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# Reading between the Bloodied Lines and Bodies: Dissecting Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus and Vesalius's De Humani Corporis Fabrica

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Reading Between the Bloodied Lines and Bodies: Dissecting  
Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and Vesalius's  
*De Humani Corporis Fabrica*

Hillary Gamblin

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

Reading Between the Bloodied Lines and Bodies: Dissecting  
Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and Vesalius's  
*De Humani Corporis Fabrica*

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*Titus Andronicus* is infamously Shakespeare's first, and bloodiest, tragedy, but only a few scholars link this violence with the Renaissance culture of anatomy and dissection. Although scholars mention the anatomical language in *Titus Andronicus*, their analyses stop short of more fully developing the rich relationship between dissection and Shakespeare's play. To remedy this oversight, this paper explores the debt that *Titus Andronicus* owes to contemporary anatomy and dissection culture by comparing *Titus Andronicus* (est. 1590) with Andreas Vesalius's revolutionary anatomy textbook, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543). Specifically, this paper will identify four major intents of the *Fabrica*: 1) to display, 2) to instruct, 3) to interpret, and 4) to aestheticize the interior of the human body, and illustrate how these four traits figure in the representation of Lavinia's body in the play. By mirroring the *Fabrica*'s four intents in both anatomy text and play, as well as examining the *Fabrica*'s images and text itself, this analysis reveals a pertinent difference. While in many ways *Titus Andronicus* celebrates the *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, the play applies a heavy dose of skepticism to Vesalius's underlying epistemological assumption that the body is knowable.

Keywords: *Titus Andronicus*, dissection, anatomy, Vesalius, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*

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### Introduction

Like a patient etherized upon a thrust stage, “Lavinia opens her mouth” and “a crimson river of warm blood...rise[s] and fall[s] between [her] rosed lips” (*TA* 2.3.22-24). And like a patient under the surgeon’s scalpel, Lavinia’s incision—her open mouth—reveals her bloody interior. By opening her mouth, Lavinia makes her internal embodiment externally perceptible. She performs an on-stage dissection. Tableaux like this solidify *Titus Andronicus*’ infamy as Shakespeare’s most violent play, and scholars and critics cannot help but analyze and criticize the violence.<sup>1</sup> Despite the many articles focusing on the violence in *Titus Andronicus*, few scholars highlight the anatomical themes foregrounded by images such as Lavinia opening her mouth. Attila Kiss classifies *Titus Andronicus* as an “anatomical play” (233) and David Hillman’s *Shakespeare’s Entrails: Belief, Skepticism, and the Interior of the Body* analyzes a few small passages from *Titus Andronicus*. Yet the Kiss and Hillman analyses only cover a small portion of the anatomical language in the play and their analysis—following the tradition of Jonathan Sawday—overlook the pictorial displays of dissection.

This is not to say that no one has examined the pictorial nature of *Titus*; in fact, visual themes have a long tradition in *Titus Andronicus* scholarship. Early Shakespearean scholar Muriel Bradbrook described *Titus Andronicus*’ dramatic displays as “emblematic” (105), and Jonathan Bate’s introduction to the Arden edition of *Titus Andronicus* develops this idea further. Bate observes that props and actors vacillate between horizontal movement and “frozen”

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<sup>1</sup>For more essays focusing on *Titus Andronicus*’s violence, see Innes 27-48, Barker 143-204, and Lisa Dickson 1-22.

moments that are like “tableaux,”<sup>2</sup> “pictures,” “freeze frame[s],” and “emblems” (38). To support his arguments, Bate reads the *Titus Andronicus*-inspired Peacham drawing (see fig. 1)—the only known drawing illustrating the contemporary staging of a Shakespeare play—as an emblem (39).<sup>3</sup> This strong tradition of interpreting tableaux in *Titus Andronicus* invites a comparison between verbally communicated images and tableaux in the play with contemporary anatomy books and images. Until this point, the only pictorial comparisons made with *Titus Andronicus* have drawn from sixteenth century emblems. In one of these articles, Katherine Rowe presents a psychoanalytic reading of dismembered hands in *Titus Andronicus* to discuss the theme of agency and action. While Rowe also uses Galen’s medical and philosophical treatise *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* (*De usu partium*), she does not emphasize the source’s anatomical intentions. And while Rowe points to similarities between sixteenth century images and the dismembered hands on stage, these violent images presented on stage allude to more than just emblems. The images of entrails, dismembered limbs, and Lavinia’s body generally in *Titus Andronicus* allude ostentatiously to anatomical drawings. In particular, *Titus Andronicus* shows a striking kinship to the images and text found in Andreas Vesalius’s *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* because of its similar emblematic structure, not “emblematic” in Bradbrook and Bate’s loose use of the term as a synonym for tableaux, but rather using Anne Haaker’s strict historical definition. In Haaker’s essay, she compares *Titus Andronicus* to specific contemporary emblems and emphasizes “the [emblematic] method of combining pictures, motto, and explication in order to elicit the desired interpretive response from the audience” (144). Similarly, the *Fabrica*

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<sup>2</sup> For more on tableaux in *Titus Andronicus*, see Hulse 106-18.

<sup>3</sup> Because the Peacham sketch has been the focus of a tremendous amount of scholarship debating its dating and transcription, interpreting the drawing as an emblem is controversial. Some scholars argue the play alludes to a specific production, while others read the drawing as a symbolic amalgamation. Subsequently, some literalists like June Schlueter find fault with Bate’s “symbolic” reading (174). For a fairly recent literary review on the Peacham drawing, see Hammerschmidt Hummel 101-111.



pioneered a new experience for anatomy textbook readers that also emphasized interpretation and utilized a combination of images and text. Thus the emblematic experience of *Titus Andronicus* for the audience correlates with the readers' experience with the *Fabrica*.

Admittedly, an anatomy textbook may seem like a less relevant choice considering the exciting scholarship linking the theatre of anatomy with the English stage. But connecting *Titus Andronicus* with the theatre of anatomy is slightly anachronistic because of the rarity of dissections performed in England. Performing dissections was popular in Italy and Holland during the mid-sixteenth century, but England did not catch-up until almost a century later.<sup>4</sup> Instead of witnessing dissections first-hand, dissection spread to England in the form of anatomy textbooks. Only two years after its original publication in 1543, the *Fabrica* arrived in London via Thomas Geminus pirated Latin edition, *Compendiosa totius Anatomiae delineatio, aere exaratum per Thomam*.<sup>5</sup> Printed five years after Henry VIII's acts supporting inquiries about the human body, Geminus' book "sold well" among English surgeons (Roberts and Tomlinson 141). To increase circulation beyond the Latin-literate-elite, Geminus published English editions of the *Fabrica* in 1553 and 1559 to "greatly avail to ye knowledge of the unlatined surgeons...[and] bee muche more beneficiall, then in latin'" (Roberts and Tomlinson 141). Broadening the readership embedded anatomy textbook themes and images in mid-sixteenth century English

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<sup>4</sup> Henry VIII's conservative 1540 Acts only chartered the Barber-Surgeon's Company and allowed the dissection of three corpses annually (Nunn 4; Sawday 4; Roberts and Tomlinson 141). Sawday illustrates this lag by quoting disgruntled English travelers and Royal Society members lobbying for more live dissections in the early seventeenth century (42). For example, Sawday quotes George Hakewill's complaint, "that an universitie so famous in forraine parts as this of Oxford, was never...provided of a publike [anatomical demonstraton]...till [1624]" (42). Subsequently, the bulk of scholarship illustrating the connections between the two stages focus on later Shakespeare plays and early Stuart drama. For more on the connection between the English stage and Anatomical theatre, see Billing 1-17 and Sawday 190.

<sup>5</sup> Roberts and Tomlinson's book, *The Fabric of the Body: European Traditions of Anatomical Illustrations*, quotes letters written by Andreas Vesalius that harshly critique the quality of illustrations in Germinus's edition (140-1). One of the main criticisms was that the drawings were significantly smaller than the originals (Ball 127). However, Roberts and Tomlinson contend that these copper woodcuts were exceptional replicas (140-1).

culture. New editions and bastardized copies continued to emerge in the late-sixteenth century,<sup>6</sup> which continued the anatomically rich tradition into the late 1580s and early 1590s. So when Shakespeare wrote *Titus Andronicus* in the late 1580s and early 1590s, the themes and images of dissections from anatomy textbooks were ripe for the performing.

Before delving into *Titus Andronicus*, this essay will look at the historical context of Vesalius and the *Fabrica* to provide the necessary groundwork for illustrating how the images and text of the *Fabrica* emphasize the particular theme of dissection: the internal made external. Dissection exposes the hidden internal parts of the body to the external world, and this theme of the internal made external manifests itself in Vesalius's *Fabrica*. There are four ways that the *Fabrica* represents this theme and accomplishes Vesalius's purposes for printing his textbook. First, the *Fabrica* displays the internal body to the external world. Second, the *Fabrica* creates an interactive text that instructs the readers about the interior of the human body. Third, the *Fabrica* provides interpretations about the body's interior. And fourth, the process of making the internal external in the *Fabrica* is an aestheticizing gesture that transforms the body into art. The final section of the paper will illustrate how the violent images in *Titus Andronicus* internalize these anatomy lessons and externalize it through its performance. And because Lavinia embodies this theme so directly, a large section will focus on linking Lavinia to dissection and the *Fabrica*. Specifically, the Lavinia section will be divided into the four major purposes of the *Fabrica*: to display, instruct, interpret, and aestheticize the human body. By placing the arguments and themes of Vesalius alongside those of *Titus Andronicus*, I hope to demonstrate the debt that Shakespeare's play owes to dissection literature, as its characters re-enact the images and text of *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*.

