Clinical Anatomy 23:1–7 (2010)

A GLIMPSE OF OUR PAST

John Browne (1642–1702): Anatomist and Plagiarist

MARIOS LOUKAS,[1] MATTHEW AKIYAMA,[1] MOHAMMADALI M. SHOJA,[2] BULENT YALÇIN,[3] R. SHANE TUBBS,[4]* AND AARON A. COHEN-GADOL[2]

[1]*Department of Anatomical Sciences, St. George's University, Grenada, West Indies*
[2]*Department of Neurosurgery, Clarian Neuroscience Institute, Indianapolis Neurosurgical Group and Indiana University, Indianapolis, Indiana*
[3]*Department of Anatomy, Gulhane Military Medical Academy, Ankara, Turkey*
[4]*Pediatric Neurosurgery, Children's Hospital, Birmingham, Alabama*

In contrast to many other physicians of his age, John Browne (1642–1702), an English anatomist and surgeon, managed to strike a balance in his career that spanned relative obscurity, prestige, and notoriety. Among his more prestigious credits, Browne was Surgeon in Ordinary to King Charles II and William III. He also had numerous publications to his name, some of which are credited as great innovations. His career, however, was tempered by his most important book, which has been critiqued by his contemporaries as well as modern historians as plagiarism. Although Browne undeniably copied the works of others and published them under his name, he was not alone in this practice. Various forms of intellectual thievery were common in Browne's day, and there were many perpetrators. The life of this overlooked figure in the history of anatomy and the stigma attached to him will be examined. Clin. Anat. 23:1–7, 2010.

Key words: England; history; anatomy; plagiarism

INTRODUCTION

"Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal"
TS Eliot (1888–1965)

John Browne (1642–1702) figures fairly and insignificantly in the annals of history (Fig. 1). At first glance, this is surprising as the credits to his name hint at an illustrious career. He was a Surgeon in Ordinary to both Charles II and William III, a title that granted him access to supervise and write about "royal touch" ceremonies (see below) performed by Charles II to heal scrofula. He is credited as being the first to describe cirrhosis of the liver (Forbes 1978). The publication was called: "A Remarkable Account of a Liver, Appearing Glandulous to the Eye; Communicated by Mr John Brown [sic], Chirurgeon of St. Thomas' Hospital in Southwark; In a Letter to One of the Secretarys of the Royal Society."

Despite this impressive list of achievements, his reputation is tempered by his use of plagiarism in his work on the muscles. The paucity of literature on this 17th century figure demands further inquiry into what mark he left on the history of medicine. In contrast with other prominent physicians of this period such as Thomas Sydenham (1624–1689) and Richard Wiseman (1625–1686), Browne's history is relatively obscure. He was born in Norwich, Eastern England in 1642 during the reign of Charles I. He studied medicine at Saint Thomas' Hospital in London like many other surgeons and physicians during the 17th century; then, he served in the navy (Russell, 1940). Following naval service, he settled for a period in the city of his birth. In 1677, at the age of 25, Browne returned to London having been

*Correspondence to: R. Shane Tubbs, Pediatric Neurosurgery, Children's Hospital, 1600 7th Avenue South ACC 400, Birmingham, Alabama 35233, USA. E-mail: rstubbs@uab.edu

Received 8 July 2009; Revised 2 October 2009; Accepted 13 October 2009

Published online 30 November 2009 in Wiley InterScience (www.interscience.wiley.com). DOI 10.1002/ca.20899

Fig. 1. Portrait of John Browne (1642–1702) from his *Myographia Nova*. [Color figure can be viewed in the online issue, which is available at www.interscience.wiley.com.]

appointed as a Surgeon in Ordinary to King Charles II (Russell 1940). A few years later in 1683, upon the King's recommendation, Browne claimed a position on the surgical staff of Saint Thomas' Hospital. This would not last long, however, since in 1691 all the surgical staff including Browne was discharged from the hospital due to "failure to adhere to the regulations" (Forbes, 1978).

