DISSECTING THE EROTIC:
ART AND SEXUALITY IN MID-VICTORIAN MEDICAL ANATOMY

by

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ABSTRACT

In the mid-nineteenth century, anatomical illustration in England underwent a crisis of representation. Moral authorities were growing increasingly concerned with the proliferation of images of the naked body and the effects they might have on public “decency.” The anatomical profession was sensitive to this hostile climate to nude representations. In the years immediately preceding the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 that defined the category of “pornography,” anatomical illustration was being purged of sexual connotations as part of an attempt to consolidate medicine as a respectable “profession.” In the eyes of this new professional body, there was no space for sexual associations in anatomical texts.

Artistic medical anatomy’s rejection was driven by its links to problematic erotic traditions. Specifically, anatomy’s proximity to pseudo-medical pornography, the same-sex eroticism of the Hellenic tradition, and the problem of the male and female nude in “high art” were at issue. In representing the naked body artistically, anatomists brought their illustrations into dangerous proximity with these traditions. By systematically putting the work of one Victorian anatomist, Joseph Maclise, into dialogue with these erotic traditions, it becomes clear that medicine was not isolated from the broader sexual culture. This study demonstrates that viewing publics and viewing practices are historically specific and are brought into being by the interaction of visual phenomena by emphasizing the fluidity between representational fields of art, medicine and sexuality. The effort to excise the sexual meanings contained in anatomy ultimately led to the emergence of a new diagrammatic style of anatomical drawing that became the orthodox style of medical illustration, and that persists to this day.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................. iii

List of Figures ................................................................................................................................. iv

Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................................ vi

“Dissecting the Erotic: Art and Sexuality in Mid-Victorian Medical Anatomy” ....................... 1

Bibliography ....................................................................................................................................... 57
LIST OF FIGURES

1. The External Oblique Muscle. Anatomy, Descriptive and Surgical (“Gray’s Anatomy”)

2. Plate 10: The surgical dissection of the sterno-clavicular or tracheal region, and the relative position of its main bloodvessels, nerves, &c. Surgical Anatomy

3. Plate 65-66: The surgical dissection of the popliteal space and the posterior crural region. Surgical Anatomy

4. Plate 64, fig. 6: Deformities of the urinary bladder—the operations of sounding for stone, of catheterism and of puncturing the bladder above the pubes. Surgical Anatomy

5. Plate X: External Views of the Male and Female Organs of Generation. Kalogynonia


7. Plate 8: The surgical dissection of the subclavian and carotid regions, and the relative anatomy of their contents. Surgical Anatomy

8. Plate 18: The surgical dissection of the wrist and hand. Surgical Anatomy

9. Plate 7: The surgical dissection of the subclavian and carotid regions, the relative anatomy of their contents. Surgical Anatomy

10. Plate 26: The relation of the internal parts to the external surface. Surgical Anatomy

11. Plate 11: The surgical dissection of the axillary and brachial regions, displaying the relative order of their contained parts. Surgical Anatomy

12. Plate 49: The relative anatomy of the male pelvic organs. Surgical Anatomy

13. Plate 48: The relative anatomy of the male pelvic organs. Surgical Anatomy

14. Plates 66: Surgical dissection of the popliteal space, and the posterior crural region. Surgical Anatomy

15. Plate 50: The surgical dissection of the superficial structures of the male perinæum. Surgical Anatomy
16. Plate 13: The surgical form of the male and female axillae compared. Surgical Anatomy ................................................................. 44

17. The Wrestlers. William Etty, ca. 1840. ................................................. 49

18. Guardsman Higgins. William Etty .......................................................... 50

19. Male nude. Eugène Durieu, 1853. ........................................................... 52

20. Plate 23: The relative position of the deeper organs of the thorax and those of the abdomen. Surgical Anatomy ........................................... 52

21. Plate 51: The surgical dissection of the superficial structures of the male perinæum. Surgical Anatomy ..................................................... 53
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Dissecting the Erotic: Art and Sexuality in Mid-Victorian Medical Anatomy

In medical anatomy, the interior and exterior of the body are in dialogue. Muscles, veins and arteries, bones and organs that are veiled by the skin are exposed for viewing by the medical gaze. For the mid-nineteenth century surgeon and anatomist, Joseph Maclise (c.1815-1880), the exterior of the body was as pertinent to medical study as the interior. According to Maclise, the “unbroken surface of the human figure is as a map to the surgeon, explanatory of the anatomy arranged beneath.” As he argued in his 1851 anatomy volume *Surgical Anatomy*, it is impossible to understand the internal body without looking at its external “superficies.”¹ At this moment in medicine when anatomical drawing was turning towards the diagrammatic and schematic, Maclise’s valuation of the artistic exterior was an interesting—and puzzling—representational choice. In choosing to represent these “superficies”—the exterior of unclothed male bodies including their faces and skin—Maclise elected to work within a representational field that was full of potential problems.

Erotic traditions were associated with all of the representational modes and scripts that were available for drawing the unclothed male body; the erotic legacies of pornographic pseudo-medical texts, Hellenism and the neoclassical aesthetic, and high art nudes made Maclise’s illustrations ambiguous. The images are both erotic and non-erotic and they blur the boundaries between these categories, suggesting a representational fluidity. Representations of anatomical bodies are unstable; they are ostensibly licit, but simultaneously tremble on the edge of the illicit and erotic by virtue of their proximity to these other representational traditions. Thus, in order to protect his professional

reputation at this moment when medical practitioners were closing ranks as a professional body, Maclise needed to carefully navigate his way through this web of connections.

The problem that Maclise faced—the impossibility of completely eliminating erotic interpretations because of the ubiquity of these erotic meanings in representational traditions of the human body—was created by two broader currents. Firstly, it was an issue of what had been seen and continued to linger in the public’s visual consciousness. The publication of several quasi-medical works that deliberately elided the distinction between the medical and the pornographic in the 1820s, *The Kalogynomia* (1821) and *The Generative System of John Roberton* (1824 edition), made both doctors and legislators sensitive to the potential overlap between medical texts and pornography. The idea that medicine could be used for erotic stimulation and gratification was highly problematic to these authorities. Secondly, it was an issue of who was doing the looking. *The Generative System of John Roberton* became controversial only after it was found in the possession of lower class prisoners which suggests the relevance of concerns over class-based viewing practices to the emerging legal definition of obscenity.\(^2\) Maclise’s images were not confined to the medical community but seemed to be part of a broader marketplace and the profession received this with unease. By marketing to an elite audience through expensive volumes, use of Latin, and restricting sales to medical students and practitioners, the orthodox medical profession resisted the popularization of anatomy and expressed its anxieties about image circulation.

By systematically placing Maclise’s images in dialogue with other images from the representational traditions noted above, it is possible to see how in addition to their

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“medical meanings” anatomical texts accumulated sexual meanings. It is not my intention to suggest that Maclise’s images were patently erotic, or used as pornography; rather, I seek to demonstrate that the multitude of simultaneous and overlapping associations between art, sexuality, and medicine narrowly circumscribed what was deemed “appropriate” illustration. Furthermore, the increasing restrictiveness of this definition eventually made drawing in an artistic style difficult, if not impossible, for anatomists. Using Maclise’s Surgical Anatomy as a case study demonstrates the persistence of these representational connections. Anatomical texts were not insulated from popular and sexual culture; they actively negotiated these fields and were thus crucially informed by the debates and controversies taking place well outside the profession’s definition of the medical sphere. The line separating the medical and the pornographic had become blurred, and Hellenism held appeal as a way to shore up the respectability of the medical artistic tradition. However, Hellenism also raised problems because of its own erotic heritage and its links to the larger crisis of the nude in “high art.” Since the sexual connotations in artistic genres were persistent and problematically fluid, they partially motivated the movement towards diagrammatic anatomical illustration that was gradually being undertaken in the first half of the nineteenth century. By the late 1850s and early 1860s, a series of representational crises had rendered this process almost complete and artistic anatomy was discarded in favour of the diagrammatic style that erased the spectre of eroticism from medicine.

Examining the eroticism of Maclise’s illustrations helps to show how defining something as “erotic” relied on a historically specific visual register. This notion, that different historical viewing publics defined eroticism differently and that definitions
could shift radically according to new stimuli, has thus far been underdeveloped in scholarship. In recent years, homoeroticism has begun to become the object of academic scrutiny—relevant here where male doctors examine and draw male patients/cadavers—but heteroeroticism has been less rigorously examined. Emphasizing the ways in which these categories existed simultaneously is most helpful, rather than drawing an artificial distinction between homosexual and heterosexual eroticism. In the late nineteenth century, sexology classified homosexuality or ‘inversion’ as a pathology; in this earlier period, male-male relationships of all varieties, as Eve Sedgwick has suggested, can be envisioned as existing along a continuum.\(^3\) Homophobia, however, ruptured this continuum and constructed ‘the heterosexual’ and ‘the homosexual’ as opposites, thus polarizing sexual and non-sexual relationships.\(^4\) Placing Maclise’s illustrations in the continuum preceding this rupture enables us to think of the ways that male-female eroticism and male-male eroticism are bound up together; for example, the male body in Maclise’s illustrations functions simultaneously as both a same-sex aesthetic ideal and a procreative model. His illustrations enable us to interrogate a moment when sexual identities were not fixed or oppositional, but were conceived as, however problematically, mobile.