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<sup>6</sup> The 1559 edition was dedicated to Queen Elizabeth and included the first published portrait of Queen Elizabeth, and John Banister of Nottingham borrowed a few of the Vesalian woodcuts for his book published in 1578 (Ball 127). For more information on these later publications, see Roberts and Tomlinson 141.

Dissection Literature: Vesalius's *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*

The Renaissance's obsession with the body draws scholarly attention to Vesalius's work in human anatomy; however, this essay requires a more specialized understanding of Vesalius's *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*. This section will provide important foundational information about the *Fabrica* that will be central to my argument. In particular, this short section provides the historical context for the *Fabrica*'s publication, and it illustrates the typography and illustrations in the first edition. Finally, this section will outline four purposes driving Vesalius to publish the *Fabrica*: to display, instruct, interpret, and aestheticize the human body.

Written partially in response to European medical schools' slow transition towards modern thought and procedures, Andreas Vesalius's teaching methods and publications forced medical schools and anatomists to pick up the pace. At this time, a few European medical schools progressively conducted human dissections; however, these dissections only occurred a few times a year. Along with limited observation of human dissections, medical schools relied on antiquated procedures and texts. Charles D. O'Malley vividly describes the typical classroom experience:

An unlearned barber or surgeon dissected while the professor . . . lectured from his high chair or *cathedra*, reciting in Latin, which the barber did not understand, a Galenic description of animal anatomy which had no relevance to the human body being dissected. . . . It seems beyond dispute that the student learned little.

(300)

After Vesalius completed medical school and serving as the chair of surgery in Padua, he rebelled against his student experiences by playing the role of surgeon *and* lecturer. He also provided his students with "another novelty in the form of very large charts on which he depicted

in minute detail the anatomy and physiology of the body” (O’Malley 301). As the popularity of his charts grew, Vesalius published the drawings in 1538. The following year, Vesalius’s “novelty” spread beyond his classroom and changes in local government provided Vesalius access to more cadavers. His secret dissection of these cadavers convinced Vesalius of the flaws in Galen’s work—reproaching the irreproachable father of human anatomy (O’Malley 302). After publically stating and demonstrating his dissent from Galen, Vesalius published his findings in *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*. Seeking respect and credibility for his progressive thinking, Vesalius commissioned artists and a printer that would help him avoid the ruinous errata of piracy (Clark 310). The careful planning paid off, as the *Fabrica* became one of the most influential texts in the history of anatomy.

Because of the dual commission of Johannes Oporinus’ meticulous typography and Titian’s artistic drawings,<sup>7</sup> the *De Humani Corporis* was a printing wonder. The *Fabrica* rivaled previous anatomy textbooks with its size: it was long—663 pages—and large—43 centimeters tall and 28 centimeters wide (Nutton). Inside, the *Fabrica* reveals typographic coherency, elegance, and cleanliness with its “wide, clean margin” (Nutton) and specially designed typeface that “adopted a more delicate font” (Saunders and O’Malley 22). Vivian Nutton observes, “the well-informed big letters . . . sit nicely on the page with enough space between lines that the eye is not wearied by the continuous mass of type.” Accompanying the type are small images occasionally embedded in the main text, and larger drawings are separated from the text (see fig. 2). And the most famous drawings—the muscle men and skeletons—fill an entire page. After each of the images, “Vesalius provided . . . an elaborate index of letters denoting the various structures exposed” (Sanders and O’Malley 9). The images, in and of themselves, are

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<sup>7</sup> Scholars still speculate about which artists to credit for the *Fabrica*’s sketches; however, the majority of experts believe that school of Titian completed artwork for the *Fabrica*.

remarkable. Scientifically, the drawings adhere to realism and detail, but the poses and landscapes in some of the larger images elevate the sketches to art. Although scholars debate the individual identities of the artists Vesalius commissioned, all agree that these artists surpassed the skill of previous publications.

Like the *Fabrica*'s typography, these sketches raised the standard for published anatomical drawings; however, the most progressive element of the *Fabrica* is the marriage between image and text. Before, images accompanied anatomical texts, but they were not linked together precisely. Vesalius uses the images to explain and support his anatomical findings. For example, marginal notations—on either side of the main text—work like footnotes as they direct readers back to relevant images (see fig. 2). This innovation created a multimodal argument—a reciprocal relationship between text and images—that revolutionized printing and argumentation in science. But again, it was more than just a scientific book. Saunders and O'Malley categorize the *Fabrica* as an “exquisite piece of creative art with its perfect blend of format, typography, and illustrations” (19).

The artful configuration of the *Fabrica*'s printing mirrored one of the larger purposes of the textbook: to aestheticize the human body. Vesalius openly asserts that the human body is the “most perfect of all creatures” (Preface 4), and the *Fabrica*'s illustrations display that notion of perfection. The young anatomist's opinion and purpose were by no means unique. As the introduction to *The Illustrations From the Works of Andreas Vesalius of Brussels* explains, by aestheticizing the images of the body in his scientific work Vesalius followed the movement in Renaissance that believed art should mirror nature. Because scientists and artists both subscribed to this artistic philosophy, artists and scientists asked and researched similar questions (Saunders and O'Malley 22). In fact, anatomists collaborated with artists in producing anatomy sketches

fifty years before the *Fabrica*, but Vesalius “marked a new era in anatomical illustration” (Saunders and O’Malley 23). Along with carefully choosing the artists to beautify the body, Vesalius insured the artistic integrity of the images in a letter to his printer, Johannes Oporinus, by instructing the printer to “likewise take care of what I consider most artistic and so pleasing in these pictures, that the thickness of the lines which produce gradation in the shows is tastefully rendered” (47). The meticulous and thoughtful consideration of the *Fabrica*’s illustrations testifies of the importance of beauty in the human form. So in many ways Vesalius’s *Fabrica* simply continued the aesthetic purpose expressed in previous anatomy textbooks, but in a way exceeded its predecessors’ aesthetic standards. Heightening the aestheticism and artistry of the images in the *Fabrica* visually intensified the inherent contradiction in aestheticizing the somewhat grotesque act of dissection.

Along with illustrating the human form’s beauty, Vesalius also had a duty to scientific accuracy. In the preface, Vesalius explicitly states another purpose of the *Fabrica*: to “place the dissected body, as it were, before the eyes” of the readers (Preface 3). Vesalius wished to display the body because of the “number of schools . . . [where] dissecting the structure of the human body [was] scarcely ever considered” (Preface 3). As a young medical student who rarely witnessed human dissections, he realized the importance of this experience, so the *Fabrica*’s illustrations supplement what many could not witness. Not only did the *Fabrica* seek to unveil the human body, but it also sought to display the human body naturally—realistically. In this, the medical schools that dissected human corpses failed to meet Vesalius’s surgical standards. In the preface he frequently complains about the unlearned surgeons that “mangle”—an adjective Vesalius uses several times to describe their knife work—the corpses beyond recognition (Preface 3). These amateurish cuts compromise the ability to display the human body as

naturally and beautifully as possible. Vesalius even equates these human dissections “placed before the spectators” with the mangled meat sold by “a butcher in a market” (Preface 3).

The surgeons’ historical mangling of corpses inhibited clear identification and interpretation, so Vesalius published a textbook with clear typography to aid identifying and interpreting the interior macro and microanatomy. The *Fabrica*’s clean delineation of body parts, achieved through sharp lines, provides contrast between the interlocking parts hidden beneath the skin. Also aiding these interpretations are small italic letters surrounding the images of the body to catalogue the various organs. Finally, Vesalius also promises his readers writing that will “explain in sufficient detail the number, location, shape, size, makeup, connection to other parts, use, function, and many such features of each part of the human body” (Preface 3). These typographic strategies integrate with carefully worded text, which mimics an emblem. The combination of text and image maximize a reader’s role of interpretation.

