, not the other way around. Her identity, moreover, is entirely determined by the uterus, to an extent that it is possible for her own position on the pedestal to be assumed by just one anatomical organ: the uterus, in effect, is the woman.\footnote{73}

In Jane Sharp’s late seventeenth-century account, we can see that very little had changed from the time of Berengarius. What the woman provided was a ‘place’ for the uterus to reside where it received the offerings of both male and female: ‘the womb is that field of nature into which the seed of man and woman is cast, and it hath also an attractive faculty to draw in a magnetic quality, as the lodestone draweth iron, or fire the light of the candle’. Sharp wrote.\footnote{74} The relationship was analogous to the print allegory which we have already encountered. The woman was the locus for the ‘matrix’ from which is drawn the infant, or the printer’s font. In order to make the font, from which discourse itself can be produced, the matrix must be ‘filled’ with lead.\footnote{75} A very different (in twentieth-century terms) kind of text provides an analogue to Sharp’s description: Spenser’s Garden of Adonis (Faerie Queene III.vi). In Spenser’s poetic interplay of Aristotelianism, filtered through Neoplatonism, the cycle of conception, birth, death, regeneration, and rebirth is played out against a rich metaphorical backcloth of floral abundance, a sensual garden corresponding to Sharp’s ‘ground’ of the ‘field of nature’. At the centre of this garden of conception is a cavern of moist fertility:

Right in the midst of that Paradise,
    There stood a stately Mount, on whose round top
    A gloomy grove of mirtle trees did rise,
    Whose shadie boughs sharpe Steele did never lop,
    Nor wicked beasts their tender buds did crop,
    But like a girond compassed the hight,
    And from their fruitfull sides sweet gum did drop,
    That all the ground with precious deaw bedight,
    Threw forth most dainty odours, and most sweet delight.

(FQ III.vi.43)

Within the female ‘hortus anatomicus’ is located the mons veneris, beneath which in ‘the thickest covert of that shade’ is a ‘pleasant arbour’ (44) where
THE BODY EMBLAZONED

Adonis – the male principle of generation – lies ‘in secret . . . /Lapped in flowres and pretious spycery’ (46).76

Jane Sharp was writing some thirty years after the publication of Harvey’s work on conception – *De generatione animalium* (1651, translated into English in 1653). Her understanding of the process of generation was, however, entirely consonant with the flow of images to be found in a poetic text published some seventy years earlier. This congruence of language in both science and poetry was perfectly expressed in contemporary images of the foetus shown in situ. The metaphoric creation of the uterus as a ‘field’ in which the foetus was nurtured came to be expressed in the extraordinary and beautiful ‘flowering foetus’ images which appeared in mid-seventeenth-century anatomical manuals, one of which appears in Jane Sharp’s own text. In Spigelius’ work on the formation of the foetus (*De formato foeto* of 1627), for example, we can see the metaphor of vegetative growth in pictorial form (Figure 28). The foetus lies, couched like Spenser’s Adonis, a flowering bud encircled by petals. The shoot of new growth which bursts from the tree-stump upon which the woman rests her knee, equally, echoes Spenser’s description of the cyclical garden of fertility.

Both the Spigelius and the Berengarius images also illustrate the fact that, like their male counterparts, the female subjects of Renaissance anatomical dissection were represented as willing participants in the complete process. This sense of participation is very different from later modes of female representation inherited from the nineteenth century. Elizabeth Bronfen, in her discussion of Gabriel von Max’s painting *Der Anatoom* (first exhibited in Munich in 1869), describes the picture’s subject – an anatomist contemplating the female corpse which he is about to dissect – as a feminine body which:

appears as a perfect, immaculate aesthetic form because it is a dead body, solidified into an object of art. The aesthetically pleasing unity this corpse seems to afford draws added power from the fact that implicitly we know it is about to be cut into.

Von Max’s painting, Bronfen argues, is paradigmatic of nineteenth-century representations of ‘feminine death’ – where ‘stillness, wholeness, perfection’ presage ‘the dissolution of precisely those attributes of beauty’.77 The fracture of this ideal sense of completeness is a function of natural forces – the decay and putrefaction of the cadaver – rather than the anatomist’s scalpel. Struggling to arrest this biological process, Bronfen suggests, is the *raison d’être* which underpins the creation, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, of waxwork anatomical museums such as La Specola in Florence.78 For Renaissance artists, however, such a poised tension between wholeness and dissolution – an aesthetic investment in the liminal moment where an
active masculine science defines itself in relation to the passive female form - would have been inconceivable. Instead, the desire to explore the female body, to cut beneath the skin and open it to the admiring gaze of fellow observers (whether poets, painters, or anatomists) was impossible to resist. At the same time, the woman, just as much as the man, had to be shown to be aiding and abetting the process of her own deconstruction. Hesitation before the female form (of the kind that Bronfen describes) is a nineteenth-century invention, one entirely foreign to the ruthless dynamism of Renaissance explorations of the human figure particularly the female human figure.

