Shakespeare en devenir
ISSN électronique : 1958-9476
Courriel : shakespeareendevenir@univ-poitiers.fr

Self-Dissecting Devotional Bodies, Torture, and the State

Par Alison Powell

Publication en ligne le 03 février 2012

Résumé

Au début de l'Europe moderne, les gens ont souvent observé des dissections publiques du corps humain par les médecins. Jonathan Sawday a appelé cette époque une “culture de dissection". La compréhension de la relation entre le corps et l'âme a été révolutionnée par ces nouvelles connaissances populaires. Ces cadavres disséqués étaient souvent les corps de criminels portés directement de l'échafaudage aux théâtres d'anatomie. Les conséquences sont importantes, en montrant que la relation entre la punition et la connaissance du corps humain a été mutuellement constitutive.Certaines personnes ont vu la dissection comme une terrible double-punition qui rend l'âme du pécheur irrécupérable. Les citoyens étaient suspicieux, et même horrifiés, par le chevauchement de l'Etat et de l'anatomiste. Le peuple croyait qu’un corps entier avait besoin d'un enterrement chrétien. D'ailleurs, certaines critiques argumentent que les citoyens de l'Europe moderne ont vu la torture comme une bénédiction pour le condamné comme une forme de martyre, et donc un chemin pour le pardon divin. Les deux routes de la rédemption ont été annulées dans les théâtres d'anatomie : le corps du criminel avait besoin d'être épargné pour l'anatomiste. Par conséquent, le criminel a été pendu au lieu d'autres appareils de la torture. Toutefois, après la performance de l'anatomiste, le corps disséqué ne pouvait pas avoir un enterrement chrétien.Cet article examine ces questions à travers des illustrations anatomiques de la Renaissance, et Dévotions de John Donne. Les deux oeuvres montrent que la dissection a créé d’importantes questions sur la relation de l'autorité religieuse et de l'Etat. Les illustrations anatomiques et Dévotions de Donne dépeignent la suspicion de l'anatomiste, liée au bourreau, et une profonde ambivalence du rôle augmentant de la médecine dans la punition par l'Etat.

Table des matières

Texte intégral

Introduction : Early Modern Ambivalence, Deviance and Dissection

In the *Devotions*, John Donne describes his illness in this way : “[The Physicians] have seene me, and heard mee, arraigned me in these fetters, and receiv’d the evidence ; I have cut up mine owne Anatomy, dissected myselfe, and they are gon to read upon me [1]”. In doing so, he subtly aligns the reader with his physicians ; as the physicians prepare to read upon the body of Donne, so the reader of the *Devotions* is privy to the emotional interiority of the poet, his mortal anxieties and musings. Throughout the work, Donne grapples with the precise nature of the relationship between a healthy / unhealthy body and pure / sinful soul, and it thus reflects what has been termed the Renaissance “culture of dissection [2]”. Early modern physicians were increasingly determined to understand human anatomy through dissection rather than conjecture, and “anatomy theaters” turned the acquisition of this new knowledge into a social event, a kind of performance in which the community gathered to witness this exciting new development in the world of medicine. Donne uses metaphors of anatomy throughout to illuminate the intense feeling of physical vulnerability as well as the crisis of faith which he experienced on his death bed. Simultaneously, the use of anatomy-as-metaphor in the *Devotions* makes use of the reality that the bodies dissected in anatomy theaters were frequently those of criminals taken directly from the spectacle of the scaffold, and the figures of criminal and executioner become symbols for individual sin and punishment. In doing so, Donne follows a line of metaphorical logic made available to him in the English town square, where the public torture and execution of a criminal facilitated his shift from outsider to the very symbol of an ongoing negotiation between man and God over man’s sins, and his subsequent punishment. The criminal often performed in the drama of his own execution, pardoning the executioner or swearing to convey messages on behalf of the community to the Lord [3]. The scaffold-performance is detailed by Charles Mitchell in his book *Shakespeare and Public Execution* and he gives various examples from the period of the speeches of the soon-to-be-executed. That one dominant effect of such “performances” was to shift the criminal’s identity from deviant to martyr is clear, as is the widespread celebrity of any man condemned to die : “this gave the prisoner the power to rewrite the official narrative of just punishment, if he chose to use it [4]”. Indeed, some performances “can be considered the civil variant of martyrology, a combination of piousness and rebellion performed by both Catholic and Protestant ‘heretics’”. Mitchell quotes John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, who argued that the

success of the sacrifice could be seen in the actions of the condemned in the days leading up to the execution, when "notwithstanding all these continual persecutions and horrible punishments, the Church daily increased, deeply rooted in the doctrine of the apostles and of men apostolical, and watered plenteiously with the blood of saints.' To transmit this message properly, one had to show no fear of death through speech or actions… (there were) many occasions when Protestant reformers embraced their deaths by kissing the stake at Smithfield for the benefit of their audience [5]". Some have even gone so far as to argue that the criminal became "Christlike" in his suffering, a figure who shepherded the body politic through redemption [6]. The body of the executed was laden with significance, and contact with the body in England into the mid-17th century was considered therapeutic. Interestingly, however, the use of that body shifted largely from providing spiritual comfort to one which could offer protection or cure for physical disease. Two centuries after Foxe, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796) demonstrates how members of a small community in Denmark made use of the body of the executed. The letter opens, "Business having obliged me to go a few miles out of town this morning, I was surprised at meeting a crowd of people of every description ; and inquiring the cause, of a servant who spoke French, I was informed that a man had been executed two hours before, and the body afterwards burnt" :

> I have always been of the opinion that the allowing actors to die, in the presence of the audience, has an immoral tendency ; but trifling when compared with the ferocity acquired by viewing the reality as a show ; for it seems to me, that in all countries the common people go to executions to see how the poor wretch plays his part, rather than to commiserate his fate, much less to think of the breach of morality which has brought him to such a deplorable end… I forgot to mention, to you, that I was informed, by a man of veracity, that two persons came to the stake to drink a glass of the criminal's blood, as an infallible remedy for the apoplexy. And when I animadverted in the company, where it was mentioned, on such a Horrible violation of nature, a Danish lady reproved me very severely, asking how I knew that it was a note a cure of the diseases ? adding, that every attempt was justifiable in search of health [7].