Along with the purposes of aestheticizing, displaying, and interpreting the body, Vesalius also strove to provide a more effective pedagogy for anatomy. Even before the *Fabrica*’s publication, Vesalius strayed from traditional teaching methods at medical schools.<sup>8</sup> The *Fabrica*’s preface appeals to his student audience as Vesalius’ shares his own frustrations with his education as a medical student. To pick up the slack, he claims that the *Fabrica* serves as a “teacher . . . [that] will bring no unwelcome profit to students of medicine” (Preface 4). Along with proffering the *Fabrica* as a teaching aid, his book proposes its own methodology for teaching anatomy. Aligning with his purpose of “displaying” the human body, Vesalius argues that doctors must observe dissections of human bodies. Even if a student attends a live dissection, Vesalius argues that this observation of the body should be aided by visual material

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on Vesalius’ progressive pedagogy—prior to the publication of the *Fabrica*—see Singer and Rabin 300-302.

because “pictures aid the understanding . . . and place a subject before the eyes more precisely than the most explicit language” (Preface 4). Besides images, the verbal metadiscourse in the *Fabrica*—especially in the preface—also “demonstrate[s]” and “describes the techniques of dissection” so well, that the readers can recreate the dissections themselves (Preface 3). The verbs in this quotation, “demonstrate” and “describe,” assert a didactic, instructional tone. Between the descriptive prose, instructional tone, and detailed images, the readers access the knowledge and skills to dissect a cadaver. One of the most heavy-handed instructional moments comes when Vesalius uses a drawing to introduce his readers to the different tools of dissection; each instrument is assigned a footnote so that “the manner in which [anatomical instruments] in which it is employed in our schools will to some extent be apparent” (see fig. 3) (128). This combination of text and image in the *Fabrica* pushes students into an interactive experience of seeing and performing human dissections. The unique interactive structure of the *Fabrica* departs from previous anatomy textbooks and even some books of literature. Instead of literature, the *Fabrica*’s methods of instruction align more with the theatre because the medium inherently demands strong interaction and visceral experiences. So similar to a play, even privately reading or enacting a text becomes a performance. Simply reading the *Fabrica* stages and performs the *Fabrica*’s text.

Vesalius’s preface clearly outlines his four purposes in publishing the *Fabrica*, and following the theme of combining text and image, the *Fabrica*’s frontispiece visually argues its intents: aestheticizing, displaying, and interpreting the human body and reforming pedagogical practices. Aesthetically, O’Malley claims that the frontispiece “woodcut ranks among the finest achievements of the art of the engraver in the sixteenth century” (42). This is not an overstatement (see fig. 4). The ornamentation of the Corinthian columns, friezes, and cornice.



The careful parallel and cross-hatching. The image's incredible size. These aesthetic qualities imbue the act of dissection with awe, artistry, and scientific precision. Most importantly, this aesthetic beauty extends to the dissected body itself. Despite the ornamentation, size, and commotion of the frontispiece, the orthogonal lines drawing the viewers' eye to the viscera. This reliance on perspective demonstrates the growing understanding of perspective during the Renaissance; however, the majority of perspective-using-Renaissance-art utilized this understanding for improving their renderings of rational space. The frontispiece departs from these rational aims by introducing a competing horizon and vanishing point, the center of the frontispiece and the skeleton. Following the Renaissance understanding of perspective and goal of rendering rational space, two or three vanishing points may exist on a horizon line, but not two vanishing points may exist on two different horizon lines. These two horizon lines produce a visual and conceptual discrepancy. The *Fabrica*, a pioneer of rational, empirical, and scientific thought, should follow the rational rendering of space. Instead, the artist defies the rational and use of perspective to let the readers peek *inside* the body. This visual and conceptual contradiction emphasizes the supreme importance of displaying the human body.

The dissector also points to the body—encouraging viewers to look.<sup>9</sup> Beside the dissector's gesturing hand are papers, an inkwell, and surgical instruments, which symbolize observation and interpretation. So while a few crowd members hold anatomical books, the teacher banishes books and the barbers—located below the dissection table (Carlino 44)—so he may play the roles of dissector, lecturer, and interpreter. Hermani Monteiro interprets these

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<sup>9</sup> Andrea Carlino's essay "The Book, the Body, The Scalpel" examines early depictions of dissections—*Anatomia Mundini* (1493), Berengarius of Carpi's *Isagogae* (1535), and Pesellion's painting *Miracle of the Miser's Heart* (1450)—to conclude that between 1450 and 1535 images functioned as "a ritual performance, and scientifically fruitless" (35). Carlino supports this conclusion by examples like the frontispiece of Berengarius's book; in this particular frontispiece the spectators focus on anything *but* the dissected body (35).

details as a “represent[ation of the] new method and studying and teaching anatomy” (371). The informality disappears as the teachers and students crowd around to interact and observe the body effectively. Accosting the readers with its size, artistry, peculiarity, and argument, the frontispiece leaves no doubt about the *Fabrica*'s purposes of aestheticizing, displaying, interpreting, and instructing the body.

Scientists and Renaissance scholars agree that the *Fabrica* achieved its purposes by ushering in new ideas about anatomy, science, and the body during the Renaissance. According to Sawday, the human anatomy that we are familiar with today began with the publication of the *Fabrica* in 1543 (23). Andrea Carlino states, “It is generally agreed that [the *Fabrica*] opened a new chapter in the history of anatomy and scientific thought” (41). Then there are the dozens of medical journal articles published within the past hundred years that still discuss Vesalius's findings. It is undeniable that Vesalius and his *Fabrica* were influential. To begin with, there are the influential anatomical discoveries; in particular, the *Fabrica* contributed invaluable information about the brain and muscles (O'Malley 304). These revolutionary findings overthrew Galen's work. And Vesalius's procedures in these discoveries—“rel[ying] upon his own researches, observations and reason” and his belief that an “experiment must be repeated a number of times before verification—set a new precedent for the scientific method in human anatomy (O'Malley 304-5). Thus the influence of the *Fabrica* went beyond the realm of science and into theories about knowledge itself. Vesalius epitomizes a man living during an epistemological crisis because he questions authoritative texts and only trusts his own observations. The *Fabrica* spreads these hermeneutic quandaries to readers by “describ[ing] his own method of dissection, each system or part in order that the readers might repeat his investigations for himself. Hence not even Vesalius's words were to be accepted without proof

through research” (O’Malley 304-5). Yet while questioning the witnesses of others, the *Fabrica* still exudes optimism about discovering more about the body. As Sawday suggests in his book, the *Fabrica* began a period of optimistic exploration of the body that was similar to contemporary explorations of new lands. These explorers believed that the body could be charted—the mysteries could be uncovered (23-4). So along with revolutionizing images of dissected body, knowledge about the body, and scientific procedures surrounding the body, Vesalius also influenced ideas about knowledge itself.

#### Reading as Dissection and Theatre as Anatomy

Because no scholar has used the *Fabrica* to dissect and explore *Titus Andronicus*, a precedent to compare and contrast Vesalius’s *Fabrica* and Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* must be established. To draw parallels between these two texts, this section discusses the *Fabrica* in a hermeneutical context and examines the theatre in an anatomical context.

Reading is dissection. And the *Fabrica* accentuates this activity for its readers through visual metadiscourse. The dissection begins at a kinetic level as the readers lift the *Fabrica*’s skin cover to discover the mysteries enclosed beneath. After peeling back the skin, the readers dismember the *Fabrica* into letters, words, sentences, paragraphs, pages, sections, and chapters. Specifically, a table of contents encapsulates a readers’ necessity to dismember a text, and the *Fabrica*’s frontispiece pictorially represents its table of contents. The dissected body displayed on the frontispiece outlines the narrative of dissection; the readers will take his or her place among the frontispiece’s dissection crowd and discover the internal mysteries of the human body. Along with outlining the plot, the frontispiece, like a table of contents page, dismembers the text by highlighting individual points in the narrative (see fig. 4). Larissa Wasyliwskyj points out, “the numerous figures packed in and around the anatomical theatre [in the

frontispiece] are portrayed as elemental ‘players’ in a larger drama who will reappear later” (41). To illustrate this point, the skeleton stands at the true center of the frontispiece and it appears again in the *Fabrica*’s first book focusing on osteology (Wasyliwkyj 42). Not only does the skeleton reappear in the osteology section, but also the depiction of the skeleton at the center of the frontispiece alludes to osteology’s place at the beginning of the *Fabrica*’s narrative. Vesalius reasoned that an anatomy student must understand the bones and cartilage first because everything else is “supported and stabilized” by their structure (Preface 3). Just as the skeleton provides the structure for the human form, so the frontispiece visually outlines the *Fabrica*’s narrative structure to the readers. So along with actually displaying a dissection, the frontispiece visually encapsulates the whole and part relationship seen in dissection and reading.

Just as the frontispiece sets the stage for the concept of reading as dissection, the initials for the books and chapters repeatedly remind the readers that reading is dissection. The images behind the initials often mirror the content of the chapter or section as cherubs “mimic . . . the work of the anatomist. They dissect, they recover, [and] they discuss their findings” (Nutton 65). These visuals—like lifting and moving the dead weight of a cadaver (see fig. 5)—remind the readers that they are performing a similar function to the cherubs. More importantly, symbolically these images meld the visual and textual metadiscourse of reading as dissection. The letter separated from the rest of the word is an act of dismemberment, representing dismemberment as inherent in reading. Entwined with that symbol of readerly dismemberment are the images of actual dismemberment. Consequently the readers begin with the framework of reading as dissection and are constantly reminded of their act of dissection by the initials that break up a word, but more importantly, the book into sections and chapters.