This dissection dynamism was rooted in a profound awareness of the conjunction between profane representation, empirical science, scripture, and ecclesiastical doctrine, circulating around the representation of the female body. This awareness, in turn, tended to stress the endless divisibility of the female body. The perfect body, of course, was male - entire, whole, complete - a harmonious union of form and matter. And the most perfect male body was that of Christ, who, despite (or rather because of) the mortification endured during the passion, and his depiction as the broken and passive object of contemplation in the numberless images of the pietà, nevertheless preserved his essential spiritual and aesthetic unity. Hence the symbolic importance of the self-division which was re-created in the Eucharist. The 'sacrifice' of the mass was not the offering of a broken or incomplete body, but a perfect object of adoration voluntarily subjected to partition as a means of redemption. Christ's body, moreover, was the pattern of unity upon which rested the super-structure of the church - Ecclesia. But, as we have already seen, there also existed a tradition of Christ represented as a nurturing female body. This tradition, as Gail Kern Paster suggests, determines the symbolic representation of the church as 'ecclesia lactans' - the nurturing church.79 Ecclesia was thus female, the nurturing body of Christ and the bride of Christ. According to St Paul, Ecclesia was composed of parts - members - gathered together to form the greater unity of the universal church. Ecclesia's body was not, therefore, itself ideal. If Christ, as St Augustine explained, was the head of this body, its perfection lay at some future date when all the members had been gathered in order that completion would be achieved 'in due time'.80

The female body of the church was evident in St Augustine's interpretation of Genesis as a typological foreshadowing of the creation of the christian church.81 In a passage which squarely confronted the nature of sexual difference (prompted by the question 'Will women retain their sex in the resurrected body?'), St Augustine demonstrated how the Eucharist, the body as a pattern of unity, and myths of division and origin, could be bound together in a harmonious fusion of scriptural interpretation and Neoplatonic reasoning:
THE BODY EMBLAZONED

Now in creating woman at the outset of the human race, by taking a rib from the side of the sleeping man, the Creator must have intended by this act, a prophecy of Christ and his Church. The sleep of the man clearly stood for the death of Christ; and Christ's side, as he hung lifeless on the cross, was pierced by a lance. And from the wound there flowed blood and water, which we recognize as the sacraments by which the Church is built up. This, in fact, is the precise word used in scripture of woman's creation; it says not that God 'formed' or 'fashioned' a woman but that 'he built it (the rib) up into a woman'. Hence the Apostle also speaks of the 'building up' of the Body of Christ, which is the Church. The woman, then, is the creation of God, just as is the man; but her creation out of man emphasizes the idea of the unity between them; and in the manner of that creation there is, as I have said, a foreshadowing of Christ and his Church.82

In the Renaissance, christian attitudes towards the human body (whether dead or alive) were informed at every level by an awareness of this potent symbolism of partition, division, and reunification. If anything, during the sixteenth century, when the schism of Reformation and counter-Reformation had divided the church, the language of union and disunion became even more relevant.83 Such wide-ranging recourse to a symbolic language, however, meshed with a network of popular beliefs which understood the body as a fragile unity, all too easily rendered into its constituent parts. Once the body was dispersed, then it seemed to possess a new significance in the popular mind. As we have seen, the complex question of dispersed burial, for example, and the effect on bodily resurrection such a dismemberment of the cadaver might possess, was endlessly debated in the period, despite St Augustine's fifth-century ruling that the fate of the body was of no real consequence to its eventual resurrection.84 But whatever St Augustine may have said, to those who took part in popular religious disturbances of the time, the body was a powerful signifier of an individual's own religious (and hence political) identity. Desecration and dismemberment of corpses, even the buying and selling of the genitalia and internal organs of one's religious opponents was, as Natalie Zemon Davis has observed, a recognizably feature of urban religious unrest. Such activities, Davis argues 'can be reduced to a repertory of actions, derived from the Bible, from the liturgy, from the action of political authority, or from the traditions of popular folk justice'.85

We have already seen how such patterns of belief could be incorporated into the representational vocabulary of anatomy in the early-modern period. Equally important, however, was the circulation of such beliefs within a complementary pattern of discourse which discovered the female body within a context that was overtly erotic. So, the divisibility of the female body sprang from what, to modern eyes, appear to be two contradictory impulses:
THE REALM OF ANATOMIA

the religious figure of the church as the female partner in union with Christ, and the erotic court culture of the Renaissance – one of whose most influential representational gestures was the ‘building up’ (to use a term common to St Augustine and sixteenth-century anatomists) of the ideal female figure.