Recognizing both the "erotic" and the “pornographic” as historically specific and seeing eroticism as not only an intellectual/emotional impulse but also an embodied

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experience is equally crucial. Some philosophers, such as Susan Bordo, have suggested that the erotic—placed in opposition to the sexual—is an emotional impulse, an “urge for attachment, for connectedness,” in which physical desire is absent.\textsuperscript{5} This seems to dehistoricize the erotic as a psychological “nature,” instead of characterizing it as an historically specific way of feeling and thinking. Sharon Marcus, in contrast, has argued that the embodiment of physical excitement and intimacy coupled with the feelings specific to nineteenth-century middle-class femininities (of “companionship, love, caretaking, admiration, longing [and] obsession”) characterized the female homoeroticism expressed in Victorian fashion plates.\textsuperscript{6} An analytic position that is sensitive to the embodied experience of eroticism will call attention to the unspoken distinctions that shape the way we think about sexual categories. For example, the distinction is often made between erotic material (that titillates our minds and imaginations) and pornography (that arouses the body). The assumed rigidity of these categories obscures the fact that they were historical developments and that bodies and desire are historically specific. In the nineteenth century, the consolidation of categories such as “pornography” through obscenity legislation was debated and contested precisely because of the absence of self-evident criteria for defining such categories. The concern that paintings of nude Venuses held in private collections might be confiscated under obscenity legislation demonstrates the fact that “art” and “pornography” are not stable or separate categories. Thus, reminding ourselves of the multitude of cultural meanings that are simultaneously expressed by visual sources is vital to this project.


We can trace a similar multiplicity of meanings in other cultural movements, such as Hellenism, which cannot be linked in any straightforward way to the history of Victorian sexuality. The scholarship on the many manifestations of the classical inheritance in nineteenth-century England demonstrates this point admirably. Hellenism held potent visual and cultural meanings to Victorians. Historians of English homosexuality have observed that Hellenism provided a crucial way for homosexual men to understand their own identities and a vocabulary with which to argue for the acceptance of these emergent identities; some homosexual Victorian men saw ancient Greece as a model for contemporary England, since they believed that the ancient Greeks upheld male-male love and sexual relationships as an integral part of their social fabric.\(^7\) Conversely, Sean Brady has argued that the Victorian obsession with Greek culture that began in the 1860s was largely devoid of reference to sexuality between men and emphasizes instead that it was primarily a discourse on national fitness and the spiritual and physical reinvigoration of a nation enervated by industrialization and urbanization.\(^8\) Both of these discursive strands were actually at work—and worked at cross purposes—in Maclise’s volume, which demonstrates how both were relevant in the ways that male bodies were seen and imagined. Although Brady is quite right that there was minimal public discussion of Hellenism as justification for homosexuality in the 1860s, attending to the ways in which medical sources alluded to notions of homoeroticism has been an under-explored aspect of the relationship between Hellenism and sexuality in this period.


Significantly, examination of Hellenism’s influence on medical illustration has been scant in scholarship and has failed to make connections to larger debates about Hellenism and sexuality.  

Since art scholarship has been attentive to the ways that art often carries sexual subtexts, it is useful to think about the ways that Maclise’s anatomical illustrations are also highly artistic; they provided medical meanings while suggesting sexual ones as well. As Tamar Garb has argued, despite contemporary claims that the conventions of high art transmitted from classical antiquity through to the nineteenth century “transformed the naked into the nude and thereby occluded its sexual connotations,” these exhortations to transcend the materiality of the naked body were largely prescriptive rather than reflecting the experiences of artists.  

Other scholars have argued that artists’ representations of the male figure were also powerful erotic objects. Alex Potts’s study of the influential eighteenth-century art critic Johann Winckelmann foregrounds Winckelmann’s articulation of the homoeroticism of the male nude. Similarly, Kenneth Mackinnon argues that there has been a tendency to ignore the erotics of male imagery in art, citing studies of the male form that couch their analysis in the rhetoric of masculinity—the male form as “magnificent,” “heroic,” and so on. Instead, he advocates a methodology of reading against the grain when looking at high art in an effort to

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9 A notable exception is Ludmilla Jordanova who observes the “increased classicisation” of anatomy in this period. Nature Displayed: Gender, Science and Medicine, 1760-1820 (London and New York: Longman, 1999), 192.


“suggest a persistent eroticisation of power through the use of the male nude.”

Examining how these erotic impulses were worked out in medical art, not simply “high art,” at this moment when “the sexual and medical gaze had yet to be separated” demonstrates the ways in which art, medicine and sexuality worked in close dialogue with one another.

A significant group of feminist scholars have taken anatomy and gender as their focus, skilfully treating the topic by emphasizing the voyeurism of the male medical gaze and the violation it effects when focussed on women’s bodies. These analyses, however, ignore the fact that male medical authorities were also interested in men’s bodies. Certainly Maclise’s illustrations are preoccupied with men and the pathologies unique to male body parts—only one of the sixty-eight plates in *Surgical Anatomy* is of a woman’s body. This evidence of an overwhelming interest by male doctors in male bodies requires attention and suggests that studies of heterosexual viewing practices must be supplemented by an examination of the homosexual visual economy in medicine.

Maclise’s illustrations have important implications for scholarship on masculinity since they exemplify what he felt was a normative, masculine body. Both John Tosh and Roy Porter have identified an overvaluation of the mental and intellectual and a devaluation of the bodily in scholarship on masculinity. Looking at medical texts—that are nothing if not preoccupied with the body—addresses this silence. Maclise’s volume

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13 McGrath, *Seeing Her Sex*, 3.
is an ideal site on which to bring these disparate bodies of literature into dialogue. Through his work it is possible to see how the dichotomies between mind and body, personal and national, erotic and non-erotic, and prescription and lived experience are unstable. Examining his work also leads us to recognize the importance of fluidity in thinking about sexual subjectivities.

Joseph Maclise was an anatomist-surgeon who appears to have lived a relatively uneventful life in London. The Irish-born, University College London-trained Maclise goes unmentioned among the anatomical “greats” and has been accorded little notice by historians. He was, however, popular in his own day. After receiving accolades from his professor and mentor, Richard Quain, whose volume *Anatomy of the Arteries* (1844) Maclise illustrated, he undertook his own anatomical project, conducting dissections and drawing illustrations that would be published in *Surgical Anatomy* in 1851; the volume of 68 lithographic plates and accompanying descriptions sold 1000 copies in its first six months in publication and was sufficiently popular to warrant numerous subsequent English and American editions.¹⁶ This proliferation of editions suggests a popularity that cannot be easily explained by an innovative contribution to the field of anatomy. Quite the opposite, in fact; human anatomy, according to Maclise, was outmoded. He remarks that “one may proclaim anthropotomy [human anatomy] to have worn itself out” and proclaims its irrelevance. He describes it as “out-trodden,” a “reiterate[ed] theme,” and argues that “the narrow circle is footworn. All the needful facts are long since gathered,

¹⁶ *Surgical Anatomy* was published no less than twice in England (1851 and 1856) and three times in the United States (1851, 1857 and 1859) with other abridged editions of the plates and discussions available. For example, see R.U. Piper, ed. *The Plates of Maclise’s Surgical Anatomy* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1857).
sown, and known.” Instead, Maclise imagined his contribution in terms of the importance of looking at “the retrospective,” and stated the necessity of making generalizations that “re-examine the things and phenomena which, as novices, we passed by too lightly.” Maclise’s retrospective orientation suggests that he saw the merit in artistic anatomy, but that he also recognized that it could progress no further as a clinical art. His interest was in the way it could be represented. Evidently, the public was appreciative of his effort; regardless of its lack of innovation, the volume was popular.

Its popularity can be traced to the interests of medical anatomy’s two divergent audiences. Firstly, it was being rapidly consumed by “the student of medicine and the practitioner removed from the schools” that Maclise states is his intended audience. These volumes were intended for medical instruction, but also had other, more ceremonial purposes. For example, in April 1852, in the town of Birtley near Newcastle, a Mr. George Gibson was presented with an inscribed copy of Maclise’s *Surgical Anatomy*, “handsomely bound in morocco and gilt,” and an inscribed silver lancet case to commemorate his skill and his service to his patients. The ritualized ceremony—with speeches and lavish commemorative gifts (as the mention of silver and gold indicate)—suggests that anatomical volumes were invested with cultural capital; they were “tokens,” appropriate symbols of gratitude for a doctor and carried meanings (such as appreciation and respect) beyond their instructional purpose. Conversely, there was another trade in less lavish publications of anatomical illustrations. The relative inexpense of certain formats—for example, individual folio of *Surgical Anatomy*’s plates were available for

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20 *Newcastle Courant*, April 23, 1852, 8.
sale for five shillings each, in contrast to the fancy, leather-bound edition presented to Mr. Gibson—attest to their potential consumption by other, “non-medical eyes” as well. This trend was encouraged by the fact that lithographic technology was easing production and spreading distribution at this time. Pioneered for anatomical applications in 1821 in France by Charles Philibert de Lasteyrie, lithography improved the process of reproduction; in lithography, a flat surface is drawn on with water-resistant chemicals which can then be more easily reproduced than the former process in which metal plates were painstakingly engraved.21 The technology was rapidly exported to other European countries and made large, complicated anatomical atlases, which often had plates measuring more than thirty centimetres by thirty centimetres, much faster to reproduce. By the 1850s, lithography was the norm in anatomical illustration and Maclise used it to produce Surgical Anatomy. This new technology created a problem of circulation and consumption. Commentators have observed that the restricted access to these anatomical volumes was not simply due to expense, but also because of content, arguing that as powerful a cultural authority as medicine may have been, it was not primarily of the “public domain.”22 The same images that might be (relatively) unproblematically consumed by classically trained physicians whose visual registers were primed in certain ways by their education and social position, might prompt concern when viewed by the “wrong” kind of audience (working class men and women, for example). Thus, cheaper editions circulating in increased numbers caused anxiety. Since it was impossible to guarantee that these images would not be consumed by an “undesirable” popular

21 K.B. Roberts, Maps of the Body: Anatomical Illustration Through Five Centuries (St. John’s, NL: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1981), 103.
audience, the medical profession adopted new standards of illustration that would prevent transgressive mis-readings.

