

# For the Edification of All: Nineteenth-Century American Medicine, Art, and the Role of the Classical Cast in Cultural Life

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During the nineteenth century, elite Americans went on a Grand Tour to Europe to view significant cultural works from Antiquity and the Renaissance.<sup>1</sup> Greek sculptures—or, more accurately, Roman reproductions—were praised for their ideal beauty, which demonstrated a canon of proportion through corporeal balance and were described as “the very alphabet of art.”<sup>2</sup> Cultural tourists with means purchased carved or cast copies of antique sculpture, which they displayed at home. These were not viewed negatively as “copies,” but were viewed positively as “copies from the original.”<sup>3</sup> Public cast collections took the didactic function

of this elite rite of passage a step further. The display of classical casts in American galleries, academies, and libraries greatly expanded cultural viewership.<sup>4</sup> Once solely for the wealthy, by mid-nineteenth century classical cast collections were promoted as for the edification of all.<sup>5</sup>

Considered the “standards of beauty for the entire human race,”<sup>6</sup> copies of the *Apollo Belvedere* and *Venus de Medici* were installed in ante-bellum Boston both in the reading room of the Boston Athenæum (founded in 1807) and, first in the anatomical theater of Harvard Medical College, and then the surgical theater of Massachusetts General

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and sought after it would be. The cast of the *Apollo Belvedere* at Massachusetts General Hospital retains an origin myth linking it to Napoleon’s Italian conquest and the production of classical cast copies created after it by the *formatore* of the Musée du Louvre.

<sup>1</sup> The Grand Tour was a significant vehicle for the display of cultural hegemony by the British and American ruling classes. It has been theorized as a method for performing cultural hegemony and also establishing national dominance. As E. P. Thompson stated, “ruling-class control in the 18th century was located primarily in a cultural hegemony, and only secondarily in an expression of economic or physical (military) power.” E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1991), 43. For further reading on the Grand Tour as a British cultural practice see Bruce Redford, *Dilettanti: The Antic and the Antique in Eighteenth-Century England* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Research Institute, 2008), while an excellent survey of the state of the field can be found in the review essay of John Wilston-Ely, “‘Classic Ground’: Britain, Italy, and the Grand Tour,” *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 28, no. 1 (2004): 136-165. Finally, for the American Grand Tour see Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., *The Lure of Italy: American Artists and the Italian Experience, 1760-1914*, exhibition catalogue, (Boston, MA: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Quoting Franklin Dexter, member of the Fine Arts Committee, Boston Athenæum in Katherine Wolff, *Culture Club: The Curious History of the Boston Athenæum* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 93. In addition, art historian Johann Winckelmann famously extolled the virtues of classical sculpture in his *History of Ancient Art* (1764) in speaking of Roman copies of Greek originals; he praised sculptures including the *Apollo Belvedere*, *Laocöon*, and *Venus de Medici*.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the closer the cast was to its original, the more highly prized

<sup>4</sup> One of the earliest and largest collections in the United States was that of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, which, in 1805, charged Nicholas Biddle to purchase seventeen statue casts, twenty-five casts of busts, and six sets of hands and feet from the studio of Getti, the plaster cast maker for the Louvre. Included in this group were the *Belvedere Torso*, the *Borghese Gladiator*, the *Venus de Medici*, and the *Apollo Belvedere*. Cheryl Leibold, “The Historic Cast Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts,” *Antiques & Fine Art* (Spring 2010): 186-191.

<sup>5</sup> While this phrasing is my own, the ideas expressed within it, that is the promotion of education for all citizens inspired by a charitable or benevolent attitude (or Christian virtue) on the part of the elite citizen, was expounded by theologians and politicians of the period. For example, in British Methodist theologian John Fletcher’s “The Portrait of Saint Paul,” he writes: “Charity avoids all appearance of haughtiness... on the contrary...she labours for the edification of all.” John Fletcher, *The Works of the Rev. John Fletcher* (New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1833), 3:48. Fletcher’s writings were widely published and read in America, certainly true of “The Portrait of Saint Paul,” first published on its own in New York in 1804. As to the American understanding of the edifying effects of art on its citizenry, Dell Upton writes: “Early in the antebellum era republicans conceived art as a form of manual and intellectual accomplishment that should be directed to the edification of fellow citizens, who in turn were expected to support art for patriotic reasons.” Dell Upton, “Inventing the Metropolis: Civilization and Urbanity,” in *Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825-1861*, ed. Catherine Hoover Voorsanger (New Haven: Yale University Press for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 34. This principle becomes especially applicable to classical casts due to their collection and display by educational institutions and public art museums in the post-bellum era.