If anatomy was a science of seeing, and thus knowing and controlling the body, in order to harness its appetites and desires, then it would be more surprising still if the female body existed in a space reserved from erotic speculation. Art, in particular, mediated this encounter between (or rather creation of) a male science which observed and a female subject who was observed. But the encounter was not one determined simply by an active male gaze confronting a passive female subject. The exchange, in the Renaissance, was at once more complex, and more overt. Spenser’s ‘Bower of Blisse’ in The Faerie Queene (FQ II.xii) perfectly captures the mediation of science through the devices of art. Like Adonis in Book III, Acrasia and her lover Verdant also lie in a ‘hortus anatomicus’ – a natural landscape endowed with fertile corporeality. Within this landscape, Guyon and the Palmer approach Acrasia’s bower, in order to ‘display/That wanton Ladie’: a moment in which the speculative and a kind of fearful desire merge into one another in a fashion which is overtly anatomic. The ‘constant paire’ – representatives of puritan and masculine ‘rigour’ – crawl through ‘covert groves and thickets close’ (a foretaste of the ‘gloomy grove’ and ‘thickest covert’ of the garden of Adonis) until Acrasia herself is discovered, like a foetal flower ‘Upon a bed of Roses... faint through heat’, which is the product of her ‘late sweet toyle’ (FQ II.xii. 77–8). This ‘toyle’ is the labouring work of conception which Guyon observes through a ‘veyle of silk and silver thin,/That hid no whit her alabaster skin’. The veil through which Acrasia is observed is ‘a subtile web’, a ‘fine net’ – a membranous downy film which is described in terms of the sixteenth-century vocabulary of anatomy. The post-coital reverie which Acrasia and her lover, Verdant, enjoy is the moment of conception where heat and moisture, form and matter, are mingled together. But the moment of conception also signals a loss of masculine identity. Here is that ‘disastrous slide back into the female’ which Henry V had set out to avoid, and which animated the courtly blazon. Acrasia’s sexuality is all-mastering, able to transform the rational masculine intellect into a world of beast-like appetite associated with the feminine. Verdant (in whose name a vegetative principle is enshrined) is ensnared within this female principle, a principle which Guyon destroys ‘with rigour pittlesse’, smashing the delicate artistry – the ‘groves...gardins...arbers...cabinets’ of Acrasia’s domain (83).

The destruction of Acrasia’s bower with ‘rigour pittlesse’ is a paradigmatic moment where we can see the conjunction of art and speculative masculine
science triumphing over the ‘dangerous’ female body. Outside the confines of art, however, the female body, understood as the site of the labour of reproduction – what Cowley was later to call ‘the great work’ – was anxiously sought after by the anatomists. The juxtaposition of Spenser’s luxurious poetic gestures with the brutal reality of the Renaissance execution site may seem gratuitous. Yet, ‘rigour pittilesse’ – the destruction of organic integrity played out at the expense of ‘The Bower of Blisse’ – was exactly what took place on the scaffold. And for women, in particular, this ‘rigour’ produced scenes of the most terrible cruelty. For, if the scaffold afforded male bodies for the anatomists with some degree of regularity, female bodies were an altogether rarer commodity. Thus, the prospect of obtaining a female body seems to have sharpened the appetites of the anatomists. Ironically, it was male attempts to police the very processes of female reproduction which, in the early-modern period, often led women to the scaffold and, thence, to the anatomy theatre. Anne Greene, for example, who was hanged at Oxford in 1651 and whose ‘miraculous’ revival on the anatomy table has already been described, was sentenced for the crime of infanticide, as was another unfortunate woman, known simply (in Anthony à Wood’s account) as ‘T’.