The resulting processes of stylistic change in anatomical illustration can thus be seen as an attempt to dissociate anatomy from some of the loaded moral, political and sexual meanings that it had accrued. The problem with artistic illustration—namely that every available representational register was fraught with potentially transgressive sexual associations—was eventually its undoing. For many, the baggage of the artistic style was a burden, particularly at a moment when the process of professionalization heightened scrutiny of practitioners’ credibility and respectability. It seems that the diagrammatic style of representation that was gaining ground through the 1840s, and would reach its most popular (and long-lasting) incarnation in 1858’s *Gray’s Anatomy*, was a way out of this problem.\(^{23}\) The abstract or diagrammatic style, what Michael Sappol terms “the universal,” seems not to be in dialogue with representational traditions that had been eroticised. Thus, it is possible to position Maclise at the very end of a long tradition of artistic illustration, as an artist who was continuing to draw on the heritage of artistic anatomy in England and on the Continent. He cited the work of Scarpa, Cowper, Haller, Hunter, Soemmering, Cruveilhier, and others as influences and thought retrospectively and self-consciously about situating his work in this earlier lineage. Maclise was aware of the stylistic precedents in anatomy and his representational style was not accidental; he made deliberate artistic choices based on the history of anatomy.

Early anxieties about the artistry of anatomical illustration manifested themselves in the discussion around photography’s usefulness in anatomy. Photography was lauded

\(^{23}\) It is possible to trace this trend in works such as Jones Quain, *Elements of Descriptive and Practical Anatomy* (London: W. Simpkin & R. Marshall, 1828).
as a new, unbiased medium and at mid-century, *The Lancet* hailed it as “the Art of Truth,” implicitly critiquing the artistic licence that illustrators had employed.\(^{24}\) If photography could show “truth,” the illustrators’ art was somehow artificial and false. Excitement about photography’s ability to depict “reality” supposedly without artistic mediation was tempered by the technology’s initial shortcomings for anatomical application. Photography’s earliest incarnations were of minimal utility to anatomists. Black and white photographs failed to register the details of internal anatomy and instead rendered it as a muddied mass.\(^{25}\) The conventions of lithographic and engraved anatomy, such as cross-hatching and the use of colour, which made it possible to distinguish the different body parts, were absent in photography. Photographs of sufficient clarity for anatomical instruction would not be produced until the 1880s.\(^{26}\) The fact that photography was acclaimed decades before it was actually a viable tool for anatomists suggests a growing unease with the artistic style of representation. Maclise’s decision to draw in the artistic style constitutes a rejection of photography and its proponents.

Attempts to emphasize reality in anatomy were not new. In fact, beginning in the 1680s, critics called for a boundary separating art and science that would eliminate the “niceties” of the artists’ hand—metaphors and fantasy settings, for example. Gone were the ornate backdrops and exotic animals (hippopotamuses and other exotic animals were not infrequent additions in earlier works), and in its place the style of “realism” emerged.\(^{27}\) Characterized by details such as ragged flesh and the appearance of pins,  

hoists, ropes and other dissecting tools, this style of anatomy—seen most famously in Great Britain in the work of William Hunter (1718-1783)—was concerned with rendering a particular, specific part of the body visible, and representing it as it was seen by the artist/anatomist during the act of dissection.\textsuperscript{28}

The second moment of the larger transition to “realism” came in the late-eighteenth century. In this shift, “anatomy was cleansed of its association with death.” Termed “universalist” because it universalized the body by uncoupling anatomy from the specific circumstances of dissection, the props and prosthetics of dissection (blocks, pins, ropes, etc.) and the dissecting table were removed and bodies appeared on empty backgrounds, without visual context.\textsuperscript{29} Increasingly, the anatomy appeared as parts (the internal organs or the nerves and muscles of the face, for example) without the rest of the body and was shown as diagrammatic line-drawings.

This style slowly came to predominate anatomical illustration by the 1830s and 1840s. It reached its most famous and long-standing articulation in \textit{Gray’s Anatomy} (1858); \textit{Gray’s Anatomy}’s “dull engravings and layout and inconsistent additional plates drawn in various diagrammatic styles” marked it for “serious,” “professional” medical study (figure 1).\textsuperscript{30} 

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{The External Oblique Muscle. \textit{Anatomy, Descriptive and Surgical ("Gray’s Anatomy")}\textsuperscript{29}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}, 46. Of course, this linear narrative can be complicated. There certainly existed stylistic slippages, overlaps and syntheses that this trajectory, by virtue of being a broad schema, does not address.
\textsuperscript{30} Petherbridge and Jordanova, \textit{The Quick and the Dead}, 96; Sappol, \textit{Dream Anatomy}, 48; McGrath, \textit{Seeing Her Sex}, 7.
Anatomy, for example, excised the artistry and multitude of connotations that were the signature of artistic anatomy; instead it was clinical and detailed in the way it showed the human body. In practice, these stylistic shifts were considerably messier. For example, Maclise’s work contains hallmarks of each of these different periods. Some of his figures look alive (figure 2), or are restrained with ropes as in “realism” (figure 3), and others are drawn in the diagrammatic, “universalist” style where line-drawn diagrams float on a blank background, utterly devoid of context (figure 4).

Figure 2. Plate 10: The surgical dissection of the sterno-clavicular or tracheal region, and the relative position of its main bloodvessels, nerves, &c. Surgical Anatomy

Figure 3. Plate 65-66: The surgical dissection of the popliteal space and the posterior crural region. Surgical Anatomy
All four of Maclise’s major illustrative efforts (*Anatomy of the Arteries, Comparative Osteology* (1847), *Surgical Anatomy* and *Dislocations and Fractures* (1858)) demonstrate movements back and forth between the categories of “realism” and “universalism.” These movements suggest that Maclise recognized the different representational possibilities and connotations that different styles expressed.

Maclise’s illustrations in *Surgical Anatomy* deployed these various styles simultaneously, and with purpose. His use of diagrammatic line-drawings constituted an experiment in newer modes and he seemed to use them exclusively to illustrate pathologies of the male reproductive organs. This suggests that the male reproductive organs most required the “safety” offered by the abstract representational mode. As well, it suggests that while the normal, healthy body was represented as whole, pathology was divorced from this norm and represented as decontextualized. In the preface to his large volume, Maclise states that he has laid emphasis on “imitating the character of the normal

![Figure 4. Plate 64, fig. 6: Deformities of the urinary bladder-the operations of sounding for stone, of catheterism and of puncturing the bladder above the pubes. *Surgical Anatomy*](image-url)
form of the human figure.”31 What becomes evident, however, is that “normal” did not connote “typical.” Maclise presented his readership with images of bodies that were anything but ordinary.32 Judging by Maclise’s standards, the “normal” body—that is, the body in a state of health against which the body in a state of disease could be judged—was an attractive, young, noble and alive-looking white man’s body.33 They have been characterized by one scholar as “perhaps the most romantically noble dissected figures that have been produced,” emphasizing the effect of their artistry.34 With the exception of one plate, which does more to draw attention to their absence than to their inclusion, women’s bodies are notably missing. Likewise, Maclise excludes the bodies of people of colour. His images attest to a near-exclusive interest in white masculinity. For him, the healthy white man was a model of health, as both a medical ideal and an ideal of the national “type.” One of the ways that Maclise articulated his idea of the ideal national type was by showing how he might look. In doing this, he borrowed from the visual conventions of classical beauty. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century social advocates had called on classicism to support discourses that argued that outward beauty was mirrored by internal moral perfection. The fact that classicism was associated with a problematic erotic tradition, as will be discussed below, made its integration into medical national fitness campaigns difficult.