The *Fabrica*'s frontispiece sets a stage similar to that of a Renaissance playhouse, the stage metaphor that frames the *Fabrica* alluding to dissection's long history as a performative act (Wilson 68). A frontispiece, by definition, introduces the author, title, date, publisher, table of contents, and so forth. Along with the traditional accoutrements of a frontispiece, the *Fabrica* *literally* sets the stage by depicting a public dissection in an outdoor, anatomical theatre. The small stones and vegetation at the bottom of the frontispiece place this public dissection outside, which resonates with the en plein air experience of London theatres. The three-tiered architecture of the Rose and Globe Theatres similarly appears in the frontispiece's anatomical theatre; the anatomy theatre organizes the audience into three levels to view the dissection (see figs. 4 and 6). The semicircular railings organizing the audience into these three levels mimics the octagonal shaped playhouses in Renaissance London. And like a playhouse, the anatomy theatre seats overlook a play. The play is dissection, and the actors are an anatomist and cadaver. The anatomist acknowledges his role as a performer as meets the readers' voyeuristic eye, which invites readers to become one of the audience members by observing the dissection. Making a less than genteel environment, the public playhouses crammed thousands of people—from various classes—into the theatre. Similarly, the tightly packed audience swells with chaos during the dissection. With a streaker, a knife fight, a monkey, a nobleman, students, a dog, clergymen, and a skeleton, it's like an acid-tripping dream. Subsequently, viewers' attention may wander from the dissection to the surrounding commotion. But that's also part of the Renaissance theatre experience. The unique circular structure and thrust stage in Renaissance theatre promotes a meta-theatrical performance. The *Fabrica* offers its readers a front row seat to see the performance, but they also enjoy watching their fellow audience members (Wilson 71). So the frontispiece ties itself to the world of the stage through architecture, atmosphere, and audience.

In addition to sharing similar stages and audiences, *Titus Andronicus* and the *Fabrica* both set their dramas in a crumbling, ancient Rome. The landscape for Vesalius's muscle men depict derelict buildings, which include "monumental Roman ruins, rotundas, pyramids, and obelisks [which] suggests that the artists responsible [were] familiar with Rome, or at least with contemporary prints or drawings made in Rome" (Philadelphia Museum of Art 160). So at the basic level of location, the Romanesque allusions in the muscle men drawings resonate with *Titus Andronicus*, a Roman play.<sup>10</sup> Both the muscle men sketches and *Titus Andronicus* illustrate a *decaying* Rome. Paralleling the derelict Roman buildings seen in the muscle men sketches, *Titus Andronicus* also includes a "ruinous monastery" and "wasted building" (5.1.21-23). Although this monastery is anachronistic and located outside of Rome, this image reinforces the theme of Rome's civil and political fragmentation.<sup>11</sup>

Expanding the symbolism of the crumbling monastery, the first act portrays Rome's fate dancing precariously on the edge of anarchy. The staging dramatically illustrates Rome's political fragmentation as Bassianus and Saturninus vie for position at opposite ends of the stage and the Senate observes above from the balcony. Bloodshed seems imminent as Saturninus threatens to "plead [his] successive title with [his men's] swords" if the people do not crown him Caesar (*TA* 1.1.4). While Rome avoids the threat of anarchy by crowning Saturninus Caesar, this solution only gilds Rome's decaying state. The play hints at this gilding by comparing a fragmented body with the crumbling city-state. Marcus initiates this extended metaphor when he implores Titus "To help to set a head on headless Rome" by becoming Caesar (1.1.189). These

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<sup>10</sup> Because of the sparse staging tradition in Renaissance productions, early staging of *Titus Andronicus* would not include visual backdrops like the muscle men drawings; however, the language in the play firmly sets the play in Rome. In fact, the rhetoric of the play personifies Rome into a character in its own right.

<sup>11</sup> This theme of political fragmentation is so strongly represented in the ruinous monastery that several scholars use this anachronistic image to link the political turmoil in *Titus Andronicus* with contemporary, English Reformation upheavals. For more on this topic, see Bate 18-21.

bodily metaphors continue throughout the play, but soon the metaphorical dismemberment of Rome becomes literal as characters—symbolizing Rome—suffer the severing of hands, tongues, and heads.<sup>12</sup> Because of Lavinia’s name and dismembered fate, her character particularly embodies Rome and its subsequent decay.<sup>13</sup> Albert H. Tricomi links the violation of Lavinia’s body with the violation of the city (293), and similarly Anthony B. Taylor argues that when Lavinia reveals her dismembered body, “it is Rome itself that stands bleeding before Marcus” (149). The combination of the derelict monastery, metaphors of bodily dismemberment, and Lavinia’s—the symbol of Rome—ravished, hand-less, and tongue-less state, illustrates the symbolic decay of *Titus Andronicus*’s Rome. Subsequently Lavinia’s body resonates with the symbolic crumbling of Roman buildings behind the muscle men and the progressive dissection of the muscle men’s bodies.<sup>14</sup> Along with similar settings, *Titus Andronicus* and the *Fabrica* enact similar actions—violent dissections—in the context of crumbling Rome.

Dissection is performed in the very first scene of *Titus Andronicus* as a victorious Titus sacrifices prisoner, Alarbus. While the sacrifice of Alarbus follows the Greek convention of backstage violence, when the sons of Andronicus “*Enter again,*” Lucius reports “See, Lord and father, how we have performed / Our Roman rites: Alarbus’s limbs are lopped and entrails feed the sacrificing fire” (1.1.145-7). Lucius’s imperative to “see” requires visual evidence of the sacrifice. Because of the ambiguity of this line, different productions interpret this visual evidence differently. Bate recounts, “The BBC production emphasized the ritual: ‘Titus’ sons return, their faces daubed with ritual markings and holding out their hands covered in blood.

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<sup>12</sup> For a more in-depth exploration of the relationship between dismemberment metaphors and events in the play, see Tricomi 226-239.

<sup>13</sup> Many critics agree with this interpretation because Lavinia’s very name “refer[s to] Virgil’s *Aeneid* and therefore the original Lavinia, mother of the Romans” (Packard 283). For more sources on Lavinia’s name as an allusion to the *Aeneid*, see Bate 18, Packard 200, and Law 145.

<sup>14</sup> Sawday argues that these ruins behind the muscle men symbolize the inevitable decomposition of body and civilization (115).

Lucius throws entrails on the altar fire” (136). Along with the more modern BBC interpretation of these lines, historically the original staging likely lathered blood on swords, faces, and or hands. The significance of blood on stage is the following: this blood makes the internal—blood—external. While little blood is present in anatomical dissections, entrails did star in anatomical drawings. And the more compelling staging calls for entrails. The ambiguity of the lines and stage direction makes it impossible to say for certain whether the original staging used blood, entrails, or both. Yet there are strong arguments are made for the use of entrails. Richard Hartley, Assistant Director to Shakespeare’s Globe production of *Titus Andronicus* in 2006, argues that the audience required evidence of realistic violence because “the reality of these terrible deeds is the engine for revenge” (18). Hartley argues that “Shakespeare guides [the audience to believing in the killing of Alarbus] by the entrance of Titus’s sons holding aloft the entrails of butchered Alarbus” (18). Both Titus’ sons and an anatomy textbook present images of the body’s entrails to their audience. Whether the original staging used blood or entrails, or both, either performative image links *Titus Andronicus* with contemporary anatomical images.

The limbs that frequent the stage—especially heads—in *Titus* also recall performative images seen in anatomy textbooks.<sup>15</sup> While live anatomy theatres dissect the whole body, anatomy textbooks sketch specific parts of the body—visually dismembering the body so that it can be explored more fully (see fig. 2). The plates from the seventh book in the *Fabrica* practice this dismembering by sketching “[heads] freed by neatly severing it from the neck and lower jaw” (Saunders and O’Malley 186). These expose the brain at various stages while maintaining the realistic details of the person’s profile. Instead of drawing an idealized head, or a generic, anonymous head, the artist realistically details the corpse’s face. The importance of retaining the

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<sup>15</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, Katherine Rowe’s article connects Titus’ severed hand with the imagery in emblem books, but the severed hand and heads also connect with anatomy textbooks.



individualism of the subject is seen on the sixty-eighth plate: there are two drawings of open craniums and the subjects' faces show that these are two different corpses. One subject's profile has a hooked nose, large ears, deep-set eyes, a moustache, and curly hair. The other subject is clean-shaven with a straight nose, leathery skin, and a cleft chin. The same sense of individuality occurs in the play when the messenger brings out Martius and Quintus' heads (*TA* 3.1.241).

Beyond aesthetics, these four heads share a common origin. Saturninus executes Quintus and Martius for the criminal act of murdering Bassianus (2.2.303), and "Vesalius tells us [in *The Fabrica*] that he constantly importuned the magistrates to allow him to take the head of executed criminals so that he might dissect the brain while still warm. No doubt the heads in this series were from this grisly source" (Saunders and O'Malley 186). While this connection may seem superfluous, Sawday dedicates an entire chapter—"Execution, Anatomy, and Infamy: Inside the Renaissance Anatomy Theatre"—in *The Body Emblazoned* to this very idea. Because anatomists procured bodies from executions, Sawday explains, these heads from Vesalius book share the same taint of criminal execution as the preceding act to their dissection. This connection strengthens as the heads—both used as props—serve a similar purpose. Like the *Fabrica* that communicates to the readers the contents of these subjects' brains, Martius and Quintus' severed heads metaphorically communicate to Titus: "For these two heads do seem to speak to me / And threat me I shall never come to bliss / Till all these mischiefs be returned again" (*TA* 3.1.272-4).