The history of ‘T’ is not only a story of cruelty. It (briefly) allows us a fleeting glimpse of the kind of resistance offered by women to this masculine science. In May 1658, ‘T’ was hanged at Greenditch, Oxford ‘for murdering her infant bastard’. Taken by William Coniers of St John’s College, and other ‘young physicians’ to be anatomized, she was found to be still alive, whereupon the bailiffs, hearing of her ‘revival’:

went between 12 and one of the clock at night to the house where she laid, and putting her into a coffin carried her into Broken Hayes, and by a halter about her neck drew her out of it, and hung her on a tree there. She then was so sensible of what they were about to do, that she said, ‘Lord have mercy upon me,’ &c. The women were exceedingly enraged at it, cut down the tree whereon she was hang’d and gave very ill language to Henry Mallory, one of the bailives when they saw him passing the streets, because he was the chief man that hang’d her.87

This appalling account opens the door into the realities of the world of ‘rigour pittilesse’, in which a group of women struggled to preserve the life and the body that the law and science had demanded. Shortly after the hanging of ‘T’ another case of revival took place at Oxford. The bailiff, Mallory once more, attempted to re-hang a woman convicted of infanticide who had been cut down whilst still alive.88 But these stories prompt another question. Is it coincidence that these well-documented accounts of ‘anatomical revival’ involved women? Women were executed with much less frequency than men in the early-modern period. In the 1650s following the
publication of Harvey’s *De generatione* and in the vicinity of the university and the physicians’ college, trainee physicians would have been eager — overeager — to seize upon female corpses, particularly the corpses of women of a child-bearing age. Just as Rembrandt was drawn to the scaffold in order to see, and record, a hanged woman, so the young physicians seized their opportunities when they came.

A more famous account of a woman being anatomized (though one drawn from an entirely different locale, and a chronologically earlier period) gives some substance to this speculation. Figure 29 shows Vesalius’ notorious image of the vagina and uterus conceived as a ‘penis’. This image has been much commented on by adherents to the ‘one-sex’ model of the history of the understanding of sexual difference. Vesalius’ text does, however, go some way towards explaining why this extraordinarily phallic rendition of the female reproductive organs should have been produced. Only very rarely, Vesalius records, was he able to procure female bodies, and hence he had to rely on the evidence culled from autopsies, and from grave-robbing.

This image was the product of one such expedition. According to Vesalius’ modern commentators, the uterus was obtained:

> from the body of a woman who had been the mistress of a certain monk. Vesalius and his pupils, hearing of her death, snatched the body from the tomb, but, unfortunately, [sic] the monk together with the parents of the girl complained of the outrage to the city magistrates so that the anatomist and his students were compelled to dismember and free the body from all skin as rapidly as possible in order to prevent its being recognized. Since they had stolen the body expressly to examine the female organs, the best they could do was to encircle the external genitalia with a knife.

And thus was produced an image which has often been termed monstrous and grotesque.

But, of course, that was exactly the point. The female body was held to be monstrous and grotesque, a region of erotic desire governed by the quasi-autonomous uterus, which lurked, like Acrasia in her bower, ready to transform heroic masculine rigour into luxurious sensual excess. The story of Vesalius’ expedition to the tomb of the unnamed woman who was so hastily stripped of the marks of her humanity and reduced to the metonymic presence of a single (male) organ, conceals a profoundly significant feature of the Renaissance culture of dissection. Classical myth and narrative, so popular in the period, were replete with stories of male figures conquered by an ungovernable female principle. These narratives became the subject matter, again and again, of artistic representation: Botticelli’s *Mars and Venus* repeated the theme, as do the stories of Hercules and Omphale, Bacchus and Ariadne, and, of course, Antony and Cleopatra. The woman’s role, as
THE BODY EMBLAZONED

Diana Coole has described the Christian tradition which stemmed from St Augustine, was associated with the control of her 'subversive appetite.' The literature of the Renaissance was populated with sinister female figures – the sisters of Acrasia – who, in the guise of Alcina in Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso (1532) or Armida in Tasso’s Gerusalemme liberata (1581), traced their origin to Circe in the Odyssey. What was so sinister (to men) about this female principle was its attractiveness to the male observer: the ‘covert groves’, as Spenser expressed it, were endlessly fascinating to ‘hungrie eies’. The observation and anatomical reduction of the female body explicitly confronted this masculine erotic desire whilst at the same time it claimed to master that desire within the fracturing impulses of science, or knowledge. Spenser’s image of the destruction of the ‘Bower of Blisse’ was the poetic counter-point to the anatomical ‘rigour’ with which the contemporaries of Vesalius sought to trace the principle of the creation of life, located within the all-consuming womb or matrix.