31 Maclise, Surgical Anatomy, vi.
32 The normal, in scientific parlance, became synonymous with the optimal or desired in the 1820s, complicating existing definitions of the normal that connoted the typical or ordinary. Hence, what was “normal” began to acquire immense value as it was associated with the desired, or perfected, state. Oxford English Dictionary Online, “normal,” Oxford English Dictionary (accessed April 30, 2008); available from http://dictionary.oed.com.
33 The issue of looking alive is one that plagued the anatomical profession since it touches on the epistemological problem of anatomy: how can one learn about living anatomy by examining dead bodies?
During this era, anxiety over potentially sexually explicit visual material abounded and culminated in the Obscene Publications Act in 1857, which defined obscenity and pornography and facilitated arrest and prosecution for these crimes. In this moral climate, the changes in anatomical style described above (and that were happening at roughly this time) can be seen as an attempt to close-down potential sexual meanings in anatomical illustrations. The overlap between pornography and medicine was of sufficient concern that by the second half of the nineteenth century, anatomies had become “vague in anatomical and functional detail” in an attempt to not appear prurient and to avoid scrutiny from anti-vice organizations.35

The shift towards “universalist” illustration was thus precipitated by a desire to excise the potential for sexually transgressive meanings to exist in medical texts. The explanation offered by scholars to date—that the shift was a result of changing notions of realism and the desire to depict anatomy more clearly—is only a partial account.36 What was illegible or unclear about anatomical drawing was not its ability to render the parts of the body understandable for medical instruction—clearly Maclise’s remarks on anatomy’s obsolescence suggest that he thought this had already been accomplished. Instead, it was the meanings that were associated with anatomy that resisted singularity and clarity. Various representational styles influenced anatomy since visual genres are neither discrete nor insulated from each other. These external influences primed people to view the images in potentially problematic ways and helped to create this crisis in representation. In anatomy particularly, where the epistemology was visual—knowledge

was gained through sight and viewing\textsuperscript{37}—careful management was necessary in order to convey the “correct,” non-transgressive, non-erotic meaning.

In fact, pornography and anatomy had long been popularly associated, since dissection was seen as a way of “undressing the body” and anatomical illustration “was the only legitimate domain in which male and female genitals could receive detailed representation.”\textsuperscript{38} Thus, anatomical illustration’s proximity to illicit pornography (they both represented naked bodies) gave anatomical illustration its own sexual cachet.

Thomas Laqueur has shown that medical texts that were intended to be instructional could assume multiple identities; the work, \textit{Onania: or, The Heinous Sin of Self Pollution, and all its Frightful Consequences}, published in 1710, was at various points tied to the quack medicine market, seen as a high-minded religious and pedagogical work, and used as “scurrilous semipornography.”\textsuperscript{39} The ease with which texts intended for medical or pedagogical use could assume pornographic meanings demonstrates how closely pornography and medicine were associated with one another in the public mind. Even an intentionally medical work could easy become “pornographic.”

So close was the association between pornography and anatomy, some authors began intentionally using medicine as a vehicle for provoking sexual arousal. In 1821 in London, Dr. T. Bell authored \textit{Kalogynomia, or The Laws of Female Beauty}, published by J.J. Stockdale, a volume that appropriated the medical apparatus to address “Kalogynomists,” or connoisseurs of female beauty, as scientists of women. Bell

\textsuperscript{38} Sappol, \textit{Dream Anatomy}, 34.
acknowledges the book’s potent sexual connotations and provides an ironically precautionary introduction:

plates 10, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24 should not be carelessly exposed either to Ladies or to Young Persons. These Plates are therefore stitched up separately. As the work is a scientific one, and calculated both by its mode of construction and by its price for the higher and more reflecting class of readers, and as the plates above enumerated are also entirely scientific and anatomical, the Publisher might have dispensed with this precaution; but he is anxious that these readers should have it in their power to obviate the possibility of the careless exposure of such anatomical Plates.40

Thus, in one quick gesture, the author made a bid for the legitimacy of his enterprise because of its proclaimed scientific merit and tone, while simultaneously advertising the explicitness of the illustrations contained therein. Even as the Kalogynomia invoked the authority of medicine, its contents differed dramatically from anatomical texts. Rather than instruction on pathology and health and the anatomical details of the body, readers are given a discussion of female physical beauty. Whereas Maclise refrains from discussing love and sexual intercourse entirely and labels his work in highly specialized, technical vocabulary, Bell’s chapter titles refer to his preoccupation with these subjects: “Of Beauty,” “Of Love,” “Of Sexual Intercourse,” and “Of the Laws Regulating that Intercourse.” Although his work is on the topic of women’s beauty, Bell’s volume contains numerous plates of erect penises, perhaps representing the sexual stimulation that results from the female beauty discussed (figure 5).

40 T. Bell, Kalogynomia, Or The Laws of Female Beauty (London: J.J. Stockdale, 1821), i.
The introduction then lingers over a description of a woman’s body, enticing readers to imagine her body and the way it feels:

we observe a woman possessing one species of beauty:—Her neck is tapering; her shoulders, without being angular, are sufficiently broad and definite; her waist remarkable for fine proportion, is almost an inverted cone; her haunches are moderately expanded; her thighs proportional … and you would imagine that if your hands were placed under the lateral parts of her tapering waist, the slightest pressure would suffice to throw her into the air.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 2.
The eroticisation of this interaction—imagining touching the woman and the implied pleasure of tossing her in the air—is inconsistent with contemporary medical texts where the contact between doctors and patients is described in more distanced terms and lacks the evocation of pleasure. For example, Maclise’s lengthy discussions of catheterization emphasize the lack of touching and the reliance on instruments for examining bodies, rather than the laying of hands that Bell describes; Maclise remarks on the “fruitless effort made” of catheterization when a practitioner is forced to work “by hand without a [mechanical] guide.”

The Kalogynomia proceeds to classify the three types of beauty and these classifications are illustrated using supposedly anatomical principles. In practice, however the Kalogynomia seems more a catalogue of arousing descriptions of women’s bodies. Bell also discusses the pleasure of sexual intercourse, which is atypical of medical texts. He describes the stimulation felt “when the penis is erect, or when during coition the glans is to receive the most exquisite and sensible impressions.” Bell used the mantle of science to shield the Kalogynomia from accusations of prurience. In light of the sexual explicitness of the text, however, it is difficult to imagine that any audience, even the “higher class” of readers Bell claimed to envisage as his audience, would be immune to the sexual undertones of the work.

The Kalogynomia was not an isolated work of medical-pornography; there seems to have been a number of these types of work. The Generative System of John Roberton,
published in 1824 by the same publisher as the *Kalogynomia* (J.J. Stockdale), also seems to have intentionally elided the distinction between pornography and anatomy.\(^{45}\) This volume, which depicted erect penises, copious pubic hair and a plate depicting a woman’s genitals, was criticized by contemporaries for being more concerned with stimulating sexual desire than with teaching about medicine or disease.\(^{46}\) In fact, like the *Kalogynomia*, it describes the process of male sexual stimulation in terms quite unlike those seen in contemporary medical texts: “the secretion of semen proceeds without our consciousness, yet certain states of mind excited the testicles to an increased action, far beyond that which they usually possess.”\(^{47}\)

The discussion of sexual excitement and stimulation in these terms, emphasizing the pleasure that results from sexual daydreams or fantasies sets it apart from “serious” medicine. The illustration shown here is also unlike those in medical texts. Viewers are given explicit visual evidence of coition by the depiction of the erect penis penetrating the vagina during intercourse (figure 6). The

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\(^{46}\) McGrath, *Seeing Her Sex*, 38.

volume incited tremendous controversy and was made central to proceedings concerning 
the emerging legal definition of obscenity in the 1830s after it was discovered being read 
by prisoners.

The precedent set by pseudo-medical works created problems for the field of 
anatomy. It became even more necessary, in light of these texts, to differentiate oneself 
from these pornographers. Little and Maclise’s volumes have numerous stylistic 
differences, and it is not my intention to suggest that Maclise’s work was pseudo-medical 
or overtly pornographic in nature. However, *Surgical Anatomy* shares some affinities 
with these texts in its eroticism. Although Maclise could differentiate himself through his 
medical language from these works of semipornography and limit interpretative latitude, 
the images resisted control. The slipperiness of these visual registers opened up the 
possibility for sexual and erotic interpretations.

The positioning of Maclise’s subjects have erotic connotations. With their open 
legs, heads thrown back, and recumbent bodies they clearly reveal the parts of the body 
being dissected, they also suggest the ecstasy of sexual passion and the moment of 
orgasm. In plate 8, the figure's tilted-back head, parted lips, closed eyes and relaxed 
facial expression suggest the fulfillment of sexual desire (figure 7). While his head and 
extended neck are arranged in the surgical position for instructional purposes, certainly 
the position of the head has multiple connotations, only one of which is didactic. 
Coupled with his closed eyes, and gently parted lips, this image evokes an erotic reading.

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48 McGrath, *Seeing Her Sex*, 58. That Little’s volume came under scrutiny only after it was 
discovered in the possession of low-class prisoners suggests the importance of class in the regulation of 
pornographic materials. Again, we see what could be considered pornographic in the hands of the lower 
classes might be consumed unproblematically by classically-trained elites. However, Maclise’s experience 
suggests otherwise that is was not always the case.
The figures are also all attractive, and attractively displayed; they have clean, unblemished skin, carefully sculpted eyebrows, expressive features and soft lips. The likelihood that Maclise’s cadavers were—like the majority of dissecting cadavers in England and France—drawn from among the poor, is effaced. The bodies are clean and show no outward signs of hard living or destitution; in fact, their hands are clean and free of calluses or other signs of labour (figure 8). Some process of erasure and insertion clearly accompanied the representation of the bodies although it is unclear whether this was undertaken post-mortem on the bodies themselves or if Maclise simply drew the bodies the way he wanted them to look. Whichever it was, it seems plausible that Maclise had a particular idea of the aesthetic he wanted to convey in his volumes, and manipulated the bodies, whether physically or pictorially, to suit his vision.