The "two persons who came to the stake" did not make spiritual use of the body of the executed ; rather, the criminal's body had for them a squarely *medical* utility. The origins of this change can be found in the increasing use of the criminal's body for dissection in the Renaissance. As the supply of criminal bodies to anatomists by the government was made official, the public profile of anatomists and their involvement in these executions came under scrutiny. To be sure, the Renaissance public was captivated with the advancements in medicine these dissections promised : they attended anatomy theaters and circulating anatomical illustrations became increasingly of interest to artists, physicians, and everyday citizens alike.

At the same time, dissecting an executed criminal troubled the established, redemptive dynamic of public punishment. What had once been purely a drama of martyrdom was now replaced, by anatomy theaters, with the drama of science. Once the government began its official process of supplying anatomists with bodies, the knowledge produced by the executed was officially re-channeled from religious to medical knowledge [8]. It was the government's official donation to anatomists of the cadavers of executed criminals of which the public seemed to most vehemently disapprove, and there is evidence that they began to generally view anatomists as grotesque,

unskilled brutes presiding over a potentially sacrilegious desecration of the body [9]. For example, Jonathan Sawday describes the effect of gibbeting, which he likens to that of post-execution dissection, as a defilement of the body which fundamentally compromised the possibility of the criminal's redemption : "To be gibbeted, to be exposed after execution to public gaze, was a fate reserved for the worst malefactors, since it compounded the punishment with a denial of christian burial… Refused burial, exposed to public view, the soul, too, was held to have been punished by not being granted peace [10]".

It has thus been argued that what *had* been an opportunity for the community to reclaim the criminal's body both for Christ and for themselves, was now a co-opting by the state to use the body to produce medical knowledge, and it is possible to read the public discomfort early modern citizens felt toward anatomists as being due in no small part to their symbolic link to the state, via the executioner. Foucault documents a similar shift in state perception of the deviant body in the 18th century ; one marked by the "disappearance of torture as public spectacle" and a desire "to make the criminal body function within the penal operation as non-juridical… to exculpate the judge from being purely and simply he who punishes… Its fate is to be redefined by knowledge". In Foucault's definition, an integrated world of penalty is one in which a variety of state institutions – not only those which are strictly penal – assist in the definition, identification, and solution to deviant bodies.

It is this integrated world of penalty which leads to the development of the jury system, the entire "scientifico-legal complex" and the application of "medico-judicial" treatments [11]. An argument can be made that, while Foucault identifies this new world of penalty with the rewriting of 18th century legal codes, the relationship between dissection and execution so widely reflected in art and culture in the early modern period is an earlier indication of the integrated world of penalty.

Above all, the Renaissance anatomist used the body of the criminal to produce medical knowledge and so is depicted in the literature of the period as an example of the mutually constitutive nature of state and scientific power. This paper considers the link between early modern penal codes and medicine through the lens of circulating anatomical illustrations, and then turns to John Donne's *Devotions* to compare the depiction of deviance and state and religious institutions in both. The displacement of the criminal soul's redemption from torture, in which the executed criminal body was a martyr for its community, to dissection, where the criminal's redemption lay in submitting its body to the production of medical knowledge, raised important questions for Donne about the relationship between sin and health, and sovereign, scientific, and religious authority.

Anatomy Treatises

Illustrations of dissected bodies in the anatomy treatises from the time - of Vesalius, Valverde, Estienne, Browne and others - often place the flayed body in a "living" environment- a field, a countryside. Even more surprisingly, the illustrations rarely depict the anatomist ; in the most famous illustrations, such as those in *De Humani Corporis Fabrica,* there is no anatomist at all. The

images show a dissected or flayed body who displays its corporeality as though still living – throwing a discus, for example, or proudly standing and facing the viewer – or actually dissects *itself.* In the latter case, the face is sometimes dramatically contorted, as the body initiates its own violent unveiling. Why would anatomists have allowed themselves to be left outside of the picture ? After all, ample evidence suggests that the most important authors were highly aware of their contribution to science and history in these treatises [12]. Vesalius and Valverde's preoccupation with the visual quality of their illustrations reflects, as Martin Kemp has pointed out, not only a desire for clarity but also their sense that the illustrations would "take their places within the genre of fine books with magnificent illustrations." The issue of patronage (the first edition of Vesalius's *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* was dedicated to Charles V) meant that the anatomists were well aware of the prestigious status of their audience, and the precise style of each illustration was important ; the landscape, facial expressions, and "canonical poses from works of art are not so much 'arty' irrelevances as clear signs of the intellectual and social contexts in which the authors judged their works could flourish [13]".

One possible explanation for the omission of the anatomist in these images may be that anatomists and their illustrators were sensitive to the public's discomfort with the state's usurping of the criminal cadaver, and so had the figures dissect themselves, presenting a criminal willingly participating in the production of scientific knowledge for the benefit of the public. A brief comparison of two illustrations shows the tension between the desire to depict the state's possession of the deviant body post-execution, and an alternate portrayal where the criminal takes it upon himself to inscribe his body with medical knowledge for the good of the state. An image for Valverde's *Historia de la Composicion del Cuerpo Humano* (Rome, 1551) shows two dissected torsos clad in armor, linking the dissection of the criminal body to loyalty and defense of state authority [14].

Figure 1, Juan de Amusco Valverde, *Historia de la composicion del cuerpo humano*, 1551, p. 95. Dream Anatomy, U.S. National Library of Medicine.
Source :
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/Images/1200_pixels/valverde_p95.jpg

By contrast, a figure from *De Humani Corporis Fabrica (*Basle, 1543 [15]), published just 8 years earlier, depicts a hanged man, foregrounded the criminality and deviance of the flayed body.