<sup>6</sup> Julia Thomas and Annie Gregory Thomas, *Psycho-Physical Culture* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1892), 229. This is a primer on physical development intended for children. The quotation is from a chapter titled “Class Talk: Physical Perfection, Personal Beauty.”

Hospital (founded in 1811).<sup>7</sup> Whereas the Boston Athenæum catered to Boston's wealthiest, Massachusetts General Hospital served a very different purpose. Established to serve working class residents of Boston's overcrowded neighborhoods and as a teaching hospital for Harvard medical students, the Hospital highly regulated the diseased bodies that entered. While admittance was likewise controlled to keep working class Bostonians out, Athenæum members performed their elite status through studied corporeal and intellectual pursuits. Casts of the *Apollo Belvedere* and *Venus de Medici* exemplified corporeal aestheticization, expounded the virtues of the classical world, and illustrated idealized physical perfection, yet what kind of cultural work might classical sculptures of a male and female nude have done at the Hospital and Athenæum? Did they accomplish similar aesthetic or intellectual functions or did their reception and effect differ?

While scholars have ably considered nineteenth-century American public cast collections, especially in the Gilded Age,<sup>8</sup> this essay examines how ante-bellum Bostonians displayed and interpreted the *Apollo Belvedere* and *Venus de Medici* at the Athenæum and Hospital. Through an exploration of the sculptures' intended audiences and the contradictions posed by their institutional display, this paper questions how these classical casts might have played a role in shaping period beliefs regarding idealized corporeality in conflict with the bodies of patients or visitors. Ultimately, this essay claims that the deployment of classical casts in these two radically divergent institutions accomplished sur-

prisingly similar ideological ends, operating to buttress the cultural capital of two nascent institutions and a generation of Boston elites.

Before turning to the casts, it is necessary to situate Boston historically, which by 1820 had a population of over 43,000 and was a busy port city made wealthy by the activities of ship owners and merchants. The sprawl of the city is evident in Boynton's 1844 map, which labels the Hospital on the Charles River and the Athenæum by Fort Hill, making it clear that these were significant institutions in the city landscape (Figure 1). Self-described as the "Athens of America" by its residents, Boston sought to emulate the ideals and republican values of the classical world.<sup>9</sup> In post-Revolutionary New England, those who sought to shape a new nation envisioned themselves as the inheritors of a classical legacy.<sup>10</sup> The centrality of the classical world to the self-identity of Boston and its citizenry was also influenced by Harvard University, where the curriculum revolved around Latin and Greek, Debate and Rhetoric. The connection between Boston and Athens was not an empty aspiration, but a lived challenge: Bostonians established institutions, benevolent societies, and philanthropic organizations, in order to bolster their reputation as the "Athens of America."

One such institution was the Boston Athenæum, established as a "publick" reading room "useful to the various classes of our citizens" and "a fountain, at which all, who choose, may gratify their thirst for knowledge."<sup>11</sup> Yet the term "publick" in the founding prospectus does not imply open access to all.<sup>12</sup> Admittance was by subscription, and mem-

<sup>7</sup> The *Apollo Belvedere* is a Roman copy (c. 120-140) of a lost bronze original, discovered in 1489 at Anzio and installed in the *Cortile delle Statue* of the Belvedere palace in the Vatican in 1511 by Pope Julius II. The *Venus de Medici* is a 1st century BCE marble copy of a bronze original Hellenistic sculpture depicting the Greek goddess of love Aphrodite. The date and place of discovery are not known. As David Dearing recounts: "It was possibly in the collection of the Medici family as early as 1598 but definitely there by 1638. By the mid-1680s it had been installed in the Tribuna, a centrally located room within the Uffizi that was dedicated to the best works in the collection. There, the sculpture 'was revered as the most beautiful Venus and one of the half-dozen finest antique statues to have survived.' Copies of it were made in almost every conceivable form, and a visit to the Tribuna, specifically to see the Venus, was mandatory for anyone on the Grand Tour." David Dearing, *Acquired Tastes: 200 Years of Collecting for the Boston Athenæum* (Boston: Boston Athenæum, 2006): 256-258.