Titus is less anatomical in dissecting his sons' brains, but it still qualifies as metaphorical dissection because Titus reveals the internal thoughts of his sons' severed heads. So Martius and Quintus's decapitated heads perform the image and texts of the *Fabrica*'s severed heads by sharing a similar aesthetic, origin, and purpose.

## Lavinia: Displaying, Instructing, Interpreting, and Aestheticizing the Human Form

Severed limbs abound in *Titus Andronicus*, but the character that offers the strongest connection to the *Fabrica* is Lavinia. She is the ultimate symbol of dissection because of how she illustrates the four purposes of the *Fabrica*. First, Lavinia displays her internal body to the external world. Second, Lavinia's external display of her body allows for an interactive learning experience for the audience and fellow characters about the human body. Third, Lavinia's displayed body becomes the central text everyone is trying to read and interpret. Fourth, Lavinia's body pushes the limits between the aesthetic and grotesque as Marcus' attempts to poetically aestheticize her dissected body.

Like the woman in the frontispiece and the countless images that follow in the *Fabrica*, Lavinia's purpose is to display the human body. Her violent transformation into a tongue-less and hand-less being limits Lavinia's ability to communicate and drive the plot.<sup>16</sup> She cannot write. She cannot talk. She is silent as a corpse, and the audience can only look at Lavinia's mutilated body. This silence dramatizes Lavinia's true role of displaying the human body. The captive audience in Vesalius's frontispiece *looks* at the displayed body, and the *Titus Andronicus* audience *looks* at Lavinia's internally exposed body. Even the characters hint at Lavinia's exhibitionist role. Titus dehumanizes Lavinia, reducing her to a mere visual prop by calling her an "object" (3.1.65). Later, Titus reinforces Lavinia's purpose by stating "I but seen [Lavinia's] picture in this plight" (3.1.104). The word "picture" narrows Lavinia's role to aesthetics: a painting, a drawing, a statue, a tableau in a play, a dance, and so forth. ("Picture," def. 1a). While a "picture" of a bleeding tongue-less, hand-less, and ravished women fails to mimic

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<sup>16</sup>In Mariangela Tempera's recent essay, she questions Lavinia's post-rape purpose because "Elizabethan spectators would have expected [Lavinia] to collapse and die, not only because they obviously knew that, in real life, death would be an inevitable consequence of leaving such severe wounds untreated, but because she appears to have fulfilled her symbolic and practical function" (110).

Michelangelo's *David*, Lavinia does resemble the beautiful, aesthetic drawings of dissected bodies in the *Fabrica*. As discussed previously, the frontispiece emphasizes its purpose of displaying the human body as the artist warped the perspective of the dissection table to allow the readers to peek *inside* the body, as if the viewer were a part of the audience. And like the anatomist pointing to the corpse in the frontispiece, the characters instruct their captive audience to look at Lavinia, not just a glance, but also a careful, anatomical examination. After witnessing Lavinia's wounds, Lucius emotionally falls to the ground, and Titus chastises the "Faint-hearted boy, [to] arise and look upon [Lavinia]" (3.1.66).<sup>17</sup> Titus commands Lucius, and in doing so the captive audience as well, to strip away his/their emotional repulsion. Lucius and the audience must replace their strong aversion with a clinical examination of her body, which Titus emphasizes again by demanding a second time: "Look, Marcus, ah, son Lucius, look on her!" (3.1.111). Like the anatomist in the frontispiece, Titus's imperatives gesture the closely compact, rowdy, diverse crowd to look at/into Lavinia's mangled body.

In Act 2 Scene 3, Marcus also plays the role of anatomist by displaying the bloody interior of Lavinia's body. Originating beneath her skin, Lavinia's wounds expose her blood—the interior of her body—to the outside world. It is an act of dissection by displaying the internal body to the external world. But the simple act of bleeding fails to fully link Lavinia to dissection; surely not every character in Shakespeare that bleeds alludes to sixteenth century anatomy textbooks. It is Marcus's commentary about Lavinia's blood that strongly links this tableau to anatomy sketches. In Marcus's speech "[Shakespeare] pays homage to the current beliefs about the one directional flow of blood through veins and arteries by referring to the 'river' and the 'conduit' of Lavinia's blood" (Tempera 111). In other words the extended "river" metaphor flowing through Marcus' speech may appear ornamental, but Tempera argues that Shakespeare

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<sup>17</sup> Muriel Bradbook also notes the pictorial significance of this scene by calling it "emblematic" (105).

shows off his anatomical prowess. For example, Marcus uses the word “issuing,” which “[is] a medical term for a discharge of blood from the body” (Bate 188 note 30). Ironically, Shakespeare’s boast relies on outdated theories of blood circulation: he uses Galen’s model instead of Vesalius’s model. While Shakespeare may use Galen’s model of blood circulation, his emphasis on clearly displaying the human body is Vesalian. As mentioned earlier in the essay, Vesalius sought to display the human body using clear pictures—avoiding the mangled corpses dissected by unlearned surgeons—and precisely locating and identifying different parts of the body. Like the *Fabrica*’s small italic letters surrounding the images of the body, Marcus gestures to a physically exposed body to demonstrate the circulation of blood. This meticulous combination of displaying and detailing that human body transforms Lavinia into an anatomical text.

Beyond Lavinia’s body making the internal external, her method of demonstrating this theme even mimics the common anatomical trope of self-dissection.<sup>18</sup> Of course, this trope is also limited by the medium of theatre. Lavinia does not self-dissect to the degree of most anatomical sketches. Like the specific image shown here, Lavinia does not hold her flayed skin in one hand and a knife in the other, nor does she lift a flap of skin to reveal the organs in her abdomen (see fig. 8), nor does she pull open the cavity in her abdomen with her bare hands. Instead, *Lavinia opens her mouth* (TA 2.3.21). Admittedly a mouth does not require an anatomist’s scalpel to reveal the internal mysteries of the body. Yet in the context of *Titus Andronicus*, opening the mouth becomes an act of dissection because it pursues the anatomical purposes of displaying the body for the purpose of interpretation. Before Lavinia opens her mouth, her silence puzzles Marcus. It is only when Marcus looks *inside* Lavinia’s displayed mouth that he sees her missing internal organ. In this simple way, opening the mouth becomes a

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<sup>18</sup> To read more about “self-dissection” see Sawday 110-120.

form of dissection. And because Lavinia opens her own mouth, opposed to the anatomist, it is an act of *self*-dissection. So while the images and gestures remain subdued in *Titus Andronicus*, Lavinia still mimics popular anatomical images by displaying the internal parts of her body.

Displaying the body provides material to educate the audience about the human form. Subsequently, Lavinia's displayed body—similar to the flayed bodies sketched in the *Fabrica*—becomes an instructional text. To label an anatomy textbook *instructional* seems rather obvious. If the genre is not evidence enough, the preface's overt claims about the *Fabrica*'s pedagogical purposes surely solidifies its instructional role. Perhaps the harder sell is *Titus Andronicus* sharing the *Fabrica*'s preoccupation with instruction. The popularity of Aristotle during the Renaissance would suggest that theatre aimed to please and instruct, but many critics interpret a sixteenth-century version of the violent blockbuster. Whether a blockbuster or not, *Titus Andronicus*, particularly in Act 4 Scene 1, establishes instruction as an essential theme.

The verbal and visual cues in Act 4 Scene 1 and the interactions between the adults and Young Lucius establishes a grammar school setting—perfect for a theme of instruction.<sup>19</sup> A grammar school, at a minimum, requires schoolroom texts, students, and an instructor, and the stage directions dictate a scholarly scene complete with schoolroom texts, teachers, and a young student (*TA* 4.1.). Mirroring the *Fabrica*'s purpose as an instructional text, the stage directions symbolically set “the books . . . lying centre stage” (Bate 210-11). Along with these visual cues, an appropriate amount of grammar school shoptalk takes place as characters frequently allude to schoolroom texts (e.g. *Metamorphoses*) and the fine teaching example of a Roman mother, Cornelia (4.1.17-18).<sup>20</sup> The scene also provides the classic interactions between student and

<sup>19</sup> For more scholarship outlining the pedagogical themes in *Titus Andronicus*, see Guy Dickson 376-409 and Pearson 34-51.