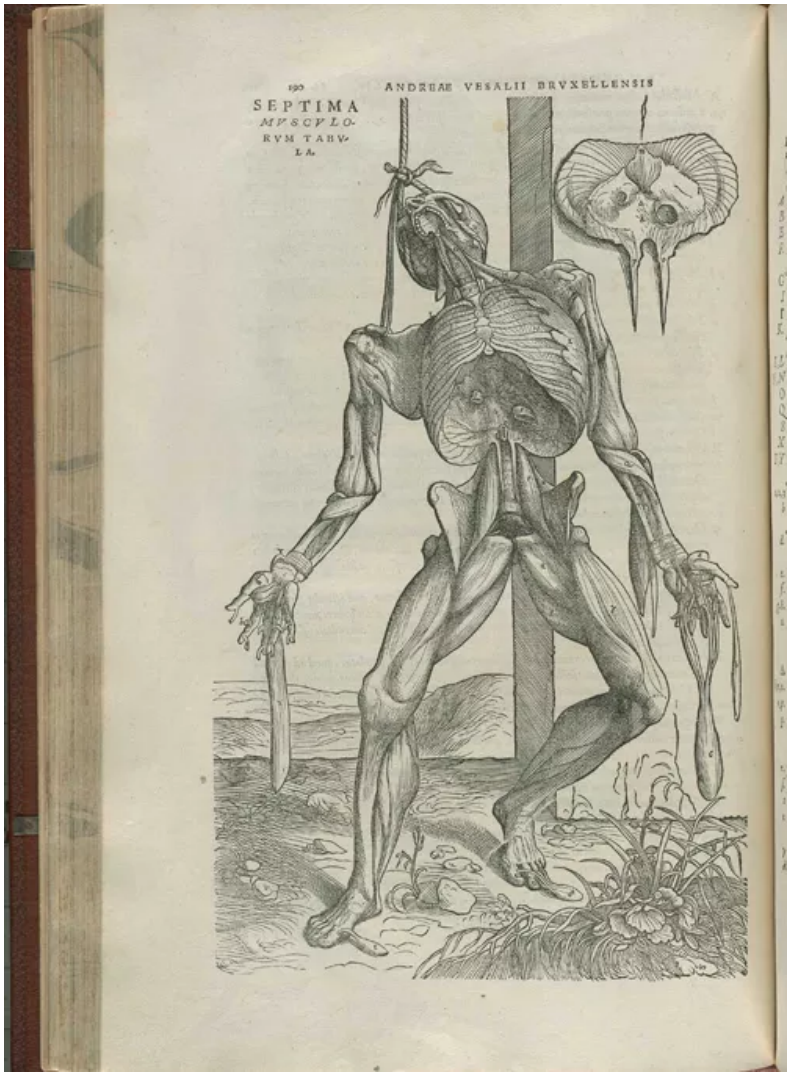

Figure 2, Andreas Vesalius, *De corporis humani fabrica libri septem,* 1543, p. 190. Dream Anatomy, U.S. National Library of Medicine.
Source :
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/Images/1200_pixels/Vesalius_Pg_190.jpg

The difference in illustrations highlights the instability of the use of dissection-as-metaphor : in the former, the anatomized body is a transgressor who endures the double-punishment of execution and then dissection, and is thus forced to embody the state's immediate recoding and re-appropriation of its will. In the latter, as with the multitude of Renaissance era images in which the criminal body anatomizes itself, the criminal body dismembers itself to protect the health of other bodies, producing valuable medical knowledge for the state. In both illustrations the punishment of the criminal of which dissection is an effect [16], functions to preserve the health of the state and the absence of the anatomist implies that the criminal has internalized the economy of punishment.

In *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624), Donne meditates on the often paradoxical intersections between deviance, faith, body and citizenship, and the dynamic he describes is often strikingly parallel to the illustrations. Dedicated to King Charles I, the text is composed of expostulations, prayers and meditations on carnal sin and punishment in the form of illness,

redemption, and recent advances in anatomical knowledge of the body. In the *Devotions*, punishment is not state-sponsored execution but illness and death : each individual is depicted as his own executioner whose sin prompts his sentence, and the body turns on itself because of a sin of the soul, thus demonstrating a natural alignment with divine judgment. In this text it is the use of physicians rather than the dissection of the criminal body which calls into question the nature of martyrdom ; the doctor is the mediator between the body and the sinful soul, and potentially undoes the sentence of death which is God's will. As a religious man (indeed, as Dean of St. Paul's), Donne knows he should be joyful when apprehending his own death, as it is a homecoming to Christ ; at the same time, he deeply and preemptively grieves himself. He rushes to physicians, fixates on the imminent loss of earthly delights, and becomes preoccupied with this paradox : illness and mortality is punishment for sin, and yet God created physicians to help heal disease. Is the use of the physician a refusal of God's will ? With frequent references to recent developments in anatomy, dissection, and medicine, the speaker repeatedly tries to will himself to a belief that physicians are sanctioned by God and a reflection of His mercy- in other words, that the institution accepts the process of negotiating a contract. In doing so, he again lays bare his own inability to accept the premise of the institution - church doctrine which says the way to the Lord's house is necessarily the exile of the body.

To complicate matters further, while Donne links the literal illness of the body to the, metaphorical state by making illness a form of punishment akin to execution, he also introduces the metaphor of illness to the literal state by describing illness as a great equalizer which reduces monarchs to the same level as the citizens he presides over. A sly version of Hamlet's "Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar", in these moments Donne's use of illness turns politically subversive and political, so that the issue of physical health is not a matter solely on the shoulders of the sinner or criminal, but also one which affects those at the highest levels of state authority. Throughout the *Devotions*, Donne elucidates wrenching personal debates over the nature of faith and, as with the anatomical illustrations, depicts a figure who vacillates between a masochistic and rebellious attitude toward sovereign, religious, and scientific institutions.

Sade / von Masoch : Politics and Power in the Illustrations and Devotions

On the one hand, many of these illustrations clearly emphasize the sadistic nature of the omnipresent state. Among the many self-dissecting bodies in Renaissance anatomical illustrations are other images which show, for example, a hanged skeleton or a slumped body post-execution - figures who are profoundly emptied of agency. Figure 2 (above), from *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* shows a hanged man who stands on the ground as though recently alive ; the body has been flayed to expose its ribcage [17]. Another image, from Charles Estienne's*De dissectione partium corporis humani libri tres*, more subtly connotes hanging by depicting not a rope, but the man's scalp, hanging from a nearby tree [18].