<sup>8</sup> For more on nineteenth-century American cast collections see: Hima Bindu Mallampati, "Acquiring Antiquity: The Classical Collections at the University of Michigan and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, ca. 1850-1925" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2010), especially chapter 2 "From Collecting Casts to Ancient Artifacts," which gives a broad overview of the historical context and scholarly discussion surrounding cast collecting. In addition see: Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture, 1500-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Betsy Fahlman, "A Plaster of Paris Antiquity: Nineteenth-Century Cast Collections," *Southeastern College Art Conference Review* 12, no. 1 (1991): 1-9; Alan Wallach, *Exhibiting Contradiction: Essays on the American Museum in the United States* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), especially "The American Cast Museum: An Episode in the History of the Institutional Definitions of Art"; and Pamela Born,

"The Canon is Cast: Plaster Casts in American Museum and University Collections," *Art Documentation* 21, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 8-13.

<sup>9</sup> This topic is examined in Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Athens of America: Boston, 1825-1845* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> In 1819, William Tudor wrote a letter describing the town: "[Boston] is perhaps the most perfect and certainly the best-regulated democracy that ever existed. There is something so impossible in the immortal fame of Athens, that the very name makes everything modern shrink from comparison; but since the days of that glorious city I know of none that has approached so near in some points, distant as it may still be from that illustrious model." Edwin Bacon, *Bacon's Dictionary of Boston* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1886), 30.

<sup>11</sup> Hina Hirayama, *With Éclat: the Boston Athenæum and the Origin of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (Boston: the Boston Athenæum, 2013), 18; *Memoir of the Boston Athenæum: With the Act of Incorporation* (Boston: Monroe & Francis, 1807), 8.

<sup>12</sup> The Athenæum's contradictory use of the term "public" was examined as early as 1817, in a letter to the library from a young citizen miffed at being withheld entry. Wolff, *Culture Club*, 58. Wolff addresses the contradiction between the use of "public" by Athenæum members and the meaning of the word today in "Pamphlet War," 130-167. As Wolff explains, the crisis came to a head in 1848, when the City of Boston voted to create a public library and proposed a union with the Athenæum. Hirayama also examines the term public and writes: "It was 'public' only in the early nineteenth-century sense of the word: a library was 'public' or 'communal' when it was not based in a home and served a constituency larger than a private household. 'Public' did

bership was limited to men who could afford dues.<sup>13</sup> While Athenæum use was restricted, the charter also declared that: “love of intellectual improvement and pleasure...which are capable of being diffused through considerable portions of the community, should be... promoted with zeal among a civilized and flourishing people.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, the edification of members ultimately affected the edification of a broad swath of Bostonians through a cultural trickle-down cultivated by those born to privilege.

Located in the former Perkins Mansion and seen in *Bowen's Picture of Boston*, in 1822 the Athenæum was the third-largest American library with over 12,000 books (Figure 2).<sup>15</sup> That same year Augustus Thorndike, son of a Boston merchant, donated eleven plaster casts to the Athenæum, including the *Apollo Belvedere*, *Borghese Gladiator*, and *Venus de Medici*,<sup>16</sup> stating that they were: “for the accommodation of such professional gentlemen as might desire to exercise themselves in drawing.”<sup>17</sup> Thus while the casts were installed in the Athenæum's reading room—territory strictly defined as for members only—the room was open three nights a week to “gentlemen” artists.<sup>18</sup>

Of the Thorndike casts in situ, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote to a friend:

Mr. Thorndike has presented the institution with a beautiful collection of casts of the ancient statues, which attract the eye in every corner from the tedious joys of writing & reading. The beholder instantly feels the spirit of the connoisseur stealing over him, & ere he can exorcise it, rubs up his Latin & Italian lore, & among the gazers, you may see the scholar, at pains to show his acquaintance with the lordly strangers, & his disdain of the ‘ignoble vulgus’ who stare & stare, & are never the wiser.<sup>19</sup>

not imply, as it does today, universal access.” Hirayama, ‘*With Éclat*,’ 19.