<sup>20</sup> As the *Arden* edition of the *Titus Andronicus* explains, “Cornelia [is a] Roman mother, exemplary for educating her sons, the Gracchi, who become notable political reformers” (Bate 211).

teacher, as Marcus quizzes his student, Young Lucius: “Canst thou not guess wherefore [Lavinia] plies thee thus?” (4.1.10). In other words, Marcus is asking what Lavinia wants and how she is communicating. Young Lucius, a dutiful, polite, yet ignorant student, responds: “My lord, I know not, nor can I guess” (4.1.16). Marcus and Titus proceed to provide Lucius with a methodology to answer Marcus’ question: “open” a book (4.1.32), “read” (4.1.46), utilize the Socratic method (4.1.50-75), consult primary sources (4.1.78), and record the findings (4.1.102-105). This framework of reading, exploring primary sources, and recording results aligns with the proto-scientific method Vesalius uses and supports in the *Fabrica*. Finally, to reinforce the learning, Titus sounds every inch the teacher by asking Young Lucius: “And where’s our lesson then? Boy, what say you?” (4.1.106). Like many effective teachers, Titus uses his question to prompt Lucius into reflection. This all-too-familiar grammar school setting, interactions, and methodology heavy-handedly points to instruction, which parallels the instructive setting and methodology of the *Fabrica*.

Creating a schoolhouse environment allows the play to examine the role texts—specifically the *Metamorphoses*—play in instruction. Tumbling dramatically to center stage, the *Metamorphoses* is destined to rise above the role of generic prop. This prop is also a prosthetic. Lavinia’s missing tongue and hands limits her ability to communicate, so Lavinia leads Marcus to read the “tragic tale of Philomel” in the *Metamorphoses* and discovers that “rape . . . was the root of [Lavinia’s] annoy” (*TA* 4.1.47-49). This textbook serves as Lavinia’s tongue and hands. The *Metamorphoses* replaces Lavinia’s missing limbs by performing the communicatory functions of a tongue and hands. The physical violence these textbooks endure as prosthetics also provides a hands-on learning experience at a narrative level. Along with being dropped, opened, and so forth, the narrative of the *Metamorphoses* undergoes a sort of transplant. “Quot[ing] the

leaves,” Lavinia dissects the *Metamorphoses* to expose and extract the narrative of Philomela (*TA* 4.1.50), and after extracting the narrative, she transplants Philomela into her own narrative as she affirmatively nods after Titus asks: “Lavinia, wert thou thus surprised, sweet girl, / Ravished and wronged as Philomela was . . . ?” (*TA* 4.1.51-2). This metalepsis mirrors the metadiscursive elements of the *Fabrica* mentioned earlier that provided an interactive learning experience for readers. A humanist education during the Renaissance often utilized ancient texts, like the *Metamorphoses*, for students to read, translate, and imitate. Whether formal medical students, physicians, or those simply interested in anatomy, many Renaissance readers utilized the *Fabrica* as a learning tool. Along with sharing the *Metamorphoses*’ role as tool for learning, the *Fabrica* also functions as a prosthetic. The *Fabrica* is a prosthetic, in that it “place[s] the dissected body, as it were, before the eyes” of the readers (Preface 4). So instead of functioning as a tongue and pair of hands, the *Fabrica* serves as an entire cadaver’s body.

Using the *Metamorphoses* as a prosthetic demands physical interaction, and that physical handling of the *Metamorphoses* produces a hands-on, interactive, and kinetic learning experience similar to the *Fabrica*. Befitting its role as a prosthetic, the prop becomes worse for wear as Young Lucius carries, “drops” and “open[s]” the book (*TA* 4.1.32), and Lavinia “turns over” (*TA* 4.1.29), and “tosse[s]” (*TA* 4.1.41) it. The manhandling of the *Metamorphoses*—dropping, turning, opening, and tossing—mirrors the athleticism the *Fabrica* required because of its imposing size, weight, and density. Highlighting the similar physical interactions with both books may seem trivial; however, Vesalius sought for the readers to experience a unique interactive instruction akin to the hands-on method he practiced in his classroom. Even size mattered. One of Vesalius’s main criticisms of Germinus’ edition of the *Fabrica* was the significantly smaller size of the drawings (Ball 127). In a way, the heft of Vesalius’s first

publication served as a more realistic prosthetic. Vesalius sought to put the body before the readers, so logically larger pictures provided a more realistic substitute for the missing cadaver and the weight and size. Subsequently, the readers of the *Fabrica* could have a similar experience reading its pages to those dissecting physical bodies. For the characters in *Titus Andronicus*, the physicality of their reading experience heightened their learning. Lucius learned by doing. And Lavinia, in spite of her physical impairments, engages physically with Ovid's text in order to communicate with Marcus and Titus. The characters' kinetic learning experience with the *Metamorphoses* aligning it with the kinetic learning experience proposed by the *Fabrica*.

Meshing the *Metamorphoses* with the body physically and through narrative suggests the inherently textual nature to Lavinia's body. To put it plainly, Lavinia's body is a text. This idea aligns with the themes of reading and writing in *Titus Andronicus*. Philip C. Kolin's article "Performing Texts in *Titus Andronicus*" also argues that Lavinia is a text by building his argument on the well-established premise that *Titus Andronicus* is emblematic. Because of the emblematic nature of the play, Kolin reasons, it transforms the stage into a giant text or scroll (250). Along with visual cues, *Titus Andronicus* swells with verbal allusions to literature and reading; it is one of Shakespeare most allusive plays (Kolin 250). And Lavinia is the center of many of these literary allusions. Titus, Aaron, and Marcus read Lavinia as *several* tragic characters in ancient texts: the virginal Lavinia in Virgil's *Aeneid* (I.i.73-92, 168-71) and a raped Virginia (V.iii.34-52), as well as Philomela (Packard 282-3). Lavinia's gender and rape likewise suggest her textual nature, because as Wendy Wall's *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* argues, Renaissance printers and authors feminized their published works—through inscriptions and engravings—to “address . . . the vexed class concerns . . . bound up with the public act of publications” (172). If published texts were



personified as female bodies used for “prurient” and “titillating” activities (Wall 172), Lavinia’s displayed, probed, and violated body embodies a published text. For all of these reasons, reading Lavinia’s body as a text is widely accepted and argued upon in criticism.

If Lavinia is a text, she is a text that other characters in *Titus Andronicus* struggle to interpret. In particular, Lavinia’s altered state transforms a niece and daughter into a figure neither uncle nor father can read. After Marcus discovers Lavinia, he confesses that “If I do dream, would all the wealth to wake me; / If I do wake, some planet strike me down / That I may slumber an eternal sleep” (*TA* 2.3.13-5). Marcus expresses antithetical responses—waking and sleeping—to Lavinia’s state, which symbolize two different—if not contradictory—readings/interpretations. Wavering reactions imply Marcus’s failure to get a solid reading on Lavinia. Titus also poses his perplexity in the enigmatic form of a rhetorical question: “Had I but seen thy picture in this plight, / It would have maddened me; what shall I do / Now I behold [Lavinia’s] lively body so?” (*TA* 3.1.104-6). If Lavinia was a text, “a picture of this plight,” Titus could conjure up an appropriate response; however, Lavinia’s “lively body” becomes the enigma that Marcus cannot unravel. This uncertainty would seem to work against my argument a few paragraphs earlier claiming that Marcus and Titus instruct Young Lucius in understanding Lavinia. How can Titus and Marcus instruct Young Lucius when the very sight of her mystifies these two men?

Marcus and Titus do teach Young Lucius, but Titus and Marcus misread Lavinia before discovering the correct interpretation. In fact, the beginning of Act 4 Scene 1 plays like a macabre game of charades as one-by-one, each character attempts to decipher the meaning of Lavinia’s wild gestures. Young Lucius begins the game by tossing-out a hunch that like Hecuba of Troy, “some fit or frenzy do[es] possess [Lavinia]” (*TA* 4.1.17) and she “[runs] mad for

sorrow” (*TA* 4.1.21). While a stellar effort, applying this particular story from the *Metamorphoses* to Lavinia fails to capture her true state of mind. Lavinia is quite sane. Quickly following Lucius, Titus takes a stab at interpreting Lavinia’s behavior by guessing she wishes to read “so [to] beguile [her] sorrow till the heavens / Reveal the damned contriver of this deed” (*TA* 4.1.35-6). Lavinia reads neither to wallow in self-pity, nor to idly pass the time. Finally, Marcus fancies “she means that there were more than one / Confederate in the fact. . .Or else to heaven she heaves [books] for revenge” (*TA* 4.1.38-40). Marcus’s first assertion correctly reads a portion of Lavinia’s textual body; however, similar to his wavering tone when first discovering Lavinia, he includes an alternate theory. As a result, this exchange suggests that Titus and Marcus’s original trepidation about reading Lavinia is well founded.

A number of scholars refer to these same passages to make the case that the characters in *Titus Andronicus* misread Lavinia. A feminist vein of *Titus Andronicus* criticism often links these misinterpretations, unsurprisingly, to gender. While gender may be a contributing cause to misreading Lavinia, text is also another major cause of misreading Lavinia. *Titus Andronicus*’ themes of reading and writing naturally attract post-structuralist enthusiasts that explore Lavinia’s role as a *slippery* text. Undeniably, post-modern themes of deconstruction also contribute to misreading Lavinia, but that is not the “text” this essay will explore. Language is inherently slippery, but the cause for misreading derives more from misidentifying the *kind* of text Lavinia represents. This vein of thinking only receives attention in a few articles because most critics simply assumed that Lavinia becomes the texts specifically alluded to during the

play. Only Katherine Rowe adventurously argues that Lavinia is an emblem,<sup>21</sup> but this emblematic reading falls short of recognizing another textual possibility.