Figure 3, Charles Estienne, *De dissectione partium corporis humani libri tres,* 1545, p. 236. Dream Anatomy, U.S. National Library of Medicine.
Source :
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/Images/1200_pixels/Estienne_p236.jpg

Images such as these, from Vesalius and others, foreground the criminality of the body while the anatomist is conspicuously absent. This is perhaps because the depiction of anatomist would remind uneasy viewers that the redemptive aspects of the execution had been compromised by the later use of the corpse for dissection, and thus dilute the state's success in reappropriating the criminal body. Though these bodies do not dissect themselves, the masochistic overtones are most apparent : while the facial expressions of the figures communicate pain, the body's posture is exhibitionistic and inviting.

In his consideration of sadism and masochism in "Coldness and Cruelty", Deleuze explains : "Sade thinks in terms of 'institutions,' Masoch in terms of 'the contract.' The juridical distinction between contract and institution is well known… the specific impulse underlying the contract is toward the creation of a law, *even if in the end the law should take over and impose its authority upon the contract itself* [19]". Some of these images illustrate the law imposing its authority over the individual who, through violating the contract, has in some way attempted to negotiate it, and they show that individual submissively acquiescing to the transformation of itself into a knowledge-producing body.

The submission of the body to the viewer exemplifies Foucault's argument about the "internal economy of penalty" in the 18th century : prisoners internalize punishment so that they are not only capable but even desirous of living lawfully within society [20]. In these examples, the absence of anatomist/state would ironically point to its very omnipresence [21] – we can assume, viewing the flayed criminal body, that the anatomist who enacted the dissection lurks somewhere nearby ; alternately, we could easily regard the positioning of the body as such that we become the anatomist, and adopt his cold appraising eye. Either way, he need not be depicted because his punishment has been internalized.

On the other hand, the images which show a *self-dissecting* body are less a representation of static, internalized punishment than a *renegotiation* of the sadomasochist contract. Many illustrations show the dissected, executed criminals as greatly empowered, calmly presenting their internal organs to the viewer, and these images infrequently position the figure so that we associate him with criminality – those bodies which stand as though alive and reveal themselves to the viewer are less likely to include, for example, a noose or scaffold. In these drawings, the absence of anatomist actually makes room for a kind of resistance *against* the will of the state, as the criminal body takes the state's efforts to anatomize, recode, and force it to produce knowledge literally into its own hands ; some even seem to invite the viewer to consider the irony of using the executed criminal body for medical insight. An illustration for John Browne (1681 [22]) shows a male body who proudly reveals his internal organs, while perching on top of a pedestal, his arm resting on a scepter.

Figure 4, John Brown, *Myographia nova*, 1687. Dream Anatomy, U.S. National Library of Medicine.
Source : http://www.nlm.nih.gov/dreamanatomy/da_g_I-D-2-01.html

He symbolically appropriates the monarchy through the symbols of the royal body, and the drawing ironically comments on the attempt to redeem the criminal's body by dissecting it for the "health" of the state. A famous illustration from Valverde's *Anatomia del Corpo Humano* (1559) graphically reveals the musculature of a man standing confidently before us, knife in left hand, his own skin in right, hanging as though a mantle - an item frequently associated with both religious figures and monarchs. His disinterested eyes are turned toward the flayed skin, which still holds the living man's facial expression, pre-dissection, loose like a ghost. The body has, impossibly, survived its dissection ; it is alive and, having appropriated other symbols of the state, it also explicitly dissects itself [23].

Figure 5, Juan de Amusco Valverde, *Historia de la composicion del cuerpo humano*, 1551, p. 64. Dream Anatomy, U.S. National Library of Medicine.
Source :
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/Images/1200_pixels/valverde_p64.jpg

In these images, the missing anatomist represents not its omnipresence, but actually the absence of the judicial-medical state, with its prioritizing of inflexible institutions and its torturing ways. These bodies have then internalized penalty only insofar as they succumb to a belief in their obligation to be knowledge-producing, and they resist early modern penal codes by taking that

knowledge production into their very own hands ; they have, after all, the powerful and "...transgressive gaze of the subject who studies his or her own bodily interior [24]". By self-dissecting, the figure in these illustrations complicates the punitive foundation of anatomy theaters by performing it all himself. He destroys the integrity of his body but in so doing lays claim to the medical knowledge produced by it, and shifts the focus away from the state's decision to use the criminal body for scientific knowledge rather than spiritual redemption.

In comparing these observations to the *Devotions*, we may first recall that Donne's work is often a meditation on the difficulty of accepting Christian doctrine that the soul exists noncorporeally after death. In fact, it is far from overstatement to say that he experienced ongoing anguish over the deterioration of the body. Predictably enough, a masochistic attitude towards a Christian God is pervasive especially in Donne's later work [25]. In accordance with widespread Christian doctrine, he believed death was a punishment for sin, and Donne portrays illness as a walk towards the scaffold, a slow progression towards execution : "How many men that stand at an execution, if they would ask, For what dies that man ? should hear their own faults condemned, and… think of ourselves… why might not I have been that man that is carried to his grave now [26] ?"

While Donne frequently considers the nature of execution in the *Devotions,* what is most, striking is the reality that the dying man is described as his own executioner. In the illustrations discussed above, the condemned man may be his own anatomist ; the speaker of the *Devotions* sees his increasingly serious illness and thus impeding death as also horrifically self-inflicted. His ailment an "execution upon himself". In considering suicides, he protests "There are too many examples of men that have been their own executioners", "But I do nothing upon myself, and yet am mine own executioner [27]". This is a most literal depiction of the internalized economy of penalty ; the punishment for his sins is written on the virus which invades his body. Donne's decision to merge the executioner with the condemned reveals the intricacy of his meditations on mortal sin, corporeality and state punishment :

> Is (man) a world to himself only therefore, that he hath enough in himself, not only to destroy and execute himself, but to presage that execution upon himself ; to assist the sickness, to antedate the sickness, to make the sickness the more irremediable by sad apprehensions… O perplexed discomposition, O riddling distemper, O miserable condition of man [28]!