<sup>13</sup> Hannah Adams was the first woman granted access to the reading room in 1829. As Wolff explains, Adams was an exception: “women were not routinely welcomed into the reading room until after 1856.” Wolff, *Culture Club*, 65. Nineteenth-century members included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Bronson Alcott, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Louis Agassiz.

<sup>14</sup> Josiah Quincy, *The History of the Boston Athenæum* (Cambridge, MA: Metcalf and Company, 1851), 31.

<sup>15</sup> Hirayama, ‘*With Éclat*,’ 19.

<sup>16</sup> See “Painting & Sculpture at the Boston Athenæum,” accessed 6 December 2013, <http://www.bostonAthenæum.org/node/127>. It is noted here that Thorndike's gift of “eight full-size and three small casts, including copies of the *Apollo Belvedere*, the *Borghese Gladiator*, and the *Venus de Medici*,” joined two casts given by Solomon Willard five years earlier, the *Laocöon* and the *Dying Gaul*. Also see Hirayama, ‘*With Éclat*,’ 179n29: “The full-scale casts were of the *Apollo Belvedere*, the *Belvedere Torso*, and the *Laocöon* (Vatican Museum, Rome); the *Venus de Medici* (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence); the *Capitoline Venus* (Capitoline Museum, Rome); and the *Borghese Gladiator*, *Diana the Huntress*, and *Hermaphrodites* (Musée du Louvre, Paris); the small

Significantly, in Emerson's view, the casts communicate their classical origins to an educated audience, one with knowledge of Latin and Italian, mythology, and archeology. The quotation also suggests an ideal audience of gentlemen connoisseurs who recognize the aesthetic beauty of the classical casts. Finally, it refers to the scholar who sneers at the “ignoble vulgus,” the humble commoner, whose social position and lack of education prevent him from appreciating the beauty, history, and context of the casts. Thorndike's and Emerson's quotes suggest that for early nineteenth-century Bostonians, classical casts were meant to be edifying, understood as territory for gentlemen viewers grounded in an elite aesthetic vocabulary and privy to a classical education. The reverse implication is that the classical casts would prove unintelligible to an uneducated audience.

This conflict was expressed in an 1826 letter to a local paper: “What literary advantages has the mass of our citizens derived from the Athenæum? Who gets to peep within its lofty walls without a ten-dollar bill?”<sup>20</sup> The contradiction between the ideal stated aims of the Athenæum, as a public place, and the actual membership was fraught and conflicted. While the Athenæum's governing board wanted, intellectually at least, to edify Boston's wider citizenry, in practice they maintained the reading room as a privileged space, buffering members from the coarseness of urban life. In the reading room, the Athenæum's membership comported themselves with care; their bodies illustrated their social position through posture, dress, and deportment. Historian Richard Bushman illustrates the importance of corporeal discipline in his study on the culture of refinement, writing: “Ease of bearing was as important to the gentleman as ease of the company was to a brilliant entertainment.” Artistic control over one's physical body, combined with books and fine dress “became instruments of power, a superior culture to parade before the eyes of a deferential population.”<sup>21</sup> With this in mind,

scale casts were of the *Discobolus* (National Museum of Rome), the *Apollino* (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence), and the *Capitoline Antinous* (Capitoline Museum, Rome).” Finally, refer to Susan Sutton Smith, ed., *Topical Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 1:128: “said (by Mr Folsom) to have been according to a list furnished by Canova, and at a cost of \$4000.”

<sup>17</sup> “Catalogue of Books in the Boston Athenæum,” *North American Review* 25 (1827): 479.

<sup>18</sup> These artists were professional gentlemen associated with the ranks of the elite membership, such as Washington Allston and Chester Harding. See: Leah Lipton, “The Boston Artists' Association, 1841-1851,” *American Art Journal* 15, no. 4 (Autumn, 1983): 45-57.

<sup>19</sup> Emerson to John B. Hill, 3 July 1822, in Ralph L. Rusk, ed., *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 1:119-120.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Knowles Bolton, *The Athenæum Centenary* (Boston: the Boston Athenæum, 1907), 30-31.