The characteristics of the bodies themselves also have erotic connotations. They are well-proportioned, well-muscled and mostly hairless. Like the Kalogynomia, they are models
of beauty. They are also languidly, sensually posed, with clearly-defined but slightly relaxed muscles; these are not men tensed for action, but rather assume the position of repose. Although the male body is not totally taut, as it is in other representational traditions such as images of the strongman, the correlation between phallic power and the ability of the flexed male body’s potential to exercise power is implicit in the figures’ poses. Their bodies are defined in such a way that the muscles are most attractively displayed, and they exhibit masculine power. This reading of phallic power is complicated, however, by the fact that the penises are all depicted as flaccid. This undermines associations with the erections of pornography by rendering the subjects literally impotent. Here, symbolic vulnerability is necessary; rather than be prosecuted for pornography, Maclise must be sure to show his subjects as devirilized.

Maclise’s decision to portray—or, in some cases, his decision not to portray—facial and body hair raised similar contradictory issues and defies easy analysis. Facial hair had multiple meanings and both its presence and absence were highly symbolic. Beardedness was seen as a marker of respectability, masculinity and class status during the Victorian “beard boom” in the later third of the nineteenth century. In the earlier period, however, since regular barbering was prohibitively expensive, beardedness was an indicator of lower class status. Beardedness was also a symbol of virility and masculinity. In The Generative System of John Roberton, Little comments on the process of male sexual maturation, remarking that “when, however, [puberty] arrives the voice acquires a more masculine tone—the beard, and mustachios grow—the pubis is covered

49 Budd, Sculpture Machine, 63.
50 Ibid.
51 Cook, London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 61.
with hair, and, the semen, being also secreted, the male is then able to propagate his species.”53 Here body and facial hair are directly associated with virility and the ability to procreate. The correlation of reproductive capacity and hair suggests that the appearance of hair designated a potent masculinity. Facial hair was also given racial significance and was used to mark the superiority of the “Caucasian or Bearded Type” from the “Mongolic or Beardless Type.”54 With this in mind, it seems that including facial hair is one way that Maclise empowers his figures as masculine models (figure 9).

Others of his models are completely clean shaven (figure 10). This lack of facial hair displays their youthful, attractive features, but also runs the risk of associating clean-shavenness with a lack of proper masculinity. Not too long after Maclise was working, clean-shavenness became increasingly associated with “perverse” sexual preferences; defendants in gross indecency trials during the 1890s, for example, were characterized by the press as having a “penchant for fashionable dress and a lack of facial hair.”55 Even if in the 1850s Maclise’s clean-shaven men predated these

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53 Little, Generative System of John Roberton, 36-37.
55 Cook, London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 61.
explicit links to perversity, the lack of facial hair picks up on debates about masculinity and beardedness that were already being expressed.

Similarly, as Little suggests, the appearance of body hair was seen as a marker of sexual virility.\textsuperscript{56} It is significant then that Maclise’s subjects are largely free of body hair. If manly men were hairy, why are his figures hairless? It seems unlikely, given the physicality and muscularity of the bodies shown, that Maclise was attempting to feminize or emasculate his figures. Rather, I would suggest that the omission of body hair serves to highlight the musculature of the body and to display it to advantage (figure 11).

\textbf{Figure 10.} Plate 26: The relation of the internal parts to the external surface. \textit{Surgical Anatomy}

The appearance of pubic hair is thus surprising and is complicated by several representational traditions. In many of the plates pubic hair is absent or minimal, almost certainly an omission for the sake of decorum by Maclise (figure 12). The absence of pubic hair also suggests the problematic sexualizing of prepubescent bodies. However, while many of the illustrations erase the pubic hair entirely, others display it prominently, thus complicating any singular explanation of the existence of hair (figure 13).

Figure 11. Plate 11: The surgical dissection of the axillary and brachial regions, displaying the relative order of their contained parts. *Surgical Anatomy*
In these varied portrayals it is possible to see an important moment of negotiation; hair and hairlessness both had a tradition that eroticised them. As we see in the discussion of *The Generative System*, and as Anne Hollander has shown, pubic hair was considered a marker of pornography.\(^{57}\) Thus, to draw pubic hair was problematic. Conversely, by

removing the pubic hair, Maclise invoked a tradition of neoclassicism that was also eroticised. Every possible avenue of representation took him in proximity to troublesome representational traditions.

Maclise’s ambivalence towards the representation of his figures’ masculinity carries through to his portrayal of their vulnerability. While the illustrations’ erotic and pornographic connotations work potentially to empower his subjects by ennobling them as virile, we should also note that they are also subjected to acts of violence. The symbols of violation inscribed in the drawings indicate an uneven distribution of power that privileges the practitioner. In many of the illustrations, ropes are attached to the figures’ wrists or ankles. In plates 66 (figure 14), the rope tied around the subject’s feet hobble him; he is restrained in what appears an act of coercion. Ropes were used in anatomy to tie the body securely in position so that the anatomy could be drawn. But by this period, the use of physical restraints, such as ropes or ties, was also part of a known repertoire of sexual practices. In the anonymous pornographic memoir My Secret Life, probably written in the 1880s, the narrator describes rigging up hooks and ropes from the ceiling in order to experiment with new sexual positions; he puts his female partner’s legs in the ropes “up to the knees, and she laid for ten minutes at a time with her legs in the

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58 Although the conventions of ancient Greek sculpture had demanded that male pubic hair be shown, eighteenth-century and Victorian neoclassical sculptures often depicted extremely scant, or absent, pubic hair.

59 In conventional interpretations ropes serve two symbolic purposes: firstly, they remind viewers that the figures are dead, and that ropes and pulleys have been used to support limbs in their poses. Secondly, rope imagery in the pre-nineteenth-century context has been seen as an effort to emphasize the criminality of the models; before the Anatomy Act of 1832, cadavers were usually obtained from the hangman and rope carried immense moral and religious symbolism. Petherbridge and Jordanova, Quick and the Dead, 38.
“air” while being penetrated. A similar effort to restrain and prop the body in position motivated both My Secret Life’s narrator and anatomists.

Maclise’s subjects are also vulnerable to surgical intervention. In plate 50, the figure on the far left has had his penis lopped off to reveal a cross-section of its interior (figure 15). The image suggests a man who is not whole, whose amputated penis serves as an emblem of the loss of his sexual vitality.

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In contrast to this violence, Maclise’s written text and the shading on the edges of his drawings suggest his desire to preserve his subjects’ bodily integrity. He states that because the exterior of the body is a “map to the surgeon, explanatory of the anatomy arranged beneath” it was his intention to leave “appended to the dissected regions as much of the undissected as was necessary”; however, this is done for the benefit of the practitioner, not out of consideration for the male subject’s bodily integrity.61 The figures are dominant in their surroundings, following the tradition of the male nude shown as “inhabiting and defining its own space”; their outstretched limbs and open eyes are looking about, symbolic of man’s “ownership of the world around,” but they are also defined by the limits of the practitioner’s gaze and the frame of Maclise’s illustrations.62

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61 Maclise, Surgical Anatomy, viii.
The intimate point of view afforded to the anatomist and the viewer in plates such as the one above would later become a hallmark of photographic pornography. By the 1880s, when photography gained popularity as a pornographic medium, photographers would position their models at “revealing angles” to clearly show the “curves that two-dimensional representations tended to flatten.” The models would thrust their pelvises forward and part their legs in order to emphasize the genitals, in much the same manner that Maclise shows his models positioned. The genitals were also made the focal point by being positioned in the centre of the photograph. Pornographers used many of the same visual techniques frequently used by anatomists to draw attention to the parts of the body most interesting and relevant to their genre.63

As these examples make clear, there were significant overlaps between the medical and pornographic vocabularies. Roberta McGrath has argued that anatomy is a site where “science and pornography meet and fuse,” since by definition both are “necessarily explicit.”64 Maclise’s illustrations exemplify this fusion. The persistence of this erotic symbolism and its attachment to medicine made medical illustration a difficult genre. The anatomist needed to carefully navigate the sexual-medical terrain by including sufficient detail to make their illustrations educational and visually appealing, while avoiding the suggestion of sexual explicitness.

In the interest in purging their texts of sexual symbolism and associations, anatomists turned to the Greek ideal. Classicism was one available cultural script which enabled them to respond to the controversies raised by pornographic works like The

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63 Sigel, Governing Pleasures, 104.
64 Roberta McGrath, Seeing Her Sex, 3; Ludmilla Jordanova, “Medicine and Genres of Display” in Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances, eds. Lynne Cooke and Peter Woolen (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1995), 211.
Generative System of John Roberton and the Kalogynomia. Classicism, it was believed, invested the nude body with an ideal and timeless quality. Without something to elevate it above the naked flesh shown in pornography, the nude body was vulnerable to accusations of sensuality. As we shall see, however, elevating the nude with classicism was an incomplete solution, since the Greek ideal evoked another set of sexual connotations.