Though he describes all forms of death as execution for one's sins, he is unable to conclude that death is righteous ; it is only something "miserable" and "perplexed", which contradicts the more ntraditional Christian ideal which encourages the faithful to accept punishment for their sins as a n personalized communication from the divine. D.W. Harding once described Donne's writings on death as a "constant effort… to convert the fear to longing [29]". If the moment of death is also, potentially, a reward of sorts, marking one's entrance into heaven, Donne is unable to make that conversion, to welcome death as an opportunity to be with the divine ; those moments in which he tries are ultimately as unconvincing as the men in *De humani corporis fabrica,* who proffer their dissected bodies to science in a kind of salvation-exchange [30]. Instead, each individual has the pitiful, horrific fate of the public criminal, whose execution is the altar upon which the entire community is symbolically redeemed ; the dying body becomes the altar upon which one's soul

repents for his sins including, always, the crucifixion of Christ. Equally attracted and repelled by the idea that physical pain is a path toward the sinner's redemption, the masochistic overtones of the *Devotions* are blatant : in humiliation and pain lies the forgiveness of God [31]. Thus various moments reveal the speaker's internalization of divine retribution, paralleling the aforementioned economy of penalty, and illness is often described using metaphors of the state : it is a conspiracy, or treason, or an actual prison. The sick bed is remarkably described as a prison within the prison of the sick body – "when I am cast into this bed my slack sinews are iron fetters, and those thin sheets iron doors upon me". When God comes to take breath from man "he prepares him to it by laying him flat upon his bed. Scarce any prison so close that afford not the prisoner two or three steps [32]".

Ultimately even the speaker of the *Devotions* must submit to self-dissection ; he declares he has dissected himself so the physicians can "read upon (him)", demonstrating a complacency to his own anatomization comparable to the anatomical illustrations. At several moments Donne equates illness within the body to illness within the state, a perspective which aligns the speaker's sympathy with he who punishes : "That which is fume in us, in a state rumour ; and these vapours in us, which we consider here pestilent and infections fumes, are, in a state, infectious rumours, detracting and dishonourable calumnies, libels, The (sic) heart in that body is the king… when these vapours, these venomous rumours, are directed against these noble parts, the whole body suffers". In contradictions that emblematize the crises of faith and logic which plagued Donne during his illness, and despite the many metaphors which depict his illness as the righteous punishment of a sinful individual, sickness is also sometimes described as a diseased citizenry which corrupts a healthy state. Thus the institution (the monarchy, for example) is the victim of malice :

> In intestine conspiracies, voluntary confessions do more good than confessions upon the rack ;... when nature herself confesses and cries out by these outward declaration which she is able to put forth of herself, they minister comfort ; but when… it is but a confession up on the rack, by which, though we come to know the malice of that man, yet we do not know whether there be not as much malice in his heart then as before his confession ; we are sure of his treason, but not of his repentance ; sure of him, but not of his accomplices. It is a faint comfort to know the worst when the worst is remediless.

Donne also sometimes describes illness as the establishment of a corrupt and secret kingdom within its victim, with the use of torture devices prevented by the physicians : "The disease hath established a kingdom, an empire in me, and will have certain arcana imperii, secrets of state, by which it will proceed and not be bound to declare them. But yet against those secret conspiracies in the state, the magistrate hath the rack ; and against these insensible diseases physicians have their examiners ; and those these employ now [33]". The prison and scaffold work nicely within this paradigm of illness as metaphorical punishment for sin, or the body as the soul's executioner ; but then there is the issue of what to do with the physician, who is a potential mediator between the illness which is an expression of divine punishment, and the sinning individual. In great contrast to the anatomical illustrations, it is the presence of the physician (read : anatomist) who enables the renegotiation of the contract with the institution (in this case, between the sick, sinning man, and the church and God). Despite the physician's presence which could enable the

renegotiation of the fated punishment, locating moments of implied resistance to the state in the *Devotions* requires more labored interpretation than with the anatomical illustrations. Still, there are moments where the speaker of the *Devotions* does subtly question the authority of the state, occasionally suggesting that its hand is a source of torment to its people. He asserts death is a great equalizer : “Here… the head of the people as low as they whom those feet trod upon ; and that hand that signed pardons is too weak to beg his own [34]”. He returns to this theme, saying “A glass is not the less brittle, because a king’s face is represented in it ; nor a king the less brittle, because God is represented in him. They have physicians continually about them, and therefore sickness, or the worst of sicknesses, continual fear of it [35]”. When the state is reunited with the physician, the state comes ever closer to its own demise (“the worst of sicknesses”).

Characteristically, Donne’s attitude toward sin, faith, and the state shift drastically throughout the *Devotions,* along with its questions : are the use of physicians and the development of medicine justifiable in the Lord’s eyes, or no ? Wouldn’t God, having given us the sensual gift of a body, be moved by our mourning of its frailty ? Shouldn’t the state, in sanctifying the body by outlawing murder, understand our resistance to killing, even when done in the name of itself ? These paradoxes are ones which Donne of all poets would have appreciated. Having in his writings previously linked torture to the sufferings of Christ, he had meditated more than once on the theological implications of torture and later dissection of condemned men. As with the anatomical illustrations, imagery in the *Devotions* ultimately both substantiates institutional power as the speaker submits to the punishment for his sins (illness), and resists discipline by enlisting the physician to renegotiate the contract of his salvation.

Conclusion : “I have cut up mine owne Anatomy, dissected myselfe, and they are gon to read upon me”

In sum, the link between the anatomist and executioner/state was clearly one that was apparent and discomfiting to Donne and his fellow citizens. Through the sacrificial and public nature of torture and execution, the criminal body had once offered the possibility of redemption to the public (and reassurance of the state’s relationship to divine order). The state’s disabling of the spectacle of torture and its subsequent dissection of the criminal horrified the public, which viewed it as double-punishment : an unjust repetition of violence which negated the possibility for redemption by eliminating suffering, and therefore the possibility of martyrdom and Christian burial. These tensions are reflected in the anatomical illustrations and religious writing of the time ; the depiction of a self-dissecting body and ambivalence about the anatomist in these works shows a reluctance to accept using the criminal body as an instrument to develop scientific knowledge.