<sup>21</sup> Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 65 and 404.

the graceful contrapposto of the *Apollo Belvedere* and the corporeal elongation of the *Venus de Medici* on display in the Athenæum's reading room mirrored the proper comportment of the members' bodies. In this way, the classical casts at the Athenæum reinforced members' corporeal prowess. The positive comparison between their bodies and these sculptural bodies, combined with the performance of intellectual knowledge they inspired, solidified elite status while throwing those on the outside of the comparison, Emerson's "ignoble vulgus," into direct relief.

While the Athenæum proved an intellectual and cultural enclave for Boston's elite, Massachusetts General Hospital fulfilled an alternate agenda. As Boston's first hospital, founded in affiliation with Harvard Medical College, it treated the city's working class population. The institutional linkages between the Hospital and College are made evident in Annin & Smith's engraving, delineated by John Ritto Penniman and likely completed to mark the official opening of the Hospital in 1821 (Figure 3). Not only do the two buildings appear paired on facing pages, but also the demonstration theaters are dominant in both illustrations, denoted by a central dome and lit via a clerestory. The divergent institutional goals of the Hospital and Athenæum were highlighted when the College and then the Hospital, installed classical casts within these amphitheatres: a marble *Venus de Medici*, loaned to the Medical College by Harvard surgeon John Collins Warren, and a plaster *Apollo Belvedere*, donated to the Hospital by Greek scholar Edward Everett (Figures 4 and 5).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> The history of casts is somewhat convoluted and requires further careful study, beyond what can be briefly outlined here. Hannah Sawyer Lee donated the marble *Venus de Medici* to the Boston Athenæum in 1861; prior to this, it was owned by her brother, Mr. William Sawyer (1771-1859) who purchased it in Italy. It was then sent to Boston to be "overseen" by Dr. John Collins Warren, who deposited it with the Harvard Medical College in 1816. Lee's brother gave it to her in 1840, however he died in 1859 and she gifted it two years later. Where it was between 1840 and 1861 is unclear and open to speculation. Due to its size and weight, I suspect that it remained at the Medical College. Provenance from a letter quoted by Dearinger, *Acquired Tastes*, 256.

Of the casts at the Medical College, John Collins Warren wrote: "the new college was built on his land in Grove Street with an ample museum... I also put all my preparations in good order when they were presented; as well as the *Venus de Medicis*, given by President Everett, and the *Apollo Belvidere* [sic], which I purchased from Solomon Willard, given by myself." Edward Warren, *The Life of John Collins Warren, M.D.* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860), 416. Edward Everett officially gave the *Apollo* to the Hospital in March of 1845, but it was seen by Frederick Marryat at Everett's home in 1838. Fredrick Maryatt, *A Diary in America* (London: Longman, 1839), 2:244-245.

A German-trained classicist Everett was arguably one of the most influential figures in Boston's classical renaissance. Appointed Harvard Professor of Greek Language & Literature, he travelled throughout England, Europe, Greece, the Ionian Islands, and Constantinople before assuming his teaching post in 1819, where he inspired Harvard men including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Charles Francis Adams. Everett also wrote articles and served as editor for the *North American Review*, gave a series of fifteen public lectures to the Boston Mercantile Association on "Antiquities" and "Ancient art" during the winters of 1823 and 1824, and was, of course, a member of the Athenæum. Everett declared: "the noble and elegant arts of Greece grew up in no Augustan age, —enjoyed neither royal nor imperial patronage... they

Beginning in 1816, the amphitheater of Harvard Medical College displayed "a beautiful statue of the *Venus of Medici*, and a noble cast of the *Apollo of Belvedere*, designed to illustrate the external forms of the human body."<sup>23</sup> Used as didactic comparative tools during anatomical lectures and exhibited with anatomical and live specimens, the two casts were displayed for the edification of elite male medical students. By 1845, Massachusetts General Hospital displayed an *Apollo Belvedere* in its surgical amphitheater, along with a human skeleton and an Egyptian mummy, donated in 1823. Here Harvard students and medical professionals (many of them also Athenæum members) would observe surgical procedures. In both locations, the *Venus* and the *Apollo* (Figures 5 and 6) proved central participants in these didactic performances: whether flanking the operating table, presiding over surgeries, demonstrations, or lectures, they provided a distinct contrast between their perfectly proportioned marble and plaster bodies and the diseased bodies of patients, whose fleshy exteriors and complex internal systems were revealed to students via scalpel and saw.