The search for this principle encouraged the appetites of the anatomists. Those women who suffered such extremes of cruelty in the seventeenth century were the victims not only of the emerging science of biology, but of a European artistic tradition which located within the female body the source of a disturbing and dislocating power. Certainly, there was something congruent in the cold, male fury with which Spenser’s knight of ‘temperance’ destroyed the subversive female principle of Acrasia, and the voracious appetite of the Renaissance anatomist willing to risk the law and public outrage in pursuit of his understanding and scientific mastery over the female body. The literary tradition, which sought to master the female body in such widely varying historical and artistic moments, was constantly looking back over its shoulder to that moment of origin, the myth of separation which, as Jonathan Dollimore writes, was to ‘help legitimate the subjection of women and violence against them for centuries to come.’

The womb or uterus was an object sought after with an almost ferocious intensity in Renaissance anatomy theatres. Here was not only the principle of life, but the source of all loss of rational (male) intellect. Once the uterus was seen, however, it had to be mastered in a complex process of representation. Mastery over and above the uterus informs some of the most beautiful (and disturbing) images of anatomy that have survived from the early-modern period. In those images, too, we can see the ways in which the female body could be reconstructed (as the blasonneurs had reconstructed it) as something both fetishistically adored, and violently suppressed. In Figure 30 (taken, once more, from Spigelius’ work of 1627) the woman’s abdomen has been dissected. The image is, however, more than a representation of the female body. The figure’s pose and gestures are reminiscent of Baroque images of the Virgin, gesturing in benediction towards her devotees. But even here, revealing the images of women’s bodies, disturbing and dislocating, the female and the male, the drawing and the diagram, the artist and the anatomist, the viewer and the viewed, are not separate. They are intertwined. They form a male gaze, a male desire, a male quest for knowledge, a male desire to understand the female body, the female body as the source of the power of life, the power of the womb, the source of life, the source of power. The female body is the source of the power of life, but the male body is the source of the power to impose that power, to control that power, to understand that power, to master that power. The female body is the source of the power of life, but the male body is the source of the power to control that power, to understand that power, to master that power. The female body is the source of the power of life, but the male body is the source of the power to control that power, to understand that power, to master that power. The female body is the source of the power of life, but the male body is the source of the power to control that power, to understand that power, to master that power. The female body is the source of the power of life, but the male body is the source of the power to control that power, to understand that power, to master that power.
even here, within such a sacred frame of reference, the great cloak, symbolizing the all-mastering uterus, swirls around the figure, as it had in the images published by Berengarius over one hundred years earlier. A more disturbing set of images of the female interior was produced in the same period. Around 1618, Pietro Berrettini da Cortona produced a series of drawings made from dissections undertaken at the Santo Spirito hospital in Rome (Figure 31). The drawings remained unpublished until 1741, when they were engraved by Gaetano Petrioli, surgeon to the King of Sardinia (Figure 32). Petrioli’s engraving compensated for the lack of detail in Berrettini’s drawing by suspending against the rigid architectural background, the reproductive organs under discussion. If anything, the 1741 duplication of the opened anatomical structure emphasized the opposition between the flowing human form, and the oppressive, triumphalist, rigidity of the architectural background, a device which serves to display the female body as all the more sensual and, at the same moment, fragile. The organic female form had to be shown to be subjected to the severe super-imposition of architectural order which reared above it. But, older, symbolic, patterns of representation were also at work. Berrettini’s figure peels back the surface tissue of her body, and, in so doing, she appears to create grotesquely misplaced genital labia, as though her body is no more than the vehicle for a vagina which dominates the complete abdomen. Amidst this ‘shameless’ display, however, the old religious motif of ‘shame’ is repeated. If she is casually made to open herself to the gaze of science, then science could not resist moralizing her body even as it stared into her: the 1741 engraving of the enlarged uterus fixed to the suddenly corporeal background wall discloses a tiny foetus in situ, which covers its eyes as though in recoil from the act of disclosure to which it and she are subjected.

We have already seen how such an image has its place in the transformation of scientific representation out of religious art in fifteenth-century representations of the gravida figure – a tradition to which Spigelius’ image (Figure 30) was also indebted. But we can trace Berrettini’s act of disclosure even further back, to the sheela-na-gig figures to be found, carved in stone, on the corbels and capitols of churches in England and Ireland in the middle ages. Margaret Miles has argued that such images, where ‘female grotesques . . . displayed their splayed vaginas’, were reminders of the ‘dangerous power of female sexual organs’. The sexual organs of the female were the visible sign of the woman as the ‘vessel’ within which (men hoped) legitimate children were conceived and nurtured. It was only through controlling this reproductive process that the male’s name and property could be transferred from one generation to the next. At this point, the conjunction of the female form and the monumental architecture in the background of the Berrettini image seems to underline the relevance of the
older sheela-na-gig motif. The Renaissance sheela-na-gig, just like her medieval counterpart, is displayed as an architectural motif. But, in keeping with a rational philosophy of enquiry, her overt function is no longer either to celebrate fertility or to warn of the dangers of female sexuality (though both may be implied). Rather, she opens herself to a gaze which is anchored in the regime of knowledge which, by the early years of the seventeenth century, was rapidly displacing older networks of religious belief.