Simultaneously, however, the power of punishment in these works is relocated through a clear masochistic impulse, where the criminal reclaims the knowledge its body produces and thus demands a renegotiation of the terms of the penal contract. Deleuze devotes the majority of

“Coldness and Cruelty” to dispelling the notion that sadism and masochism are inverses, or mirror images of the other, and he delineates the performative elements that the sadist and masochist have in common. The equivocal feelings of horror and fascination which the anatomical illustrations and the *Devotions* express show a negotiation of experience between the sadist/institution on the one hand, and the masochist/contract on the other. The condemned man embodies this negotiation : his initial violation of the state contract leads to the masochistic dramatization of correction, one he participates in on the day of his execution. The attempt to negotiate the state contract requires a confrontation and even occasionally produces the mimicry of the institutional sadism of the state.

The contradictory nature of these works indicates that while the foundations of penal and religious institutions were beginning to shift, we cannot read the illustrations or the *Devotions* as exclusively expressing the sinner / criminal’s autonomy, nor as only a demonstration of the omnipotent state. We must read them as an expression of both. If the criminal or sinner submits himself to the will of the institution, he does so in the interest of his own redemption. Similarly, if the dissected body in these illustrations maintains life and volition or even dissects itself, it is potentially to re-appropriate its criminal body as productive and knowledge-producing. In these tensions we see the dynamics of Sade and Masoch, and the “monster” that was torture and execution in Renaissance Europe, as it was inscribed upon the dissected criminal body. Just as the narrator of *Venus in Furs* desires the sadist to “never separate (itself) from (him) completely [36]”, so the criminal body / sinner and institution rely fundamentally on each other, a reliance predicated on the production of pain, pleasure through martyrdom, and the demonstration of institutionalized punishment.

Deleuze writes : “Ought we to conclude that the language of Masoch is… paradoxical… because the victim speaks the language of the torturer he is to himself, with all the hypocrisy of the torturer [37] ?”. The answer is emphatically *yes.* If the production of knowledge for the state requires the dissection of the self, then the self may dissect or be dissected ; the relationship between sadist/state and masochist/citizen is not one which is interchangeable but rather one which is constantly undergoing negotiation, in which each figure occasionally “tries on” the position of the other or works to conflate them. Donne expresses this dynamic in the *Devotions,* when he attempts to determine whether and how dissection might lead to redemption. Speaking of his belief that not only doctors but also the Holy Trinity are in counsel over his illness, he writes :

> I offer not to counsel them (the doctors) who meet in consultation for my body now, but I open my infirmities, I anatomize my body to them. So do I my soul to thee, O my God, that there is no vein in me that is not full of the blood of thy Son, whom I have crucified and crucified again, by multiplying many, and often repeating the same, sins ; that there is no artery in me that hath not the spirit of error, the spirit of lust, the spirit of giddiness in it ; no bone in me that is not hardened with the custom of sin and nourished and suppled with the marrow of sin ; no sinews, no ligaments, that do not tie and chain sin and sin together [38].

The speaker confesses he sees the repetition of Christ’s crucifixion in his own sins, a declaration initiated by the revelation of the body in dissection. This can be read an attempt to access

redemption through this new method of pain ; anatomization has now become a way to produce knowledge of the body and soul. If “the condemned man represents the symmetrical, inverted figure of the king [39]” the dissected criminal body is the most evocative symbol of a troubled, cyclical marriage between religious and juridical institutions. As citizens of early modern Europe attempted to make sense of the anatomy of the body, so they attempted to grapple with the shifting methods of punishment enacted by the state.

Bibliographie

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, New York, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 4-5.

Matthew Greenfield, “Christopher Marlowe’s Wound Knowledge”, *PMLA*, Vol. 119, No. 2, March 2004, p. 233-246.

D.W. Harding, “Coherence of Theme in Donne’s Poetry,” *Kenyon Review,* 13 (1951), p. 439.

Martin Kemp, “‘The mark of truth’: looking and learning in some anatomical illustrations from the Renaissance and eighteenth century’, *Medicine and the five senses,* W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter, ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993. p. 101.

Gary Kuchar (*Divine Subjection : The Rhetoric of Sacramental Devotion in Early Modern England,* Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 2005, p. 38-50).

Mitchell Merback, *The Thief, The Cross and The Wheel,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 157 - p. 152.

Charles Mitchell, *Shakespeare and Public Execution,* 2004, p. 23.

Donald Ramsay Roberts, “The Death Wish of John Donne”, *PMLA*, Vol. 62, No. 4, Dec. 1947, p. 958-976.

Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, “Venus in Furs”, *Masochism*, Zone Books, 1991, p. 196.

Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned : Dissection and the Human Body in the Renaissance Culture*, London, Routledge 1 995.

John Stubbs, *John Donne : The Reformed Soul*, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 2006)

Juan de Amusco Valverde, *Historia de la composicion del cuerpo humano*, 1551, p. 95. Dream Anatomy, U.S. National Library of Medicine. Source : http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/Images/1200_pixels/valverde_p95.jpg

Juan de Amusco Valverde, *Historia de la composicion del cuerpo humano*, 1551, p. 64. Dream Anatomy, U.S. National Library of Medicine. Source : http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/Images/1200_pixels/valverde_p64.jpg

Andreas Vesalius, *De corporis humani fabrica libri septem,* 1543, p. 190. Dream Anatomy, U.S. National Library of Medicine.
Source :
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/Images/1200_pixels/Vesalius_Pg_190.jpg

Robert N. Watson, "Duelling Death in the Lyrics of Love" in *The Rest Is Silence : Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance.* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994, p. 165.

Luke Wilson, "William Harvey's Prelectiones : The Performance of the Body in the Renaissance Theater of Anatomy" (*Representations*, No. 17, Special Issue : The Cultural Display of the Body, Winter 1987, p. 69).

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written in Sweden, Norway and Denmark,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 104-5.