Lavinia's body is an *anatomical* text that spectators must "interpret" (TA 3.2.36). Categorizing Lavinia as an anatomical text is essential because anatomical texts, like the *Fabrica*, differ from traditional literary texts, like the *Metamorphoses*. Because of the difference between literary and anatomical texts, each requires a unique hermeneutical approach. Thus trying to read Lavinia as a classical literary text, when she is in fact an anatomical text, forces a square peg into a round hole. Whereas misidentifying Lavinia as a literary text quashes the possibility for a clear interpretation/reading, correctly identifying Lavinia as an anatomical text elucidates her body. Lavinia confounds literary interpretations because she is all body. Her inability to speak renders her a solely external object, a silent/silenced body. With no words for the characters or audience to hear or read, it is just Lavinia's body that provides the interpretation. Thus interpretation is all physical and not spoken or written communication.

Lavinia's body must be an object confronted on its own terms. The way the *Fabrica* presents the body as the only site of interpretation. An example of a Vesalian reading of Lavinia is when Titus interprets the "martyred signs" inscribed *on* Lavinia's body (3.2.36). The peculiar phrase "martyred signs" actually alludes to a medieval tradition of interpreting the body. Katherine Park explains that beginning in the thirteenth century, Europe believed "the saint's body differe[d] from that of other people . . . by certain unmistakable signs" which included "external and internal marks, such as a stigmata" (6). To illustrate this further, Park recounts the fourteenth century testimony of Francesca of Montefalco. While embalming Chiara of Montefalco's body, the Umbrian nuns found an image of the crucifix etched on Chiara's heart.

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<sup>21</sup> As an emblem, Lavinia is a merely a mirror; "she becomes a continual reinscription to her 'readers' of their own uncontested interpretive skills" (Rowe 295). Subsequently for Titus, Lavinia "serves as the enabling display of a well-recognized precedent for revenge" (296).

As expected, the witnesses interpreted this as a testament of Chiara's sainthood (Park 2).

Subsequently, Titus claiming the right to interpret Lavinia's "martyred signs" suggests he will *read* her body. Because this particular *reading* derives from one of the earliest practices of dissection in Europe, it suggests that Titus' interpretation is a form of dissection.

Marcus's speech after finding Lavinia in the woods exemplifies the tension in anatomical images that aestheticize dissection. Instead of helping Lavinia, Marcus awkwardly catalogues her wounds in gushing poetics, which prompts most modern productions to excise this redundant and cruel speech. What is so unsettling and odd about this speech? Is it cruel? Nancy Vickers's influential essay "Diana Described: Scattered Women and Scattered Rhyme" argues that the disquietude of modern audiences derives from the poetic device known as a blason. Marcus's speech is a blason that represents a "legacy of fragmentation" and the subsequent problem that "bodies fetishized by poetic voice . . . do not have a voice of their own" (277). Vickers's structure of paralleling Lavinia's physical fragmentation with the metaphorical fragmentation of a blason provides a compelling insight for dissection and anatomy, but instead of pushing towards the more anatomical implications of her argument, Vickers focuses on gender. Yet the focus of the blason does not seem driven by gendered or sexualized parts of the body. The poetry only focuses on sites of dissection: her tongue and hands. In Mariangela Tempera's essay, she acknowledges Vickers's argument, but she also explores how Shakespeare's contemporary audience may interpret Marcus' speech. Tempera argues that Shakespeare's contemporary audience would find it less cruel and would perceive it as the playwright trying to show off his anatomical knowledge (111). This speech represents a combination of these two arguments: Marcus's poetic blason fragments the body aesthetically and it mimics contemporary tropes in anatomy and dissection drawings.

Mimicking the *Fabrica*'s dissection sketches, Marcus aestheticizes Lavinia's dissected body by comparing Lavinia's amputated hands to "two branches" that lost "those sweet ornaments" (*TA* 2.3.18). This metaphor also attempts to naturalize Lavinia's stumps by comparing her to a tree—an organism that organically loses its leafy appendages. Yet this comparison backfires. It does anything *but* naturalize Lavinia. If anything, the lively pastoral backdrop Marcus illustrates contradicts the deathly wounded and bloody Lavinia. This inherent tension pantomimes the muscle men in the *Fabrica* because both place grotesque, dissected images in a fertile, pastoral landscape. Similar to Marcus' attempt to meet poetic aesthetic standards with the tree metaphor, the pastoral landscape also follows artistic tropes during the Renaissance (see fig. 5).

Yet these aesthetic embellishments often contradict the nature of dissection. Marcus's peculiar word choice of "chopped and hewed" produces the disquieting tone that so causes so many contemporary directors to chop this particular speech. The clipped and guttural sound of "chopped" produces an inelegant sounding word, and "hewed" does not do much better. The harshness in pronouncing these words also extends to the connotation of the words. Chopped and "hewed" suggests a rough, unskilled method of cutting, which could be a critique of the surgeons that "mangled" cadavers. More importantly, chopped and hewed are one of the few instances in Marcus' speech where crude, unpoetic language creeps in. Marcus's adherence to poetical tropes and careful word choice strives to meet an idealized standard of poetry. Yet the subject does not possess an idealized body. Similarly Vesalius's muscle men adhere to the Renaissance representation of the human form; the muscle men, like Michelangelo's *David*, are fine specimens. With bulging, sculpted muscles and perfect proportions and symmetry, the muscle

men attempt to meet the idealized aesthetic of Renaissance art; however, these idealized images must remain incomplete forms— devoid of skin, fat, veins, and arteries.

### Conclusion

*Titus Andronicus* is undoubtedly violent—and the critics, scholars, and audiences of today, like their Early Modern counterparts,<sup>22</sup> fixate on the blood that overwhelms the text. But, ironically, drawing on the blood from *Titus Andronicus* has hermeneutically bled it dry. Instead, scholars need a fresh body of text to read and interpret alongside *Titus Andronicus* to reanimate the play. Andreas Vesalius's *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*'s representation of dismembered bodies provides the transfusion through its theatricality, classical Roman setting, bloody images and props, dissections, and emblematic structure, suggesting a useful new perspective by which to approach for *Titus Andronicus*.

As these parallels provide a solid argument for reading the *Fabrica* alongside *Titus Andronicus*, the strongest similarities reside in Lavinia. In fact, Lavinia's body is the nexus in which the *Fabrica*'s anatomical themes converge. The characters and audience respond to Lavinia like she is an anatomy textbook: they instruct, display, aestheticize, and interpret her body. They respond to Lavinia this way because she lacks wholeness of body. If her body were whole—hands and tongue attached—she could not display, instruct, aestheticize, or interpret the interior of the human body. So like Vesalius's muscle men, she too must be made incomplete in order to be read. However, there is one ironic difference. Designed to display the interior mysteries of the body, anatomy textbook does not have the luxury of secret interiors. Lavinia, on the other hand, *does* have the luxury of secret interiors. As Hamlet so eloquently stated, “But I have that within which passeth show” (1.2.85), and the characters and audience attempt to

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<sup>22</sup> For particulars on the popularity of *Titus Andronicus* during the Renaissance, see Metz 154-156.

unlock Lavinia's secret interiors because they believe she is interpretable. They believe looking beneath the surface is easy.

But as this essay argues, interpreting Lavinia proves unattainable. It could be argued that the difficulty in discovering Lavinia's interior secrets aligns with undercurrents of skepticism in Vesalius's work. Returning to a quote used earlier, O'Malley argues that Vesalius understood that "not even [his own] words were to be accepted without proof through research" ("In Memoriam" 304-5); however, Lavinia in many ways remains unreadable. So in mimicking the intentions, images, and text of the *Fabrica*, *Titus Andronicus* exposes and challenges Vesalius's underlying epistemological assumption that ultimately the body is knowable. The undercurrent of skepticism in *Fabrica* turns septic in *Titus Andronicus*.

Figures



Fig. 1. Henry Peacham drawing from *Minerva Britanna* (London, 1612); rpt in Jonathan Bate, Introduction. (New York: Routledge, 1995; print).