But those same networks of belief still provided the symbolic core of the ‘performance’ of anatomy. To open the female body was not just to embark upon a voyage of scientific discovery but was also to trace the lineaments of the rebellious nature of womankind. That rebellious nature could undermine the smooth transfer of material goods from one generation to the next, just as, in the garden of Eden, it had seemed to undermine the divine plan itself. Every female body which found its way into the anatomy theatre was, therefore, a potential second Eve, just as every male body was a potential second Adam. To be an Eve, however, was very different from being an Adam within the patriarchal structure of early-modern culture. If the Renaissance anatomy theatre, in its modes of ritual and representation, offered the suggestion of redemption to the male cadaver, what it offered to the female was the reverse: a demonstration of Eve’s sin, a reinforcement of those structures of patriarchal control which, so the argument ran, were necessary to avoid a repetition of that first act of rebellion in the garden of Paradise.

Thus, the Leiden anatomy theatre, and its counterpart in England – Inigo Jones’s lost temple of mortality – both featured the founding moment of human transgression in their ornate decoration. In the predominantly protestant cultures of the Low Countries and England, with their theological and social stress on the significance of the Fall, the anatomy theatres looked back to that original moment for their most arresting visual motif. In other words, what we have already identified as the punning conceit on the iconography of Adam and Eve within the anatomy theatre (the invention of death within the temple of death), was, as so often meant, once it was Eve rather than Adam who was being dissected. Once Eve was transported into the theatre, then the investigation of the origin of death was buttressed by the pressing theological, social, and scientific need to master her aberrant sexual nature. The anatomical knowledge of Eve, therefore, was perhaps a more important project than knowledge of Adam who was, after all, no more than the ‘victim’ of her unruly desires.

With the production and dissemination of ever more detailed accounts of the body understood as a mechanism, however, some authorities began to grow distinctly uneasy at the circulation of these images and accounts. If we think of the fantastic decoration of the anatomy theatres, together with the mannered articulation of the illustrations in the textbooks, as devices which were explicit and predominantly explicit of such knowledge, we might ask what their functions were. And the answer would be that they were different, and, at the same time, they could not be reduced to the explicit and determinate, for knowledge was the very condition of the body being open.

If the word ‘opener’ is not to the point, perhaps the word ‘patient’ is not supplanting it. But the point is to establish the most fundamental difference. We have seen that knowledge of the human body was a voluntary act, one of the fundamental pleasures of the human body. And 5 centuries of anxiety about knowledge of the human body, including knowledge of the body without the organs of knowledge.

The anatomical theatre is a historical object. It is an object that is whole and complete, circular, and not reducible to parts by the acts of knowledge. And the President's comments about the effects of knowledge of the human body.

several centuries ago, it is easy to remember that the anatomical theatres were not seen as a place to look at and learn about the human body.

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THE REALM OF ANATOMIA

explicit attempts at controlling how the body was to be understood within a predominantly religious context, then a point was to come when the power of such devices was itself questioned. Were architecture, illustration, ritual, and the endless protestations of the 'divine' nature of this science enough to preserve a predominantly patriarchal view of the nature of human sexual difference? If the female body existed in the same Cartesian universe as the male, and both were no more than machine-like entities, then what guarantee could maintain patriarchal structures, with their dense layers of hierarchical and determinedly organicist metaphors? The female body was already acknowledged to be an unruly entity, and the very seat of that potential rebellion was the 'field of nature' described by Jane Sharp, the uterus. How could this body be controlled under the pressure of Cartesian analysis?

If the detailed investigations of the scientists were to lead to a challenge to the more simple verities of St Paul, then this knowledge of the body, particularly the female body, might have to be policed more rigorously, if not suppressed completely. In England, it is possible to date this struggle to establish control over knowledge of the female body almost to the month. We have already encountered Helkiah Crooke's syncretic work in which many of the images under discussion were published in England. But Crooke's Microcosmographia appeared only after considerable debate. Parts of the text were in circulation in November 1614, when John King, Bishop of London, was reported to have been affronted by passages from Books 4 and 5 of Crooke's work. The passages objected to were those describing 'the parts belonging to generation'. The Bishop secured the support of the President of the College of Physicians, who condemned the volume and informed Crooke's printer, William Jaggard, that if the work appeared without alteration it would be destroyed.