KING'S EVIL

Browne also wrote on the subject of scrofula (cervical tuberculous lymphadenopathy), or what was then known as the "King's Evil." In his day, it was believed that the "royal touch" held a cure for scrofula, so sufferers would line up to be touched by the King. As Surgeon in Ordinary to the King, Browne had attended such ceremonies and, consequently, his account is often quoted in articles about the King's evil and scrofula. The lengthy title of the 1684 manuscript that detailed the event was titled Adenochoiradelogia, or An anatomick-chiurgical treatise of glandules and strumae, or Kings-Evil-swellings. Together with the Royal gift of healing or cure thereof by contact or imposition of hands performed for above 640 years by our kings of England continued with their admirable effects and miraculous events and concluded with many wonderful examples of cures by their sacred touch" (Browne, 1685).

Although he is credited as being an important witness to these ceremonies, articles that cite Browne on this topic invariably mention his obsequiousness. For example, there came a time when the ceremony was falling into disrepute and the speed of the King's ability to heal was questioned. In response, Browne assured that the King "doth *in a moment* send ease to the sick" (Werrett, 2000). He also compared the King with "the first and last, the best and greatest Recoverer of all diseases... our Saviour Christ" (Werret, 2000). Browne's lavish praise of the King was perhaps reciprocation for the privileges he was afforded in his career by the nobility.

CLINICAL PRACTICE

Browne's record in clinical practice is also marked with dubious distinction. Forbes (1978) outlined the proceeding of an episode in 1687 in which a woman accused Browne of malpractice in the treatment of a fractured tibia and fibula. The case lasted several

Fig. 2. Image from the preface of Browne's text. Note the image of Browne in the background. [Color figure can be viewed in the online issue, which is available at www.interscience.wiley.com.]

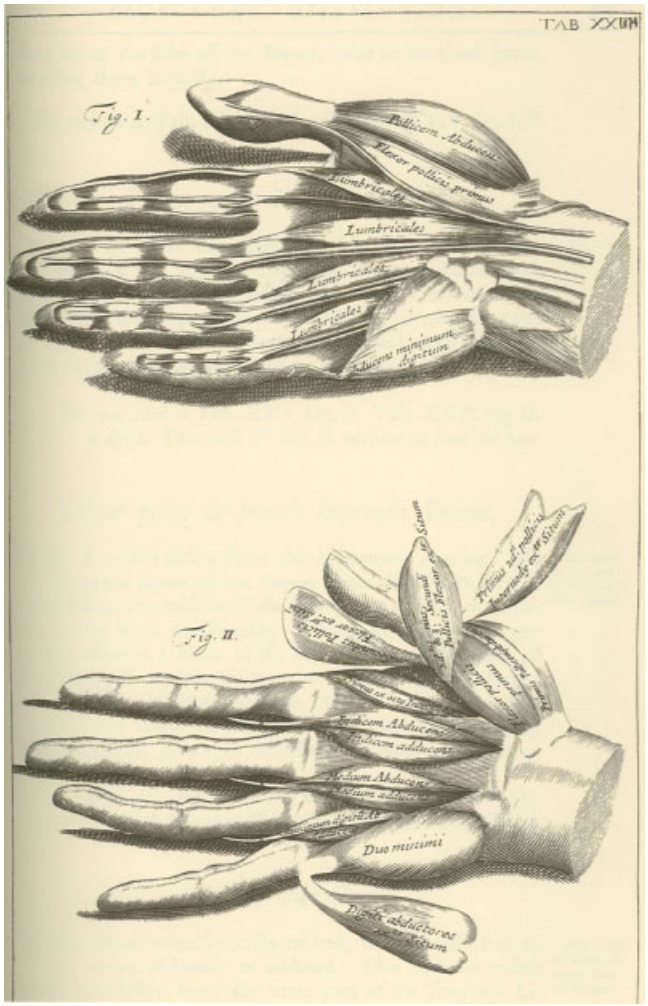

Fig. 3. Plate from Browne's *Myographia Nova* utilizing his direct labeling of anatomical structures of the hand. [Color figure can be viewed in the online issue, which is available at www.interscience.wiley.com.]

years and is a tale of incompetence and neglect. This is the only other place Browne appears in the writings of other authors other than the writings on King's Evil and the works of Russell.