Since Maclise could not control his work’s circulation or audience beyond a limited degree, it was imperative that he, along with other practitioners and anatomists, demonstrate their credentials and authority to avoid being labelled quacks, or worse, pornographers. One of the ways this was accomplished was by invoking the doctor’s classical heritage and his classical learning, since classicism was supposed to elevate the base, material, and bodily to a higher plane.65 The authority of Greek culture gave anatomy an air of respectability and authority by invoking ideas of reason, political enlightenment, and justice.66 To prevent public scrutiny and to demarcate themselves from quacks and other “illegitimate” practitioners, doctors sought to emphasize their “gentlemanly attributes and appeals to science.”67 Certainly a classical consciousness and education was one of these “gentlemanly” qualities. Medical leaders, particularly in London where Maclise was educated and trained as a surgeon, emphasized the importance of a more general education in classics and other fields, rather than a strictly technical, medical education. The proper moral and analytic foundations for medical practice were provided by a thorough classical education. Although some applauded the downfall of classical education in favour of a “modern and scientific education,” others

66 Callen, Spectacular Body, 11.
believed that the gentlemanly foundations of medicine would be corrupted if classics were discarded.68

Neoclassicism also supported an ideology of national fitness that anatomists—as proponents of bodily health—were keen to advocate. Anxieties about the weaknesses (physical and moral) of an English populace enervated by the process of industrialisation and the attendant difficulties of urban living motivated the search for new models of physical and moral health.69 Social commentators seized upon the notion of classicism. For them, the ideal, aesthetically perfect body was synonymous with a healthy body, and a stable political culture.70 This concept was extrapolated to apply to the nation as a whole. If its people could aspire to physical perfection, England would be a robust, strong nation. This notion of nationalism, however, was a gendered one. Premised upon the masculine ideal suggested by the neoclassical aesthetic, model citizens were muscular, youthful male figures who symbolized the nation.71 Notions of manliness “based upon the Greek revival” constituted a new discourse in masculine citizenship, one that shifted away from martial masculinity in favour of a political discourse of civic responsibility.72 Thus, the classical model became an aspirational cultural script.

Although gender is foregrounded in this discourse, sexuality has only an implied role—

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69 Tamar Garb, * Bodies of Modernity: Figure and Flesh in Fin-de-Siecle France* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 68.
72 *Ibid.*, 13; Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality*, 4, 61. This is a contentious issue. Some historians, such as Mosse and John Tosh, have argued that the existence of martial masculinity declined in Britain following 1815 and Napoleon’s defeat. Others have argued for its perseverance through the age of Empire, for example, see Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004).
namely that healthy parents give birth to healthy babies that then go on to produce and fight for a healthy nation.

Like social commentators and politicians, the medical profession also appropriated the discourse of classical perfection. The muscular, perfect-looking body was a healthy body and this external perfection was mirrored internally in the absence of pathology. This Victorian notion borrowed from an existing tradition, since for several centuries classical sculpture had influenced anatomy. For example, Soemmering’s drawings of skeletons were based on postures found in the Venus de Medici and the Venus of Dresden. Far from being free from cultural values, however, anatomy helped to create new gendered, racialized and classed norms. Londa Schiebinger’s work on anatomical skeletons has shown that classical proportions had important implications for contemporary ideas of masculinity and femininity.73 Maclise’s illustrations do similar gendered and racialized work. The figures he portrays are white male bodies and fit neatly into the civic ideal suggested by Hellenism. These images of “normal” white men are in contrast with other racialized images in circulation at the time. Ethnographers and anthropologists were growing increasingly interested in classifying and measuring indigenous colonial peoples through comparative anatomy and physiognomy. The racism and exploitation that characterized many of these encounters has been well observed in scholarship.74 According to Athena Leoussi, the “rise of Greek subjects in English painting and sculpture, and especially of the male nude, should be considered as

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73 Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex: Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1991), 200. For example, the size of a woman’s hips and pelvis in anatomies influenced by classical sculpture were used to naturalize and essentialize arguments for women’s reproductive roles.

an outcome of the social acceptance of racial theories from 1850 onwards. Maclise’s illustrations also literally “whitewash” the figures; their bodies are not only white but also unblemished and unscarred. They are artistic and national models, and are examples to be emulated; for many groups, however, such as women, people of colour and the so-called unrespectable working classes, the participation in the political nation that they exemplified could be aspired to but never achieved. The perfection of Maclise’s subjects—muscular neoclassical physiques, bodies unmarked by hard work, disease or disfigurement—suggest that these are the types of men to improve the English racial stock; not the reedy, enervated workers of the urban slums. The concern with national fitness was intricately wound up in imperial discourses. Anatomy created meanings that invoked gendered and racialized values, while situating sexuality and eroticism on the margins.

It is unlikely, however, that classicism was effective in these efforts to desexualize anatomy. The kinds of people most feared for their “mis-interpretations” of anatomical works—the working classes specifically—largely lacked the formal classical education that contemporaries argued was required to process images of the nude male body as non-erotic. While classicisation may have been a bid to de-eroticise anatomical images, it is hardly clear whether it achieved any measure of success. Hellenism was already highly eroticised, and was well on its way to becoming homoerotic.

In many cases, classicism serves to provoke erotic responses rather than to forestall them. In one such story, the Edinburgh-born doctor and anatomist, Robert Knox, was prompted to view one of his cadavers in erotic terms because of the visual

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76 Budd, *Sculpture Machine*, 77.
parameters of classicism. In 1828, Knox reportedly refused to dissect the body of Mary Paterson because he was struck by her beauty. It has been argued that Knox saw Mary Paterson as “a woman at the peak of the kind of beauty he was later to argue was the epitome of human civilisation, that of classical Greece” and was thus loathe to dissect her. Instead, he asked an artist, J. Oliphant, to sketch her, and “then preserved her whole in a tub of whisky for three months.” In this example, the classical aesthetic became implicated in an almost necrophiliac response.

In a decidedly less macabre story, classical statuary was seen as sexually attractive. In the Kalogynomia the author demonstrates his attraction for the Venus de Medici. He describes “the admirable form of the mammae, whence man first learns ideal beauty, which, without being too large, occupy the bosom, rise from it with nearly equal curves on every side” and then lingers over the description of the rest of her body including the “beautiful elevation of the mons veneris.” The statue gallery is an instructional site for a man’s sexual development and a place where female genitals are on display; it is here he “first learns ideal beauty.” Having lost himself in revelling over the Venus’s body, the author snaps out of his daydream, remarking in a footnote that “the writer forgot it was a statue of which he was speaking!” calling attention to the slippage between attraction for the living and the non-living. Moral authorities believed that the viewers who had sexual responses to art were those lower-classes who lacked the “elevated intent demanded by high culture” to look beyond the nakedness of the classical

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78 MacDonald, Human Remains, 34.
79 Bell, Kalogynomia, 71, 73.
80 Ibid., 73.
statue. Instead, they responded basely to the content of the image (naked bodies) instead of its “formal qualities.” The possibility that classical beauty could be so powerful as to compel attraction to a non-living object demonstrates classicism’s power over the Victorian erotic imagination. With this in mind, it is not difficult to see how classicism could render anatomical forms sexually compelling.

The anecdotes discussed above demonstrate how the statue galleries of museums and galleries were important sexual sites for (hetero)sexual gazing. Later stories discuss their relevance to homosexual men. The British Museum provided titillation for one man in particular, who commented in 1883: “I revelled in the sight of pictures and statues of male form … and could not keep from kissing [them].” This notion of the museum as a space for sexual liaison would be later raised in E.M. Forester’s novel Maurice (1914) in which two male lovers arrange to meet at the British Museum. Here, the contact between a middle class man and his working class lover reveals the museum not only as a space for sexual contact, but also as a space where cross-class sexual connections were possible.

According to most accounts, the confluence of Hellenism and homoeroticism was submerged for much of the nineteenth century. In this argument, the tradition of “Hellenizing homosexuality” arose in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century.

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82 Certainly by the 1880s, when the anonymous pornographic memoir, My Secret Life, is believed to have been written, Greek statuary is clearly portrayed as enabling seduction. The narrator uses the occasion of viewing a Greek nude male sculpture to lead an unfamiliar female acquaintance into a discussion that “ran as closely to the border of decency that [he] could,” which included a discussion of the appearance of the sculpture’s pubic hair. The narrator feels, at this point, that the discussion of the sculpture’s nudity has made the woman want “to hear talk suggesting sexual pleasure,” and they proceeded back to their lodgings for a sexual encounter. Anonymous, My Secret Life, 270-71.
83 Quoted in Cook, London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 33, 86.
84 This is not to suggest that the public space of the British Museum held sexual possibilities or connotations to all.
with gentlemen collectors, such as Richard Payne Knight (1751-1824). Payne Knight wrote *A Discourse on The Worship of the Priapus* in 1786 in which he argued that phallic worship had an unbroken history from ancient Greece to the contemporary world. The tradition then supposedly “dives underground” for the duration of the nineteenth century and reappears only in the 1880s and 1890s with Oscar Wilde and the emergence of Victorian Aestheticism. However, classicism and notions of “Greekness” remained in circulation throughout this period; episodes such as the acquisition of the Elgin Marbles by the British Museum in 1816 demonstrate this point. Emphasizing the ways that classicism remained connected to sexuality in these intervening decades lays the basis for connecting the historiographies of early-nineteenth century Greek-inspired Republicanism and late-nineteenth century Hellenism. Rather than seeing a long period when Greek sexuality ceased to play a significant role in Victorian culture, I would argue that attending to the ways in which the suggestion of Greek homoeroticism popped up in licit locations such as anatomy provides a context for what is otherwise the “sudden” emergence of late-Victorian aestheticism. Medical illustration is part of the “underground” where Hellenism existed during this intervening period.