Notes

[1] John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, Together with Death's Duel,* Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1997, p. 15 - 160. The Devotions seems to serve both medical and spiritual purposes for its author. It details each day of the illness Donne suffered, and in the text he touches on topics pertaining to "earthly" matters (justice, society), as well as the spiritual. He also puts forth various questions and exclamations to God, desperately seeking some answer for the various paradoxes he was preoccupied with throughout his life. Ramie Targoff writes: "Donne made the decision during his convalescence to chronicle his weeks of sickness, presumably using notes he took during the active state of the disease. In transforming his sickbed musings into the rich, often baroque prose of the Devotions, he relives each phase of the illness; all of the stations are written in the present tense, and there is no foreshadowing of his recovery" (Ramie Targoff, *John Donne: Body and Soul,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008, p. 131).

[2] I am indebted throughout this paper to Jonathan Sawday's excellent work, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in the Renaissance Culture*, London, Routledge 1995. Sawday writes: "In medicine, anatomizationtakes place so that, in lieu of a formerly complete 'body', a new 'body' of knowledge and understanding can becreated.... In medicine, too, anatomization takes place in order that the integrity and health of other bodiescan be preserved", p. 2. Sawday also reads Donne through the lens of Vesalian anatomy, in the chapter entitled"Sacred Anatomy and the Order of Representation," p. 85-140.

[3] Mitchell Merback notes that that Renaissance institutionalizing of torture-as-penalty both redeemed the criminal's soul and spiritually cleansed those watching the torture and execution of the criminal, so that "...the state's monopoly on legal violence (was) practically above contestation ... compassionate vision learned to invert the abject sufferings of the prisoner and see them as glorious and Christ-like. The image of each penitent sinner could enter, in the mind's eye, into a

macrocosmic economy of pain, a community of suffering anxiously geared toward redemption", in *The Thief, The Cross and The Wheel,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998, p.157-152.

[4] Charles Mitchell, *Shakespeare and Public Execution,* 2004, p.23. Mitchell includes an excellent analysis of the account of Anne Boleyn, which is worth including here, as it illuminates just how complex the rhetoric from the scaffold could be, using one of the period's most notorious executions:
Boleyn made excellent use of submission to subvert the state narrative. Vastly unpopular with court and commoner since she first appeared in the public eye and unable to produce a male heir, political forces rallied against her and she was sentenced to death for plotting the king's death. Boleyn wore a robe of dark gray and along white cape from her shoulders, the perfect combination of mourning and purity. Costume was important on execution day and felons often wore their best clothes. After mounting the steps, she smiled at the audience and delivered a masterfully prepared speech:
« Good Christian people, I am come hither to die, according to law, and therefore I will speak nothing against it. I come here only to die, and thus yield myself humbly to the will of the King, my lord. And if, in my life, I did ever offend the King's Grace, surely with my death I do now atone. I come hither to accuse no man, nor to speak anything of that whereof I am accused, as I know full well that aught I say in my defence doth not appertain to you. I pray and beseech you all, good friends, to pray for the life of the King, my sovereign lord and yours, who is one of the best princes on the face of the earth, who has always treated me so well that better could not be, wherefore I submit to death with good will, humbly asking pardon of all the world. if any person will meddle with my cause, I require them to judge the best. thus I take my leave of the world, and of you, and I heartily desire you all to pray for me. »
While at the block, she prayed until the executioner was ready and repeated, 'Jesu, receive my soul! Oh Lord God, have pity on my soul! To Christ I commend my soul!' until the sword was lowered.
The intricacies of the speech are worth a closer look. Anne shows herself to be a good subject, submitting to the King's will, a woman wronged by others that she is too kind to name thereby proving her virtuousness. She wishes prayers for King Henry but also gives him a back- handed compliment by calling him 'one of the best princes.' After pointing to the irony of being 'treated well' by one who has commanded her death, she even encourages 'meddling in her cause,' planting the seeds of revenge for her death. Within two weeks, ballads circulated in London portrayed her as a heroine. Henry would not make the same mistake again. His next wife to take the block, Catherine Howard, was not allowed to speak in her own defense. A performance of this kind can be considered the civil variant of martyrology, a combination of piousness and rebellion performed by both Catholic and Protestant 'heretics' (23).

[5] *Ibid*.

[6] As Gary Kuchar writes, considering poet Robert Southwell's *An Epistle of Comfort* (written in 1584), "Following established traditions of Christina martyrdom, physical mutilation and religious persecution become the very proof of Catholic authority and thus the very weapons of grace. moreover, by identifying the physical subjection of Catholics as the sign of their grace, Southwell appropriates, for Catholic ends, the investments of power that Protestant authority places onto

the body of the condemned. He thus subjectivizes torture, fully assuming political subjection in order to transform it into submissiveness before a divine rather than merely political authority." (*Divine Subjection: The Rhetoric of Sacramental Devotion in Early Modern England,* Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 2005, p. 50). As Kuchar points out, though Southwell was a Jesuit priest and so his work is aimed primarily toward Catholic martyrs, he was "is always cognizant of a Protestant readership, so much so that his work became highly popular among non-Catholics during the seventeenth century" (p.38).

[7] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written in Sweden, Norway and Denmark,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, p.104-5.

[8] Sawday describes the unsavory development of an underground "corpse economy" which took place before bodies were "officially" secured for anatomists; the famous anatomist Vesalius reconstructed his first skeleton from the bones of an executed criminal which he stole, piece-by-piece, over several nights.

[9] Dissections had taken place at the University of Oxford since 1549 (when the most influential anatomical illustrations were circulated), bodies of which would have come directly from the scaffold, and "...as early as 1505 the Guild of Surgeons and Barbers in Edinburgh was granted the body of one executed felon each year for the purposes of dissection". By 1641 the College of Physicians was dissecting six criminal corpses each year, though the number of executions had been drastically reduced. Jonathan Sawday, *op. cit.,* p. 56-57.

[10] *Ibid*., p. 22.

[11] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, New York, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 4-5.