BROWNE'S PUBLICATIONS AND LEGACY

Browne's publications are found in historical libraries of Britain, Scotland, America, and Australia, and due to their limited print and their age, they are difficult to access outside of occasional web sites and university historical collections. Fortunately, Kenneth F. Russell—the only scholar to have written in any detail on Browne—published an annotated bibliography that enumerated the titles and editions of Browne's work (Russell, 1962). Brown's work covered a variety of topics including the anatomy of the eye, an account of a hydropsical liver, a treatise on tumors, a discourse on wounds including skull fractures and gun shot wounds, and an early account of the body's defense against disease. His most famous and controversial work, however, is on the subject of the muscles (Figs. 2 and 3).

The muscles of the human body were a commonly addressed topic in publications of the 17th century. Browne's contribution was entitled 'A compleat [sic] treatise of the muscles, as they appear in the humane body and arise in dissection; with diverse anatomical observations not yet discover'd' and later published as *Myographia Nova*. The last portion of this earlier title is ironic, seeing as the descriptions of the muscles were taken from a book published in 1648 by the English anatomist and surgeon William Molins (1617–1691). Russell (1959) noted that a manuscript for Browne's version of the publication dated 1675 was nearly a verbatim copy. In the edition dated 1681, some "padding was done in an attempt to hide the obvious piracy." Molins' book on muscles was published with the Greek title *Myskotomia*; it was reissued in 1676 and in 1680 with the Latinized title *Myotomia*, each with a *Syllabus musculorum* by Sir Charles Scarburgh (1615–1694). Interestingly, Scarburgh was a student of William Harvey (1578–1657) and a tutor to Christopher Wren (1632–1723) who would collaborate with

Fig. 4. Plate VIII from Casserius' text.

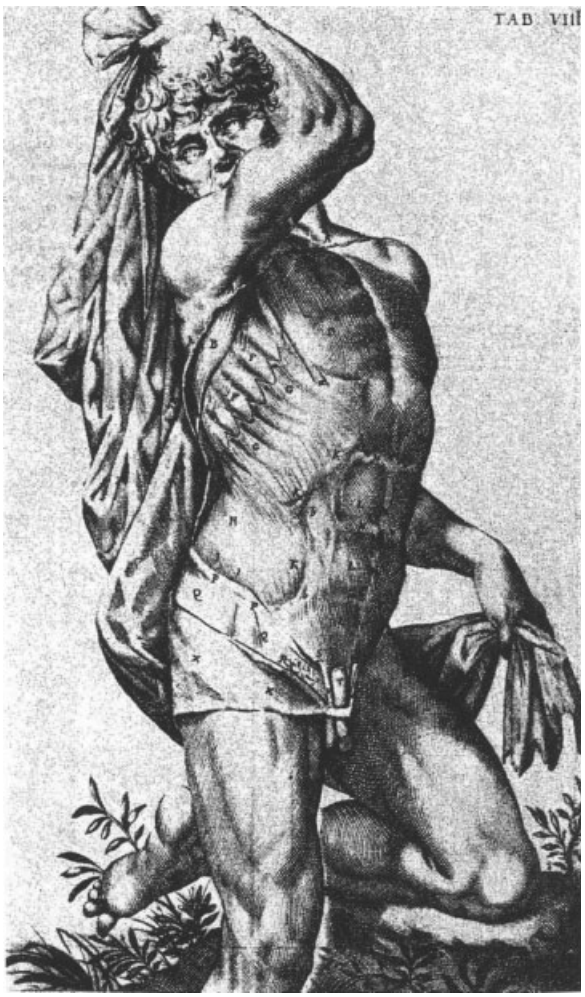

Fig. 5. Image from Browne's text that was obviously copied from Casserius' text (see Figure 4).

Thomas Willis (1621–1675) to produce his *Cerebri anatomi*.