Casts of the *Venus* and *Apollo* in both medical institutions presented to an elite male audience idealized male and female bodies defined by human perfection. Integral to anatomical demonstrations, the *Venus* presented a female nude with a natural and idealized figure, while the male *Apollo* revealed attenuated musculature after the release of an arrow.<sup>24</sup> Their display exposed contradictions between the bodies of patients and the bodies of the classical ana-

sprang at once into life in a region not unlike our own New England —iron-bound, sterile, and free." Quoted in: "Professor Everett's Orations," *The North American Review* 20 (Boston: Cummings, Hilliard, and Co., 1825), 431.

<sup>23</sup> James Thacher, *American Medical Biography* (Boston: Richards and Lord, 1828), 1:35. A Harvard Medical School student wrote of the two classical casts: "the anatomical lecture which followed, delivered by John C. Warren ... always secured a crowd of eager students. The *Venus de Medici* and *Belvidere Apollo* (the first in marble, the second in plaster) stood sentinels at each side of the door, which he entered. A long table for the reception of any specimens or preparations which he designed to exhibit, and before which he stood when lecturing, a number of carefully prepared diagrams and models, were all that disturbed the simple character of the room." Warren, *John Collins Warren, M.D.*, 390.

<sup>24</sup> The *Venus de Medici* and *Apollo Belvedere* were common props for anatomical demonstrations and were often found in medical collections of the nineteenth century. The *Venus* would often be discussed in relation to the damage of corsets on female interior organs, while the *Apollo* demonstrated attenuated musculature. See Dr. Hayes Agnew, "The Relation of Social Life to Surgical Disease," in *Transactions of the American Surgical Association*, ed. J. Ewing Mears (Philadelphia: Printed for the Association, 1888), 6:2-3, which invokes the *Apollo* and *Venus* in demonstrating these social dangers. He wrote: "I have, however, some knowledge of human anatomy...when I look upon the masterpieces of the human form ... a *Belvidere Apollo* or a *Venus de Medici*, and contrast these... I am forced to admiration." Another example of the pairing of an *Apollo Belvedere* and *Venus de Medici* for anatomical exploration can be found in Dr. Joseph Kahn's 1863 handbook to his Anatomical Museum advertising life-size dissectible models the *Apollo Belvedere* and *Venus de Medici*. This handbook is in the

logues. Contrary to the genteel bodies of the membership at the Athenæum and the idealized bodies of the *Apollo* and *Venus*, the working class bodies used for demonstrations during College lectures or admitted to the public hospital for treatment were diseased and imperfect. The first patient treated at the Hospital in 1821 was a sailor with syphilis, which the admission record notes he contracted in New York, prompting one to ask if there was an ideal patient for Boston's public hospital.

The 1810 founding circular benevolently described the Hospital's ideal patient as: "an honest working man on a borderline income...decent women abandoned by intemperate husbands...the young apprentice...caught unprepared by accident or illness...[or] domestic servants who can scarcely be adequately attended if they are sick in their rooms."<sup>25</sup> However, when the hospital opened in 1821, patients had to apply for admission in writing, proving that they were literate, and could be turned away for "bad morals" or discharged for spitting, drinking, smoking, or swearing. Lists were kept of those admitted that noted name, address, and disease, making it easier to regulate the bodies of the ill working classes within the hospital and control the spread of disease outside the hospital. An indication of the conflicted benevolent goals of the institution and its administrators, the bodies of the Hospital's patients were regulated and contested.

These working class patients were operated on in the surgical dome of the Hospital, where resident surgeons opened bodies and cut away disease while lecturing to an audience of Harvard medical students seated in the amphitheater. From there, these students, educated in Classics and Rhetoric at Harvard, had a view of the classical cast of the *Apollo Belvedere* standing sentinel over the body of the exposed, working class patient, allowing for a studied physical contrast. The intellectual contemplation of this contrast could lead some viewers to the opinion that the modern medicine being demonstrated before their very eyes in the Hospital's operating room sought to create corporeal perfection in the bodies of working class patients.

