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ALANNA SKUSE. *Surgery and Selfhood in Early Modern England: Altered Bodies and Contexts of Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. 201. \$99.00 (cloth).

In *Surgery and Selfhood in Early Modern England*, Alanna Skuse considers “how anomalous bodies shaped and were shaped by . . . beliefs about the nature of embodiment, about soul and body, and about personal identity” (2), situating altered bodies within theological, philosophical, and pragmatic debates over monist and dualist understandings of the body and soul. The book adds to the understanding of early modern bodily alteration, impairment, and disability, and deftly shows the variable and changing relationships between them.

This is Skuse’s second book, following the excellent *Constructions of Cancer in Early Modern England* (2015). It shares with that text Skuse’s interest in themes of embodiment and selfhood, clear writing style, and close attention to a variety of print sources. But here Skuse takes more adventurous steps to integrate readings of a wider range of bodily phenomena, and to draw from new theoretical approaches. In doing so, Skuse offers early modern studies an important engagement with insights and research questions from contemporary phenomenological and disability studies, and scholars of those fields in modern and contemporary circumstances a necessary historicization that is most provocatively set out in the conclusion.

Surgery and Selfhood is structured in six chapters that concentrate on a specific alteration” In chapter 1 Skuse engages with early modern views of castrati identity, sexuality, and masculinity. She takes a nuanced approach to understanding the extent to which the impairment imposed on the boys in order to preserve their singing voices could be considered disabling. For some it was the ticket to fame and fortune, but it also subjected them to slurs on their masculinity and allegations of improper sexuality, including “public wrangling over the castrato’s right to marry” (31).

In chapter 2, Skuse's attention turns to mastectomy, and she argues for a lack of public visibility of "sexually altered female bodies" that stands in stark contrast to the "hypervisible and overdetermined" castrati (36). Mastectomy procedures appear in surgical textbooks, and the effects in ethnographical works on temporally and geographically far-flung Amazons, but not in the dramas that brought Amazons into domestic view, or in published stories of real-life survivors of the operation. Here, Skuse utilizes Julia Kristeva's conceptualization of "abjection" to take some of the material from *Constructions of Cancer* further. Though Skuse closes this chapter with a note that "stories of surgically altered bodies were almost always stories of *male* bodies" (55), there is an important exception made in chapter 5 for a close reading of Lavinia's mutilation in *Titus Andronicus*. Though Lavinia's amputation is not performed by surgeons, Skuse argues that her experience and use of the staff as a prosthetic can "be illuminated in new ways by a closer appreciation of the practical and ideological aspects of limb prostheses in early modern England" (82). In turn, Lavinia's representation as amputee can offer insight on "sexuality, embodiment and sociability" (98) in limb loss to accompany the growing scholarship on early modern amputation, prosthetics, and disability.

Some of chapter 3 has previously been published as an article ("'Keep Your Face out of My Way or I'll Bite off Your Nose': Homoplastics, Sympathy, and the Noble Body in the Tatler, 1710," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 17, no. 4 [2017]: 113–32), but that distinct material on homoplastics and the nose here benefits from its wider engagement with the altered face, and within the book. Skuse shares my fascination with the rhinoplasty operation made famous by surgeon Gaspare Tagliacozzi and associated in the early modern period with concerning tales of failed nose transplantation. Here, the altered face raises even more pointed questions about the body and identity and the potential for facial disfigurement to be read as disabling in different circumstances and for different people. The sympathetic

death of the grafted nose also leads to my favorite chapter, where Skuse dives into the tricky post-mortem fates of altered bodies and their parts. Here, Skuse engages with the questioned relationship of body to identity that was raised by the Resurrection, ultimately focusing on the writings of Robert Boyle and John Donne and pairing these with a surgical reading of the Miracle of the Black Leg. She adds to the work of disability historians like David M. Turner and Irina Metzler with further evidence for theological debates on whether impairments and deformities were sufficiently part of the individual's identity and capacity for sociability to accompany them at Judgement Day, or whether all people would rise flawless and thus in some cases unrecognizable.

Throughout *Surgery and Selfhood*, Skuse carefully but confidently draws productive links across time, including when acknowledging the research questions and synergies that arose through public engagement work on this Wellcome Trust-funded project. This is most apparent in the final chapter, where Skuse uses current engagements with the "hard problem" of "how consciousness can arise from matter" (139) to engage with early modern writing on phantom limb pain, especially from surgeon Ambroise Paré and philosopher René Descartes, and the first-hand account of eighteenth-century Scottish physician William Porterfield. This is an apt chapter with which to close the book, since it captures threads from across chapters on the "varied and often fluctuating ways" people understood embodiment, where "the body could be imagined as entirely entwined with one's mental subjectivity, or as utterly divorced from it" (146).

My only quibble with *Surgery and Selfhood* is essentially a wish that the book was longer. Skuse covers six different case studies (plus introduction and conclusion) in 173 pages, and within chapters, she moves between focus texts and across the full sixteenth to eighteenth centuries (and even further back into late medieval illustrations of the Miracle of the Black Leg). Because of this, some of the moves are a little abrupt. In my view, the book

would have benefited from the space for some more expansive framing in the introduction and especially within chapters to set up methods, links, source choices, omissions, and conclusions between the topics. The generative conclusion is testimony to what Skuse can do with this reflective space.

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