The plates that accompany Browne's text were copied from the work of Julius Casserius (1561–1616) (Figs. 4–7). Casserius was an Italian surgeon and anatomist who studied under Hieronymus Fabricius (ca. 1533–1619) in Padua who was succeeded as Chair of anatomy by Andrien Spigelius (1578–1625). In keeping with the alterations, Browne had made in the text portion of the book, the clothing was changed to 17th century style, and the poses and backgrounds were modified in an attempt to claim them as his own. Russell (1940) commented that "it is doubtful if more whimsical or bizarre figures have ever graced a serious treatise on anatomy."

Browne was heavily criticized for this piracy. James Young (1646–1721), a contemporary of Browne's and a fellow surgeon, wrote a scathing review of his treatise on the muscles. In this critique, he disclosed the sources of Browne's book making the remark that "he hath not skill enough... to construe three lines" (quoted in Russell, 1959). Similarly, William Cowper (1666–1709) was critical, although his condemnation extended to the work of Molins as well making a broader comment about the state of anatomical writing in the 17th century. He noted in his *Myotonia Reformata* that "the many that have lately written on this subject, especially our English writers, have rather increas'd than diminished former errors: and particularly that treatise of Mr. William Molins, and that most erroneous one of John Brown [sic], are chiefly collections of the mistakes of others" (Russell, 1959). Interestingly, Lecky et al. (2007) have stated that Cowper was two-faced with his comments as in his *Anatomy of Humane Bodies* of 1698, he used illustrations from Bidloo's *Anatomia Humani Corporis* of 1685 without permission. These authors go on to conclude that plagiarism was widely practiced in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Fig. 6. Plate XV from Casserius' text. [Color figure can be viewed in the online issue, which is available at www.interscience.wiley.com.]