An 1847 Southworth & Hawes daguerreotype, commissioned to mark the final operation by Dr. John Collins Warren before his retirement, presents a young boy anesthetized on the Massachusetts General Hospital amphitheater operating table (Figure 7). A founding member and benefactor of the Athenæum, Warren was Professor of Anatomy and Surgery at Harvard Medical College and a founder of Massachusetts General Hospital.<sup>26</sup> In the image, sunlight floods the middle ground, surgical instruments are laid out, a temporary wall encloses the scene, and the room is presented at an angle

from above. Taken from the theater's stadium seating, the daguerreotype presents a view of surgery as seen by the nineteenth-century medical audience. The identity of the patient has been lost, however Dr. Warren places his hand on the boy's thigh to imply the location of the coming surgery for treatment of necrosis of the tibia and looks up at the audience of student spectators and photographers. Warren's theatrical gesture reminds the viewer that this is an educational demonstration for a student audience and that the sleeping patient is actively being viewed. The patient's unconscious body thus becomes the subject of scrutiny in this picture, replicating photographically the repeated voyeurism of surgical demonstrations in the Hospital amphitheater and College lecture hall.

The *Apollo Belvedere*, donated to the Hospital by the famed orator, statesman, and Harvard Classics professor Edward Everett, is seen in the upper right corner of the daguerreotype and acts as a visual reminder of the ideal and healthy classical form (Figure 7, right detail). It stands in direct contrast to the ill and diseased body presented on the table. Augmenting the peculiarity of the image is the position of the patient's unruly body, which contrasts strongly with the classical contrapposto pose and healthy and muscular physique of the *Apollo*, along with the poses of the surgeons and assistants. The male patient, with a flushed, glistening face, is dressed in a small white gown but retains his long dark socks. His mouth is wide open from the Ether-induced sleep and his awkward body is too long for the operating table, making his sock-clad feet dangle off the edge (Figure 7, left detail).

Once again, as at the Athenæum, the contradictions between the legibility of the classical cast and its audience and the conflict between the unruly patient (or "ignoble vulgus") and the idealized classical body isolate a central aspect of the Hospital's mission. While certainly established to assist working class patients deemed worthy by administrators, the Hospital also sought to train young doctors—students at Harvard Medical College—who were educated in a classical vocabulary and the idealized aesthetics of the antique. For them, the inclusion of the *Venus de Medici* and *Apollo Belvedere*, first in the lecture hall and then in the surgical amphitheater of the hospital, functioned to remind them of the ideal corporeal subject—one who was proportioned, healthy, and vigorous. Indeed, the *Apollo Belvedere* remained on display in the Hospital amphitheater, where over 8,000 operations were performed between 1821-1868, and operated as an affirmation of the medical mission that these young men undertook (Figure 7). Each Harvard student was familiar with the Hippocratic oath, which begins: "Apollo

collection of the Wellcome Library, London (ICV No. 3368). Finally, British surgeon William Cheselden's *Osteographia* (1733) included engravings of the *Venus de Medici* and *Apollo Belvedere* as skeletons.

<sup>25</sup> *Massachusetts General Hospital: By-Laws, Rules and Regulations, Acts and Resolves* (Boston: James Cotter & Co., 1874), 19.

<sup>26</sup> Warren, *John Collins Warren, M.D.*, 316. Warren actually saw the *Venus de Medici* at the Uffizi and wrote of it on 5 March 1838: "Florence Gallery—Here the Venus de Medicis stands pre-eminent. She was dug up at Adrian's Village; was in fourteen pieces; was put together, so that there is nothing new but the hands. The figure is much more beautiful than it appears in the copies, and is very captivating."

Physician and Asclepius and Hygieia and Panacea and all the gods and goddesses, making them my witnesses, that I will fulfill according to my ability and judgment this oath."<sup>27</sup> In this manner, the idealized objectives of professional medicine and the healing arts were invoked by the presence of the *Apollo* in the operating theater, reminding students and surgeons of the corporeal ideal and of their professional oath.