Since the neoclassical revival highlighted homoerotic tendencies, especially in the writings of Johann Winckelmann, medicine’s adoption of neoclassicism was similarly tinged. Winckelmann, a German art critic, provided a vocabulary with which to admire the nude male bodies of antiquity. For men who loved men, Winckelmann’s *Reflections*

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86 Sigel, *Governing Pleasures*, 72. The reprinting of *Worship of the Priapus* in 1865 in London by J.C. Hotten suggests the continuing popularity of these notions of ancient sexuality.
on the Paintings and Sculpture of the Greeks (translated to English and published in 1765) and History of Ancient Art (published in 1774) provided an important discussion of ancient Greek admiration and love between men; for some Victorian men, this was crucial in helping them to understand their own sexuality.88 There is some debate about whether Winckelmann’s volumes were available in England by the 1850s. Although Alex Potts argues that History of Ancient Art was only available in English “in a rather inaccessible American edition some ninety years after its initial publication” and that Winckelmann “was no cultural icon or hero figure among British Victorian intellectuals,”89 references to Winckelmann began appearing in the Times as early as 1836, and by 1850 notices of an edition translated from the German by G.H. Lodge—including highly favourable reviews from The Spectator—advertised History of Ancient Art for sale in London for 12 shillings.90 Winckelmann’s ideas were also taken up by the sculptor Richard Westmacott the Younger between 1841 and 1860 and were fundamental in shaping the English view of ancient Greece.91

Winckelmann’s work exemplifies the paradox of neoclassicism; it expresses the elevating calm and the absence of emotion with “an intense awareness of the kinds of erotic and at times sado-masochistic fantasy that could be woven around such representations of the body beautiful.”92 Characterized by scholars as conveying an “unapologetically sensuous homoeroticism,” Winckelmann identifies the finely-formed, Greek male nude as the erotic ideal.93 Winckelmann’s identification of the ultimate

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88 Walter Pater’s essay on Winckelmann has been often cited in support of this claim.
89 Potts, Flesh and The Ideal, 240.
90 Times (London), March 7, 1850, 10; Times (London), August 27, 1850, 11.
92 Potts, Flesh and the Ideal, 2.
93 Ibid., 5.
object of desire as the masculine, male body rather than the female body destabilizes the “conventional heterosexist ideology,” as Potts has successfully shown. Thus, the neoclassical male body gained purchase as an erotic object.

Maclise’s neoclassical tendencies demonstrate how the homoerotic could be seen in mid-nineteenth-century medicine. He was certainly intrigued by classicism and the Greeks. Evidence within his work suggested that Maclise travelled extensively in Greece. In the preface to his work *Dislocations and Fractures* (1858), Maclise states that the “crippled guide” who he “witnessed” in “the ruins of the Athenian Acropolis” inspired him to remember the real-life necessity of his work. Maclise, in this rather offhand comment, reveals that he has visited this ancient archaeological site in Greece that in the early-nineteenth century was being excavated and, along with the acquisition of the so-called Elgin Marbles by the British Museum, prompted an increased interest in Hellenism.

Maclise’s interest in classicism is also apparent in the illustrations themselves. His interest in male musculature and his depiction of muscles as flexed with vitality is a hallmark of neoclassicism. It is also a particular aesthetic choice, given that Maclise’s anatomical cadavers would have had flaccid muscles. Plate 13 is a typically neoclassical image (figure 16): the beautiful, youthful-looking but mature man’s supple and lithe figure extends throughout the frame and his rippling abdominal muscles capture the viewer’s attention. There are, however, some distinct differences between Maclise’s male figures and the male figures of the neoclassical tradition. Neoclassicism avoided portraying details such as veins and sinews, which disrupted the supposed perfection of

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94 Ibid., 113.
the body. Maclise, on the other hand, depicted the viscera of his male nudes in vivid
detail.97 Thus, Maclise’s figures suggest a particularly medical understanding of the
neoclassical notion of perfection.

Eroticism was a problem
circulating around Hellenism but it was
also a larger problem about the place of
the nude in art more generally.
Discourses of high art were used, like
classicism, as a way to elevate and
civilize the unclothed body, allegedly de-
sexualizing it. High art was supposedly
of an “elevated, spiritual order, not the
blatant sexuality associated with body
hair.”98 In England, however, debates
about the status of the nude in art
destabilized high art’s claims to an
elevated position. Thus, while formal artistic conventions were meant to insulate images
of nudes from criticism, increasingly the nude came under attack.

Maclise’s high-art sensibilities have been attested to by recent commentators on
anatomy. They have observed that his “images have little to do with the dissecting room”
and the figures, who appear “god-like” are indeed those of “‘high’ art, only incidentally

Figure 16. Plate 13: The surgical form of the male and female axillae compared. Surgical Anatomy

97 Hansen and Porter, Physicians Art, 192.
98 Callen, Spectacular Body, 85.
of an anatomical subject.” 99 An image from *Surgical Anatomy* is included in one book on the artist’s model as a “graphic illustration of the manner in which mid-Victorian techniques of drawing permeated into medical treatises.” 100 It is the only example of a medical illustration in what is otherwise an entire book of “high art” nudes. Scholars have also observed Maclise’s stylistic affinities to the life drawings of hyper-realist artists such as William Mulready (1786-1863). 101 Maclise’s brother, Daniel Maclise, was a renowned Victorian artist and a member of the Royal Academy, which has prompted commentators to observe similarities between the brothers’ bodies of work. 102 We can be reasonably safe in assuming that Maclise was aware of what was happening in fine art circles. However, we are only able to speculate on his reasons for illustrating artistically. Maclise was working in a period that witnessed, as Lynda Nead has shown, an increasingly commercial visual street culture. Nead argues that the response to new forms of visual culture in Victorian London manifested itself in nostalgia “for a slower and more containable world of high art.” 103 Certainly a self-conscious nostalgia is a possible explanation for Maclise’s decision to invoke neoclassical conventions of high art, as his prefatory comments on his “retrospective” orientation make clear. Perhaps he wished to emulate the artistry of his anatomical “heroes,” men like William Hunter. As well, Maclise’s artistry can be seen as an effort to resuscitate interest in the “unalterable

101 Ibid.
102 Nancy Weston, *Daniel Maclise: Irish Artist in Victorian London* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 229. Weston also, rather romantically, observes that “the similarities are so strong that it is impossible not to imagine a lifetime of these brothers drawing side by side with the only line blurred being that between the poet and the practitioner.” For more information, see Arts Council of Great Britain, *Daniel Maclise, 1806-1870* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1972).
facts of the human body” with his “novel treatment” of them using anatomical artistry.104 Certainly his contemporaries had virtually ceased to produce anatomies in this style and his was distinctive for its artistry.

Another possible explanation for Maclise’s artistry is the belief, mentioned above, that high art minimized potential sexual readings of the nude by elevating it from “naked” male body to artistic “nude.” Debates supporting these distinctions seem to have originated in controversies surrounding the interactions between artists and nude models. The rhetoric of high art’s elevating capacities was first invoked when, in the early-nineteenth century, artistic academies in England became contentious spaces that included both women and men.105 These heated debates about the role of the nude were taking place during Maclise’s formative years as an artist, and were only a generation before he began to publish his own works. The formal conventions of high art were supposed to work to de-eroticise the naked body and encouraged “an elevated mental set in the viewer who might otherwise be susceptible to baser promptings.”106 This prescriptive language of elevation and de-eroticisation obscures the reality of the life drawing class. Despite elevating rhetoric, concerns over the proximity of artists and naked models—and the potential for sexual arousal and contact enabled by this proximity—abounded.107 The nude tradition in England faced opposition from critics

104 Maclise, Surgical Anatomy, viii.
107 Postle and Vaughan, Artist’s Model, 56.
who claimed to be defending public morality.\textsuperscript{108} For these opponents, nakedness, “whether male, female, realistic, eroticised or ideal,” had no place in art.\textsuperscript{109}

Even reputable, established artists faced criticism for their portrayals of nudes. The English artist William Etty (1787-1849), a member of the Royal Academy, was famous for his nude paintings. In the 1820s, the \textit{Times} criticized his work as being indecent: “naked figures, when painted with the purity of Raphael, may be endured: but nakedness without purity is offensive and indecent, and in Mr. Etty’s canvass is mere dirty flesh.”\textsuperscript{110} The critic couches his indictment of Etty’s work in the unspecific language of a concern for purity. What he seems to be suggesting, however, is that Etty’s portrayal of the naked body is too realistic. Its lack of elevation makes it problematic. Without “purity,” the images were too realistic, too base, and too visceral. Although Etty was undoubtedly a “serious” high-art painter—wide acclaim for his talent and his membership in the Royal Academy attest to this—even he was unable to escape the condemnation of being base and “dirty.” Indeed, Etty contended with accusations of salaciousness for his entire career.\textsuperscript{111}

In addition to numerous female nudes, Etty also produced art of the male body. These nudes, however, failed to receive similar accusations of “dirty flesh” despite strong erotic associations. The lack of criticism of male nudes by male artists indicates a normalization of male-male relationships in the tradition of the academic male nude. Artists portrayed nude men as heroic and masculine and as exemplars of a certain brand of athletic masculinity, despite the fact that models were largely drawn from the working

\textsuperscript{109} Postle and Vaughan, \textit{Artist’s Model}, 109.
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Ibid}., 110.
\textsuperscript{111} Smith, \textit{Exposed}, 31.
classes. Male models were culled from the ranks of “pugilists or soldiers capable of sustaining a pose and renowned for their fine musculature.” They were selected for their physical similarity to the perfect antique body and were represented in these lofty terms. Thus, in art as in Maclise’s own images, the lower class status of the actual model was effaced in the images. Interestingly, images of pugilists and pedestrians (runners) were also in circulation in the common market. They could be bought in London in the early 1860s for five shillings each, echoing the ways that Maclise’s images were also produced in both elitist and popular versions, with appropriate prices. While five shillings was certainly still expensive, it was drastically less expensive than most pornography. Pornographic images in weekly publications such as *The Exquisite* were more accessibly priced. *The Exquisite* was published between 1842 and 1844 by William Dugdale, and provided stories of copulation and seduction focusing on heterosexual penile-vaginal intercourse with one pornographic engraving per issue. Each issue with a colour engraving, at one shilling, six pence, was affordable for the more well-off labouring classes. The prices of these consumer products suggest a thriving market for images of nude men, among the labour elite and the middle classes. Images of pugilists and pedestrians, like those of male anatomical models, could be read “straight,” simply for their intended meanings. But the possibility that they carried sexual subtexts meant they could also be “read” differently, as ostensibly licit but sexually provocative.