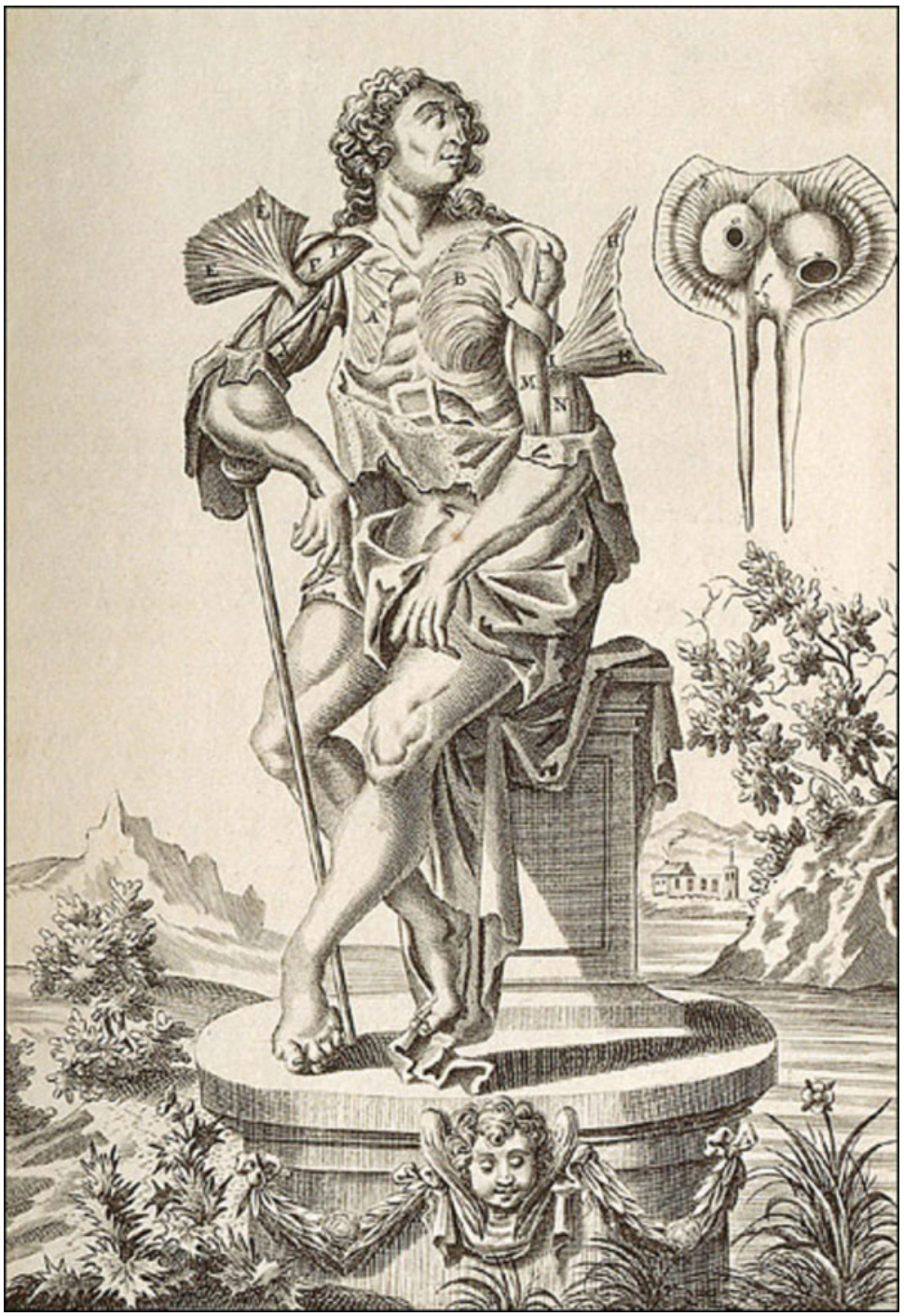

Fig. 7. Figure from Browne's text again illustrating obvious similarities to Figure 6. Note that surroundings have been added to Browne's image but that muscles are reflected almost identically and that even most of the lettering is the same between the two figures. [Color figure can be viewed in the online issue, which is available at www.interscience.wiley.com.]

The criticism directed against Browne's piracy was well founded, but it cannot be correctly stated that he was a plagiarist. The word ''plagiarism'' (derived from the Latin word meaning ''kidnapping'') was not coined until the early 17th century and copyrighting, the law binding domain of plagiarism, was in its infancy in the late 17th century. The 1681 edition of Browne's treatise on muscles (ironically) included a

Royal Warrant of copyright prefacing the text that prohibited reproduction of the plates and text for 15 years (Russell, 1962). Despite ordinances issued by publishing companies and kings, copying was not an unusual practice in Browne's day. In fact, it is well known that Shakespeare purloined most of his historical plots directly from Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Laurence Sterne, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Oscar Wilde, and Thomas de Quincey were also accused of plagiarism (Moss, 2005). Muscially, even Brahms was accused of having used many themes from Beethoven's Ninth in the composition of his first symphony (Moss, 2005).

Browne's ''techniques'' of producing his work were not limited to copying others. He also engaged in reproducing his own works with slight alterations to subsequent versions of his text published after 1685. There were financial incentives for doing so. Russell (1962) noted that ''these modifications, coupled with the variations in the titles of the later editions, tend to make them appear to be new works, but such is not the case. Browne must have been an astute business man and realizing the value of added material attempted to give his prospective buyers value for their money.'' For example, in a subsequent 1684 Latin edition, Browne added a folded sheet entitled *Syllabus musculorum* devised by Sir Charles Scarburgh and an appendix on the heart written by Richard Lower (Tubbs et al., 2009). In all of these subsequent addendums, however, the authors were credited (Russell, 1959).

Did anything original come out of Browne's treatise on the muscles? In the same 1684 Latin version, Browne is credited for having pioneered the technique of engraving the name of each muscle on the plate (Fig. 3), a practice that is still used in anatomical texts today. This innovation, however, was also discredited by Young as thievery. Though it ''looks pretty, and is an ease, and advantage to the reader... this is not new, nor his own, he stole this also from a muscular scheme, or schemes in Mr. Molines [sic.] Parlour, drawn by the accurate pencil of Mr. Fuller'' (Russell, 1959). Interestingly, Casserius also performed such labeling (Fig. 6).

PLAGIARISM IN MODERN DAY

Obviously, plagiarism continues today among many disciplines including writers, artists, and politicians. For example, Martin Luther King plagiarized part of his doctoral thesis, George Harrison was successfully sued for plagiarizing song lyrics, and Alex Haley copied large passages of his novel Roots from The African by Harold Courlander (Moss, 2005). Moss (2005) has stated that to read TS Eliot's The Waste Land ''is also to read Shakespeare, Chaucer, Webster and many others'' and cited one writer as referring to Eliot's methods as ''verbal kleptomania.''