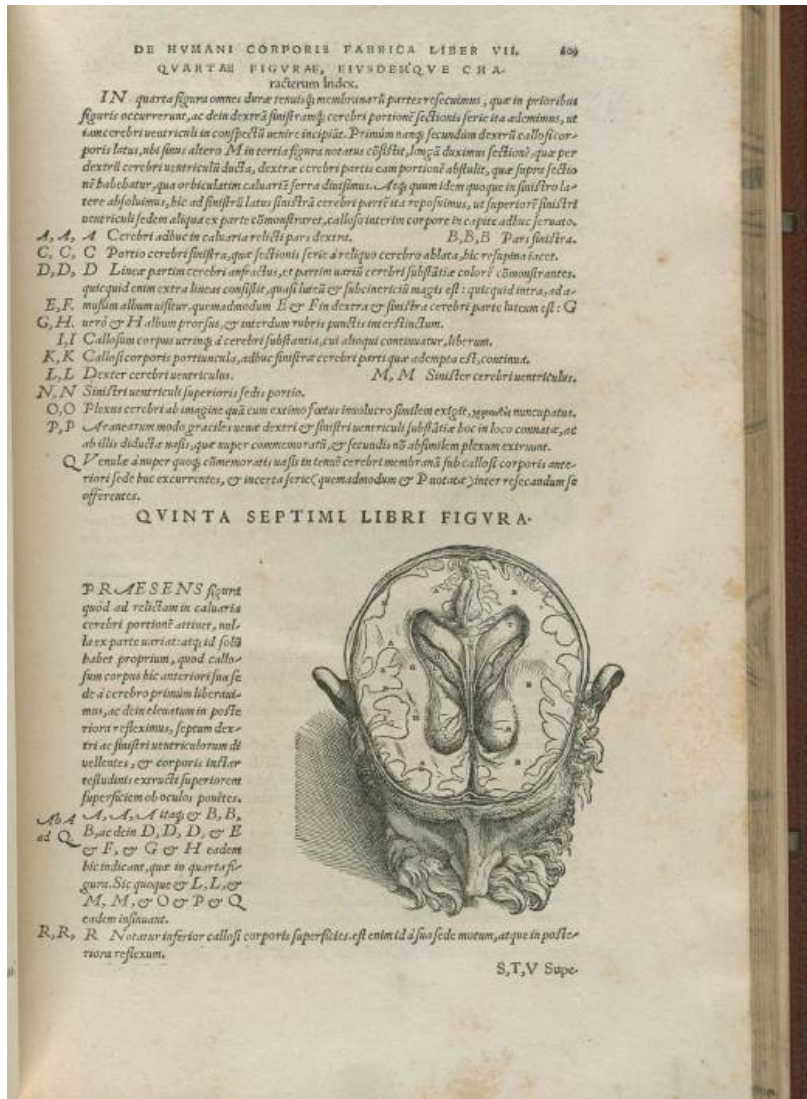


Fig. 2. "Plate 68" *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (Basel, 1543); rpt. in J.B. de C.M. Saunders and Charles D. O'Malley, *The Illustrations from the Work of Andreas Vesalius of Brussels* (New York: Dover, 1973; print).

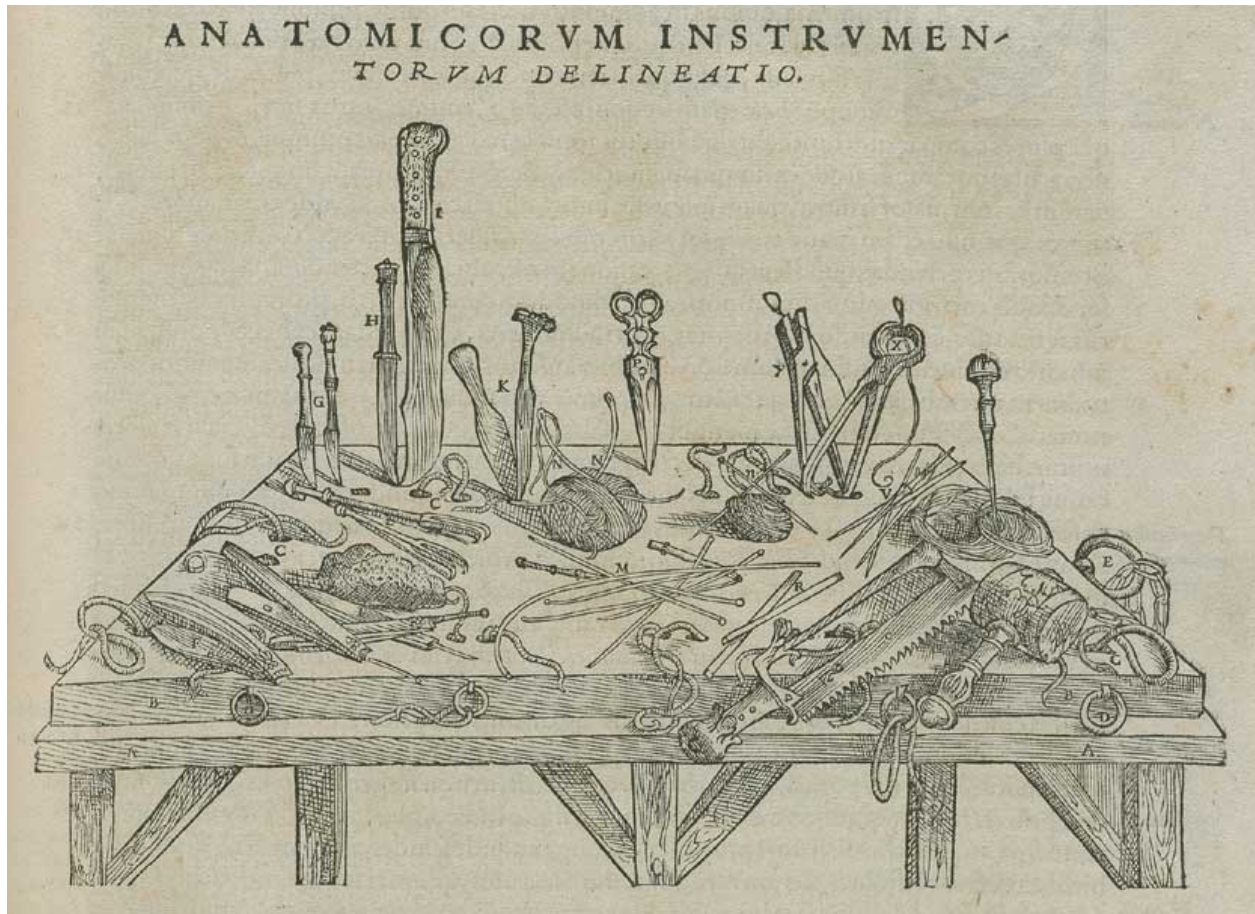


Fig. 3. "Plate 42" *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (Basel, 1543); rpt. in J.B. de C.M. Saunders and Charles D. O'Malley, *The Illustrations from the Work of Andreas Vesalius of Brussels* (New York: Dover, 1973; print).



Fig. 4. "Frontispiece" *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (Basel, 1543); rpt. in J.B. de C.M. Saunders and Charles D. O'Malley, *The Illustrations from the Works of Andreas Vesalius of Brussels* (New York: Dover, 1973; print).



Fig. 5. "Decorated L" *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (Basel, 1543); rpt. in Mandy Koroniak, Sandra Geddes, and Leslie Randall, "Decorated Letters." 2013. Web. 30 May 2014.

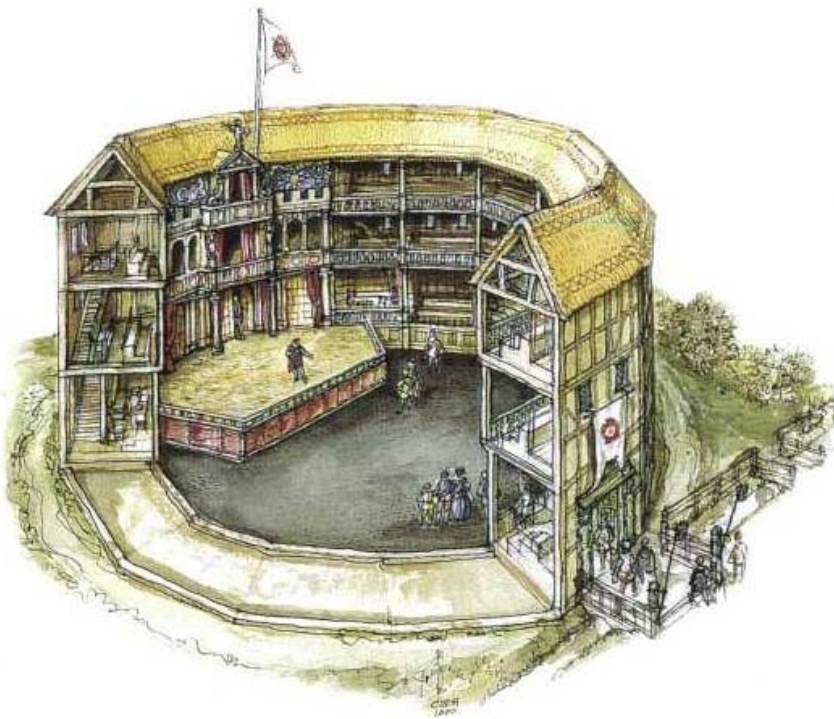


Fig. 6. Walter Hodges "Reconstruction of the Rose Theatre" (London, 1592); rpt. in Jonathan Bate, Introduction (New York: Routledge, 1955; print).



Fig. 7. "Plate 67" *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (Basel, 1543); rpt. in J.B. de C.M. Saunders and Charles D. O'Malley, *The Illustrations from the Works of Andreas Vesalius of Brussels* (New York: Dover, 1973; print).



Fig. 8. Self-demonstrating figure from Spigelius, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1627); rpt. Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995; print).

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