Addison’s “Dissections”

Directions: Read the following excerpts from two of Addison’s essays for The Spectator and answer the questions that follow.

Dissection of a Beau’s Head

I was yesterday engaged in an assembly of virtuosos, where one of them produced many curious observations which he had lately made in the anatomy of a human body. ... We found that the brain of a beau is not a real brain, but only something like it.

The pineal gland, which many of our modern philosophers suppose to be the seat of the soul, smelt very strong of essence and orange-flower water, and was encompassed with a kind of horny substance, cut into a thousand little faces or mirrors, which were imperceptible to the naked eye; insomuch that the soul, if there had been any here, must have been always taken up in contemplating her own beauties.

We observed a large antrum or cavity in the sinciput, that was filled with ribbons, lace, and embroidery, wrought together in a most curious piece of network, the parts of which were likewise imperceptible to the naked eye. Another of these antrums or cavities was stuffed with invisible billet-doux, love-letters, pricked dances, and other trumpery of the same nature. In another we found a kind of powder, which set the whole company a sneezing, and by the scent discovered itself to be right Spanish. The several other cells were stored with commodities of the same kind, of which it would be tedious to give the reader an exact inventory.

There was a large cavity on each side of the head which I must not omit. That on the right side was filled with fictions, flatteries, and falsehoods, vows, promises, and protestations, that on the left with oaths and imprecations. There issued out a duct from each of these cells which ran into the root of the tongue, where both joined altogether, and passed forward in one common duct to the tip of it. We discovered several little roads or canals running from the ear into the brain, and took particular care to trace them out through their several passages. One of them extended itself to a bundle of sonnets and little musical instruments. Others ended in several bladders, which were filled with wind or froth. But the large canal entered into a great cavity of the skull, from whence there went another canal into the tongue. This great cavity was filled with a kind of spongy substance, which the French anatomists call galimatias: and the English, nonsense...

The os cribroforme was exceedingly stuffed, and in some places damaged with snuff. We could not but take notice in particular of that small muscle, which is not often discovered in dissections, and draws the nose upwards. When it expresses the contempt which the owner of it has upon seeing anything he does not like, or hearing anything he does not understand, I need not tell my learned reader, that this is the muscle which performs the motion so often mentioned by the Latin poets when they talk of a man’s cocking his nose, or playing the rhinoceros.

We did not find anything very remarkable in the eye, saving only that the muscular amatorii, or, as we may translate it into English, the ogling muscles, were very much worn and decayed with use: whereas, on the contrary, the elevator or the muscle which turns the eye towards heaven, did not appear to have been used at all.

He was cut off in the flower of his age by the blow of a paring-shovel, having been surprised by an eminent citizen as he was tendering some civilities to his wife. ...

—Joseph Addison
1. Why does Addison use the word “dissection” in his title?

2. What characteristics does he attribute to the beau?

3. What does his satire criticize?

4. What happened to the beau?
Dissection of a Coquette's Heart

Having already given an account of the dissection of a beau's head, with the several discoveries made on that occasion, I shall here, according to my promise, enter upon the dissection of a coquette's heart. . . . Our operator desired us first of all to observe the pericardium, or outward case of the heart, which we did very attentively; and, by the help of our glasses, discerned in it millions of little scars, which seemed to have been occasioned by the points of innumerable darts and arrows, that from time to time had glanced upon the outward coat; though he could not discover the smallest orifice, by which any of them had entered and pierced the inward substance.

Every smatterer in anatomy knows, that this pericardium, or case of the heart, contains in it a thin reddish liquor, supposed to be bred from the vapors which exhale out of the heart. . . .

Having cleared away the pericardium, or the case and liquor above-mentioned, we came to the heart itself. The outward surface of it was extremely slippery, and the macro, or point, so very cold withal, that upon endeavoring to take hold of it, it glided through the fingers like a smooth piece of ice.

The fibers were turned and twisted in a more intricate and perplexed manner than they are usually found in other hearts; insomuch, that the whole heart was wound up together like a Gordian knot, and must have had very irregular and unequal motions, whilst it was employed in its vital function.

One thing we thought very observable, namely, that upon examining all the vessels which came into it, or issued out of it, we could not discover any communication that it had with the tongue.

We could not but take notice likewise, that several of those little nerves in the heart which are affected by the sentiments of love, hatred, and other passions, did not descend to this before us from the brain, but from the muscles which lie about the eye.

Upon weighing the heart in my hand, I found it to be extremely light, and consequently very hollow, which I did not wonder at, when, upon looking into the inside of it, I saw multitudes of cells and cavities running one within another. . . . Several of these little hollows were stuffed with innumerable sorts of triftles, which I shall forbear giving any particular account of; and shall, therefore, only take notice of what lay first and uppermost, which, upon our unfolding it, and applying our microscope to it, appeared to be a flame-colored hood.

We were informed that the lady of this heart, when living, received the addresses of several who made love to her, and did not only give each of them encouragement, but made every one she conversed with believe that she regarded him with an eye of kindness; for which reason, we expected to have seen the impression of multitudes of faces among the several plaits and foldings of the heart; but, to our great surprise, not a single print of this nature discovered itself, till we came into the very core and center of it, appeared dressed in a very fantastic manner. The more I looked upon it, the more I thought I had seen the face before, but could not possibly recollect either the place or time; when at length one of the company, who had examined this figure more nicely than the rest, showed us plainly the make of its face, and the several turns of its features that the little idol which was thus lodged in the very middle of the heart, was the deceased beau, whose head I gave some account of in my last paper. . . .

—Joseph Addison
1. Why does Addison focus on the coquette's heart, not her head?

2. What characteristics does he see in her?

3. What does he criticize?

4. How does he associate the beau and the coquette?