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112 Ibid., 61.
113 *Era* (London), January 19, 1862, 3.
While Etty’s paintings of male nudes are not manifestly homoerotic, they border on these traditions in their sensuality and depiction of male physicality. Several of Etty’s works show an interest in “both exotic men and naked men.” The painting here, *The Wrestlers*, exemplifies Etty’s interest in the physicality of the male body (figure 17). Drawing a stark visual contrast between dark and light flesh, Etty’s painting shows the two wrestlers in an unclothed embrace, their arms and legs closely intertwined. The formal conventions contrasting lightness and darkness highlight the locations of contact, drawing the eye to the boundaries between light and dark flesh where the flesh is pressed together. Although they are looking away from each other, they remain in close contact and their muscularity and strength is manifest in the painting. These models are images of masculine perfection and were “celebrations of virile masculinity.”

Etty’s choice of male models had erotic connotations as well. He, like other artists, preferred muscular guardsmen. Two such men, Guardsman Higgins and Samuel Strowger, appeared numerous times in his art (figure 18).

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The guardsmen and soldiers were part of a highly homosocial environment. Scholars have observed that guardsmen frequently engaged in male prostitution because of the army’s low pay. One notorious site for male “renting” was in Trafalgar Square where a nearby barracks ensured a constant supply of “soldiers willing to accept all kinds of invitations.” In November 1842, male prostitution by guardsmen incited a public controversy when the *Times* reported that a private in the Grenadier Guards, William Malt, was arrested for “unspecified ‘indecent practices’ committed in the toilet with a civilian.” In light of these accusations, guardsmen shown in Etty’s paintings took on new associations and prompted viewers to look suspiciously, or knowingly, at the figures. Giving viewers cause to believe that nude male models might also be male prostitutes—however remote a possibility—provided a powerful link between “perverse” sexuality and high art.

More explicit connections were drawn between illicit sexuality and art through the 1850s. Anxieties around the artistic nude intensified, particularly in the lead-up to the

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passing of the Obscene Publications Act of 1857. Private art collectors worried that their nude paintings would be seized as pornography and that they might face prosecution. Ultimately the Obscene Publications Act determined that potentially obscene images of nudity were safe if they were “artistic.” There was, however, a fine and unstable line between art and obscenity. Photographs of nude models that were used by artists as visual aids came under attack and were classed as pornography. In 1870, one seller of such photographs, Henry Evans, was “charged with selling obscene prints, and fined and sentenced to two years’ hard labour despite a petition in his favour signed by artists who used his supplies, including [Dante Gabriel] Rossetti and [Edward] Burne-Jones.” What constituted “art” and what “pornography” was being actively defined; even artistic aids were not sufficiently elevated to avoid prosecution. In fact, by the turn of the twentieth century, pornographers euphemistically marketed pornographic nudes as “artist’s models.” That these images were classed, sold, and used as pornography but were named as “art” demonstrates the problematic slippage between art and pornography.

Photographic studies of the male nude existed in the 1850s as well. The photographs taken by the French photographer Eugène Durieu as studies for the painter Eugène Delacroix have been identified as some of the earliest sets of

120 Nead, Female Nude, 89.
121 Postle and Vaughan, Artist’s Model, 113.
122 Ibid.
123 Sigel, Governing Pleasures, 90.
male nude photography and have been identified by some commentators as homoerotic (figure 19).\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{124} Ellenzweig, \textit{Homoerotic Photograph}, 7.
Durieu’s model displays rippling abdominal muscles and he is positioned holding the pole in such a way as to best display the definition of the torso. Like Durieu’s images, Maclise’s models are also positioned to best display the musculature of the body. Durieu’s figure’s eyes are cast downwards and aside and his face is neutral, in much the same way as many of Maclise’s figures’ faces (figure 20). The appearance of Maclise’s and Durieu/Delacroix’s figures’ bodies are also similar: broad shoulders, expansive chests, muscular arms and a general impression of firmness of flesh characterize both artists’ works.

This firmness, in a homoerotic reading, symbolizes the phallus in embodying “all the properties wished for in the phallus: strength,
firmness, vigour and mastery.” The stool in the background of the Durieu/Delacroix photographs is draped in fabric, mimicking the “sweep of folded drapery” that was a convention of the academic nude study and also appears in Maclise’s illustrations. The effect of this draping in Maclise’s work is to foreground the dissected anatomy and, perhaps, to preserve some semblance of modesty for the model and to prevent offending viewers. As well, drawing drapery was a sign of artistic skill. Fabric was notoriously difficult to draw well, and conveying its thinness and the body beneath it was a challenge for artists. Perhaps Maclise was demonstrating his technical skill as an artist, not merely an anatomist. In practice, however, the draping does nothing to protect the figure’s modesty or to shield potentially offended viewers. In plate 51, the futility of the drapery is even more pronounced as the viewer, as well as the anatomist, is privileged with an invasive and intimate view of the subject’s genitals (figure 21).

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125 Ibid., 14, 7.
These attempts to integrate the conventions of high art into anatomical illustration reflect, perhaps, an impulse to elevate it as artistic, just as the veil of antiquity was used to de-eroticise the nude; however, when the reader is invited to imagine the intimate circumstances of the subject and anatomist—such as Maclise drawing the illustration above, positioned between the cadaver’s legs—that veil of elevation evaporates. Anatomy was a physical and messy profession. Anatomists were not elevated above the body; they were in it, using tools and instruments to cut it apart.

Artistry was a problematic representational mode, but realism offered no reprieve from accusations of sensuality either. The problematic realism of photographic nude studies (since they were studio portraits as yet unelevated by the artist) and Etty’s works demonstrate this. Maclise had to make the “dissected dead counterfeit” appear life-like and realistic in order to have relevance to the “whole living body” that surgeons operated
Realism, according to Maclise, was what gave anatomy instructional value. Realism was also, however, problematic since it evoked the body as a sexually accessible, base and material human body. Since artistic rhetoric of transcendence and elevation and realism were equally bankrupt, the anatomical profession faced a representational dead end.

After Maclise, anxieties about medicine and sexuality would continue to intensify but would be voiced in a new location: sensationalized representations of medical seductions in the popular press. In one article, an account of a paternity suit, a Dr. Waters is accused of drugging a patient, Mary Walley and having sex with her while she was unconscious, resulting in a pregnancy. The article reports: “then came the 9th of November, on which day Mary Walley swore that she called upon the doctor, that she was very ill when she arrived there, that the doctor gave her some wine, and that she almost immediately afterwards had a fit and became insensible, and that she remembered nothing more until she came to herself about two hours after, when she found herself lying on the hearthrug in another room.”

Dr. Waters’s profession was construed as providing the forum and means for the alleged seduction. The reportage of medical seduction was increasingly common in the second half of the nineteenth century, and perhaps reached its apex with the “Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” series that ran in the Pall Mall Gazette in 1885. In the “Maiden Tribute,” the editor and social-crusader W.T. Stead sought to expose a wicked circuit of exploitative doctors and midwives who conducted gynaecological examinations on girls of “a tender age” to medically certify

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126 Maclise, Surgical Anatomy, viii.
127 “A Medical Man Accused of Seduction,” Reynolds’s Newspaper (London), April 12, 1863.
their virginity for sale into child prostitution. The public was outraged to hear that medical persons were participating in the corruption of young girls.

Stories like these demonstrate the intensification of public anxieties around medicine and sexuality in the decades following Maclise. They make it clear that the public was growing increasingly intolerant of any ambiguity surrounding sexualized representations of patients. But they also demonstrate that anatomy ceased to be the focus of this scrutiny. Artistic anatomical illustration, by virtue of the sexual baggage of its tradition, had been discredited and discarded. The introduction of the diagrammatic style had thus solved one set of these problems by distancing anatomy from representational traditions with erotic associations and minimizing the public’s anxiety about the anatomical enterprise. It also, however, opened another set of problems; for example, this new abstract anatomical body was curiously “unbodily” and it made claims of unbiased legibility and transparency that commentators have recently begun to argue are unjustified. In these ways, and others, representational problems continued to plague the field of anatomy. Despite the attempts to excise interpretive latitude from anatomical illustrations, anatomy’s meanings remained unstable. New artistic styles and representational traditions closed down existing problems, but simultaneously summoned new historically-specific viewing publics into being that in turn created new controversies.

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