The condemnation of Crooke's work has been understood by medical historians as, essentially, a matter of professional dispute. At issue was the whole question of whether such works should be published in the vernacular, and thus be allowed to circulate before a wider audience. From the record of the Comitia of the College, held on 11 November 1614 in order to investigate the affair, the question of vernacular publication was debated: several thought that a few subjects and more indecent illustrations should be removed, and other points ought also to be corrected, while many considered that book four with the pictures of the generative organs should be destroyed and that he [Crooke] should be enjoined to confess that it was a translation, that is of many subjects from Laurentius... and of... Bauhin.

The point, of course, was that such illustrations (derived from numerous continental sources, including Vesalius and Valverde) had been in circulation in England for the past fifty years or more, and that the production of
syncretic works was, equally, hardly an innovation on Crooke's part. Instead, Crooke's 'crime' was to conjoin the illustrations and an English text at a moment when theological sensitivity was particularly intense. Scripturally based notions of patriarchal rule were part of the very fabric of puritanism, at a time when domestic religious policy was one of constant compromise and negotiation between competing factions within the (predominantly) protestant establishment. So, whilst it is easy to dismiss the objections of Crooke's fellow physicians as a combination of prudery and obscurantism, it was also the case that there was an ideological stake in controlling the ever more detailed dissemination of public information on the operation of the reproductive body. If, in the main, as Diana Coole writes, 'patriarchalism provided a horizon for all English political thought in the seventeenth century', then we can more readily begin to explain the growing sensitivity, on the part of medical professionals in England, to the implications of the discoveries of continental anatomists in this sphere. In England, in the early years of the seventeenth century, any vernacular discussion of the mechanism of generation was potentially a dangerous topic. In 1618, for example, Sir William Paddy, president of the College of Physicians and a friend of Archbishop Laud, was to object to Crooke's election as a Fellow of the College of Physicians because the candidate had written, so it was claimed, a letter to the king describing how, in public dissections, members of the College 'exhibited the human body of either sex to be seen and touched and that they cut up indecent parts and explained each separately in the vernacular'. Paddy's objection was that Crooke, once more, was guilty of encouraging public discussion of sexual differentiation. Who could know where such discussion would eventually lead?

The evidence that we possess for tracing the understanding of the female reproductive body in the early-modern period is still contradictory and hazy. Part of the contradiction, however, lies in our modern unwillingness to allow our early-modern forebears access to a dense, subtle, interlocking language of simile and metaphor. All understanding of the body was mediated through such a metaphorical web, which was spun, in particular, out of scriptural texts. Female sexuality was known to be a potentially transgressive force, because that was the message of the scriptures interpreted and reinterpreted through patristic authority, catholic and protestant exegesis, and the spoken word of the pulpit. The metaphors which surrounded the female body – metaphors such as we have encountered in Spenser's poetry, or in medical images – may have expressed the body's fertility, but they also underlined its existence as a source of a dangerous male delight. Thus, metaphors acted not only to explain function (or dysfunction) and structure, but to constrain the body within the overarching organization of patriarchal authority. As long as the metaphors were in place the female...
THE REALM OF ANATOMIA

body was a subject entity. It was for this reason, more than any other, that the fantastic codes of representation – their complex and detailed affirmation of the harmony of scripture and science – informed Renaissance anatomical investigation of the female body.

For women, subject to the dangers of childbirth, the primacy of scriptural experience was paramount as a comfort and as a related means of understanding the pain and danger which they endured. For pregnancy and labour were not only biological activities, but reminders of every woman’s direct participation in ‘the fallen procreation of Eve and her Old Testament daughters’.[103] Thus, scriptural texts also acted as means of fashioning an internalized system of suppression and domination. Very occasionally, we can glimpse a woman struggling against this pervasive system, questioning the analogical discourses within which her own language (of necessity) was formed. But usually, the result was failure. Mary Carey’s moving meditation of 1657 – ‘Upon the Sight of My Abortive Birth’ – seems to deploy the network of metaphors which enclose the female body in order to assert her own identity (and body) as a free agent, rather than as the vehicle of scriptural exegesis. But the struggle was unequal. The prevailing system of metaphor anchored her words to the predominant discourse of surveillance and control as firmly and inevitably as did the marginal scriptural references:

... It is in Christ; he’s mine, and I am his;
   this union is my only happiness;
But lord since I’m a Child by mercy free;
   Lett me by filial frutes much honour thee;
   I’m a branch of the vine; purge me therefore;
   father, more frute to bring, than heeritofore;
   A plant in God’s house; O that I may be;
   more flourishing in age; a growing tree;
   Lett nott my hart, (as doth my wombe) miscarrie;
   but precious meanes received, lett it tarie;
   Till it be form’d; of Gospel shape, & sute;
   my meanes, my mercyes, & be pleasant frute:
   In my whole Life; lively doe thou make me:
   for thy praise. And name’s sake, O quicken mee;
   Lord I begg quikning grace. . . [104]

This poem is a demonstration of Mary Carey’s acceptance of God’s will, made all the more poignant by our knowledge that the stillbirth which it commemorates represented the sixth child she and her husband had buried. But the poem also demonstrates just how the prevailing systems of metaphor structure the devastating but, in seventeenth-century terms, familiar experience of child-loss, and the threat to the woman’s life which
pregnancy and labour represented. For Mary Carey, even as she demands of God a 'quikning grace', has already located the source of her sadness (and her religious consolation) in her own physiology which is itself a product of her own sinful nature. Earlier in the poem, questioning 'of my sweet God/ The reason why he took in hand his rodd?' she provides the theologically inevitable answer:

Methinks I hear God's voyce, this is thy [the] sinne;
And Conscience justifies the same within.\textsuperscript{106}

God's patriarchal voice is internalized. Her own puritan conscience will confirm the harsh judgement. As another woman, the Countess of Lincoln, put the matter in 1622: 'We have followed Eve in Transgression... Let us follow her in Obedience.'\textsuperscript{107} As though she had heard the Countess's admonition, Carey offers the fruit of her body to Christ as cement to the bond which unites her and her saviour. Her religious identity, too, is determined by the familiar metaphors of conception and growth ('I'm a branch of the vine... A plant in God's house'), whilst, in keeping with the images we have already explored, her womb is understood as a dangerously rebellious entity, denying her, through its stubborn resistance, the (theologically acceptable) role as fruitful mother, and prompting the anxious reflection that her religious zeal ('my hart') must not, like her womb, 'miscarie'.

Comparing Carey's poem with a similar text by a male writer - and Ben Jonson's 'On My First Son' is an immediate and obvious point of comparison - we may well be prompted to agree with Charlotte Otten that Carey's use of 'female reproductive metaphors... establishes her female identity, and... brings her female experience into an area free from male mediation'.\textsuperscript{108} Certainly, Jonson's chronologically earlier poem (his son died of the plague in 1603), when we come to it after reading Carey's meditation, appears to speak from a different world, one in which poetic device is altogether more consciously on display - a display encapsulated in the famous lines:

Rest in soft peace, and, asked, say here doth lie
Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry.\textsuperscript{109}

where Jonson's identity as a poet (no matter how 'sincere' the epithet may be) is asserted over and above his identity as a bereaved father. But this freedom from male mediation which Carey's poem may, at first, suggest is only momentary. Reproductive metaphors - webs, flowers, fruit, cloaks - ensnared women, rather than guaranteed them autonomy. Once we have replaced Carey's poem within the metaphorical domain of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century accounts of the female body, accounts produced primarily by men for other men, then whatever freedom may have been attained by women is severely circumscribed. Mary Carey's verses were structured
THE REALM OF ANATOMIA

through her experience of the Psalms, puritan theology, and the prevailing metaphors of medical understanding which were, themselves, embedded within the parameters of a theologically driven society. To escape those parameters (even if such an imaginary escape could have been envisaged) was more than could be achieved by any one individual.

Anatomia – the cultural domain of the Renaissance science of the body – was a hungry goddess, feeding off the bodies of condemned men and women in the cities of early-modern Europe. But the anatomy theatre was not, it seems, the only place where she held sway. Appearing in different forms, she could be discovered not only at the scaffold, but in the very centres of political power. Given the absolute centrality of the body to Renaissance culture – whether understood as a source of fearful anxiety or hierarchical patterns of government – then the perverse vitality of Anatomia is readily comprehensible. But Anatomia operated according to a rigidly gendered set of rules and prohibitions. To those rules and prohibitions, the art, literature, and science of the body were subservient. With the advantages of historical hindsight, the courtly world of the blazon, and the internalized world of a puritan such as Mary Carey, may seem, now, to be poles apart from one another. But reposition the body – particularly the female body – within either of those cultural spheres and a curiously similar structure emerges: a culture of erotic partition and scientific fragmentation which operated through the same network of metaphors and codes of representation. The question we now have to consider is what happened to the body when that world fell apart. How did Anatomia survive the dual pressures of the new science of the later seventeenth century, and, in England, the cataclysm of a political revolution?