[12] Though Vesalius was well aware of the importance of his book, none of the illustrations are signed, and there is still controversy over who actually drew them, though the Italian painter Titian is frequently named, as is the Flemish painter Jan Stefan von Kalkar, who drew the skeletons for Vesalius's *Tabulae.*

[13] Martin Kemp, "'The mark of truth': looking and learning in some anatomical illustrations from the Renaissance and eighteenth century', *Medicine and the five senses,* W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter, ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993. p. 101.

[14] Figure 1, Juan de Amusco Valverde, *Historia de la composicion del cuerpo humano*, 1551, p.95. Dream Anatomy, U.S. National Library of Medicine.
Source:
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/Images/1200_pixels/valverde_p95.jpg

[15] Figure 2, Andreas Vesalius, *De corporis humani fabrica libri septem,* 1543, p.190. Dream Anatomy, U.S. National Library of Medicine.
Source:
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/Images/1200_pixels/Vesalius_Pg_190.jpg.

[16] “Dissection seems to have enjoyed a quasi-legal status. It was a further punishment inflicted upon the body by authorities who had already exacted the full revenge allowed by the law”. Jonathan Sawday, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

[17] Vesalius, Figure 2, *op. cit.*

[18] Figure 3, Charles Estienne*, De dissectione partium corporis humani libri tres*, 1545, p.236. Dream Anatomy, U.S. National Library of Medicine.
Source:
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/Images/1200_pixels/Estienne_p236.jpg.

[19] Gilles Deleuze, “Coldness and Cruelty”, *Masochism,* trans. Jean McNeil, New York, Zone Books, 1989, p. 27 (emphasis mine).

[20] Michel Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[21] Luke Wilson notes in “William Harvey’s Prelectiones: The Performance of the Body in the Renaissance Theater of Anatomy” that Vesalius “found that by suspending the body vertically it was more easy to manipulate....Vesalius ... (is) conscious that, as a renowned anatomical performer, he shares the gaze of the observer” (*Representations*, n° 17, Special Issue: The Cultural Display of the Body, Winter 1987, p. 69). Still, the illustrators choice to include landscapes in many of the illustrations would have reminded contemporary readers of executions, which took place outside, more so than an anatomy lesson; the many other illustrations which explicit depict execution tableaus supports the reading of anatomical illustrations as directly or indirectly referencing executions.

[22] Figure 4, John Brown, *Myographia nova*, 1687. Dream Anatomy, U.S. National Library of Medicine. Source: http://www.nlm.nih.gov/dreamanatomy/da_g_I-D-2-01.html.

[23] Figure 5, Juan de Amusco Valverde, *Historia de la composicion del cuerpo humano*, 1551, p.64. Dream Anatomy, U.S. National Library of Medicine.
Source:
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/Images/1200_pixels/valverde_p64.jpg.

[24] Jonathan Sawday, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[25] For an excellent essay on the conflict of faith in Donne’s views on body and soul, see Donald Ramsay Roberts, “The Death Wish of John Donne”, *PMLA*, Vol. 62, No. 4, Dec. 1947, p.958-976.

[26] John Donne, *op. cit.*, p. 99-103.

[27] *Ibid.,* p. 79. This is no empty metaphor. Donne witnessed many executions and examples of torture in his life, and came out (if cautiously) against torture in *Pseudo Martyr,* and other, later works. A recent biography (John Stubbs, *John Donne: The Reformed Soul*, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 2006) even suggested that he may have been present at the brutal execution of the priest his brother was jailed for harboring (Donne’s brother died in prison). Unsuccessfully hanged, the priest was cut down, disemboweled, and his intestines were set on fire before him.

[28] *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 8-9.

[29] D.W. Harding, “Coherence of Theme in Donne’s Poetry,” *Kenyon Review,* 13 (1951), p. 439. Quoted in another very useful text: Robert N. Watson, “Duelling Death in the Lyrics of Love” in *The Rest Is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance.* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994, p. 165.

[30] An example: “... take me again into your consultation, O blessed and glorious Trinity; and though the Father know that I have defaced his image received in my creation; though the Son know I have neglected mine interest in the redemption; yet, O blessed Spirit, as thou art to my conscience so be to them, a witness that, at this minute, I accept that which I have so often, so rebelliously refused, thy blessed inspirations; be thou my witness to them that, at more pores than this slack body sweats tears, this sad soul weeps blood; and more for the displeasure of my God, than for the stripes of his displeasure. Take me, then, O blessed and glorious Trinity, into a reconsultation, and prescribe me any physic. If it be a long and painful holding of this soul in sickness, it is physic if I may discern thy hand to give it; and it is physic if it be a speedy departing of this soul, if I may discern thy hand to receive it” (p. 62).

[31] *Ibid.,* p. 49: “Thou wouldst have thy corrections taste of humiliation, but thou wouldst have them taste of consolation too; taste of danger, but taste of assurance too... O Lord, in these corrections which are the elements of our regeneration, by which our souls are made thine, imprint”.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 17-20.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 65-84.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

[36] Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, “Venus in Furs”, *Masochism*, Zone Books, 1991, p.196.

[37] Gilles Deleuze, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

[38] John Donne, *op.cit.*, p.6. For examples of verbal self-dissection / anatomization in Renaissance drama, see Matthew Greenfield, “Christopher Marlowe’s Wound Knowledge”, *PMLA*, Vol. 119, No. 2, March 2004, p. 233-246.

[39] Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

Pour citer ce document

Par Alison Powell, «Self-Dissecting Devotional Bodies, Torture, and the State», *Shakespeare en devenir* [En ligne], N°5 - 2011, Shakespeare en devenir, II. Anatomic poetics: violence, the state and

the self, mis à jour le : 03/02/2012, URL : https://shakespeare.edel.univ-poitiers.fr:443/shakespeare/index.php?id=572.

Quelques mots à propos de : Alison Powell

Alison Powell is currently advanced to candidacy in the PhD program in English at the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center, and her research focuses on 18th century German aesthetics and the Romantic poets. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Shakespeare Association of American conference in April 2009 ; she recently gave a paper at the British Association for Romantic Studies conference in London (“John Clare, Migratory Locust : Subjectivity as Form and Mirror in ...