CONCLUSIONS

John Browne was surgeon to the King who was the one who had the authority to issue copyrights. It has been argued that originality was not deemed the crucial ingredient in artistic genius until the 18th century (Buelow, 1990). However, due to the accusations against Browne, there were certainly seeds being planted in which a premium was being attributed to originality in 17th century medicine. Brynn (2002) pointed out that plagiarism was not regarded as a crime until the 18th century but that it was regarded as a problem in the 17th century as writing was becoming an occupation for some. Interestingly, copying the literary works of others has been found even more remotely in for example, the works of some Greek writers (Anonymous, 1876). Copyright laws came into being with the invention of the printing press (Briggs and Burke, 2002). English concern over the copying of manuscripts resulted in the passing of the Licensing Act of 1662 and the Statute of Anne in 1709, which gave authors rights for their works at least for a short period of time (Briggs and Burke, 2002). The Berne Convention of 1886 provided international laws for the protection of copyrights and its effects are still enforced today. This being said and despite the accusatory remarks made against him, ten editions of Browne's work on the muscles were published between 1681 and 1705, eight of which appeared during his lifetime (Russell, 1959).

Although Browne's work remains controversial, one thing is certain: The work of John Browne should be looked upon not as the work of one man, but the work of several. However, a context must be provided so that the false impression is not given that he was the only one committing such transgressions. In the end, Browne's work lacked originality as the figures were stolen from Casserius' *Tabulae Anatomicae* and the text was almost identical to the anatomical work of Molin. Interestingly, in an editorial in the Journal of the American Medical Association in which an editorial staff resolved to ''exercise the best possible judgment in the selection of manuscripts for publication; in turn, it is hoped that authors will resolve to devote more time to the preparation of original contributions. Under no circumstances should one emulate John Browne'' (JHT, 1960).

REFERENCES

Anonymous. 1876. Literary plagiarism. More paste jewels. Plagiarism in historic narrative-a few notable instances-famous stories and historical facts rejuvenated and promulgated as original. New York Times, July 9.

Briggs A, Burke P. 2005. A Social History of the Media. 2nd Ed. Polity Press: Cambridge.

Browne J. 1675. Myographia Nova: Or a Graphical Description of all the Muscles in Humane Body, as They Arise in Dissection. London: Thomas Milbourn.

Browne J. 1685. Letter. Philos Trans R Soc 15:1266–1268.

Brynn K. 2002. When did plagiarism become a crime? URL: http://hnn.us/articles/569.html [accessed November 2009].

Buelow GJ. 1990. Originality, genius, plagiarism in English criticism of the eighteenth century. Int Rev Aesthetics Sociol Music 21: 117–128.

Forbes TR. 1978. The case of the casual chirurgeon: John Browne. Yale J Biol Med 51:583–588.

JHT. 1960. A remedy for the itch. JAMA 174:2227.

Lecky T, Ehling I, Halloran M. 2007. Anatomy as Art: The Dean Edell Collection. New York: Christie's Auction.

Moss S. 2005. A history of plagiarism (not my own work). URL: http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/nov/23/comment.stephenmoss [accessed November 2009].

Russell KF. 1940. John Browne and his treatise on the muscles. ANZ J Surg 10:113–116.

Russell KF. 1959. John Browne, 1642–1702, a seventeenth century surgeon, anatomist, and plagiarist. Bull Hist Med 33:503–525.

Russell KF. 1962. A list of the works of John Browne (1642–1702). Bull Med Libr Assoc 50:675–683.

Tubbs RS, Loukas M, Hill M, Shoja MM, Cohen-Gadol AA. 2009. Richard Lower (1631–1691): Acknowledging his notable contributions to the exploration of the nervous system. J Neurosurg 111:1096–1101.

Werrett S. 2000. Healing the nation's wounds: Royal ritual and experimental philosophy in restoration England. Hist Sci 38:377–399.