In conclusion, Boston offers a unique case study for public cast collecting; the city's elite sought to demonstrate the validity of their self-proclaimed status as the "Athens of America," via the establishment of cultural institutions including the Boston Athenæum and Massachusetts General Hospital.<sup>28</sup> While the former was a private library open only to men of good breeding, the latter was established to provide medical training for Harvard students and care for the city's working classes. The two institutions, while functionally distinct, established social hierarchies through cultural performance; the status of the upper class was solidified by membership in the Athenæum or their role at the hospital, while the position of the middle and working class Bostonian was likewise defined when denied entrance to the Athenæum or admitted as a Hospital patient.<sup>29</sup>

As art historian Alan Wallach has argued, nineteenth-century American public art collections should be understood as a "recurring impulse to establish institutional bases for high art."<sup>30</sup> A significant vehicle for the performance of cultural capital at Boston institutions was the acquisition and display of casts of antique sculpture, including in both cases, the *Venus de Medici* and *Apollo Belvedere*. Considered the pinnacle of corporeal perfection, these reproductions communicated to an elite audience of medical students, professionals, connoisseurs, and scholars, affirming the viewer's intellectual and scholarly acumen and advertising that status to patients and visitors who were denied that knowledge. Installed in institutional spaces that were troublingly both public and private, the rhetoric surrounding the casts and the agendas of their institutional owners reveals the conflicted and contested nature of that middle-ground, both ideologically and physically. The casts on display at both institutions, while proclaimed as for the edification of all, ultimately acted for the edification of the few.

Boston University

<sup>27</sup> David J. Rothman, Steven Marcus, and Stephanie A. Kiceluk, eds., *Medicine and Western Civilization* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 261-262.

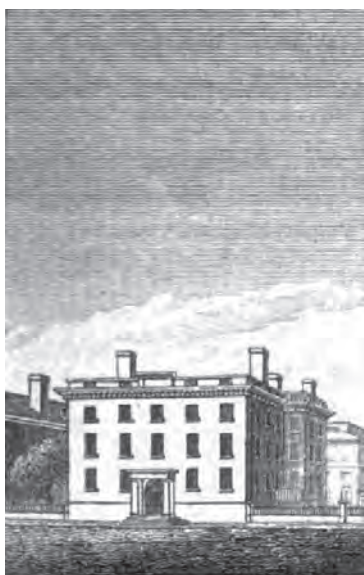
<sup>28</sup> These two institutions only serve as examples of the abundance of cultural institutions founded in ante-bellum Boston that sought to solidify Brahmin cultural capital: others include Perkins School for the Blind, 1829, Boston Museum of Natural History, 1830, Mt. Auburn Cemetery, 1831, and Boston Public Library, 1848. The term *Brahmin* was coined by Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1861 to describe Boston elites.

<sup>29</sup> Of course, the ideological agendas of these two institutions have drastically changed over the course of two centuries, as is evident by a broader consideration of the Boston Public Library, the Boston Athenæum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Massachusetts General Hospital as they operate today.

<sup>30</sup> Alan Wallach, *Exhibiting Contradiction: Essays on the Art Museum in the United States* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 11.



[above] Figure 1. George W. Boynton, "Plan of the City of Boston," 1844, engraving, 24 x 28 cm. Reproduction Courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library.



**ATHENÆUM.**

[left] Figure 2. Abel Bowen, "The Athenæum," c. 1828, wood engraving, image size: 6.5 x 5.5 cm. Published in *Bowen's Picture of Boston* (Boston: A. Bowen, 1829), illustration facing page 188.



MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL HOSPITAL.

[right] Figure 3. Annin & Smith, *Massachusetts General Hospital/Massachusetts Medical College*, c. 1821, hand colored engraving, sheet size: 27.3 x 21.9 cm. Boston Athenæum.



MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL COLLEGE.



Figure 4. Southworth & Hawes, "Statue of Roman Man," c. 1850, daguerreotype, whole plate: 20.5 x 15.4 cm. Courtesy of George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film.



Figure 5. "Apollo Belvedere at Massachusetts General Hospital," copy after the original in the Vatican Museum, plaster, height: 224 cm. Photo credit: Naomi Slipp.



Figure 6. *Venus de Medici*, copy of the original in the Uffizi, Florence, marble, 158.4 x 43.8 x 47.6 cm. Gift of Hannah Sawyer Lee, 1861, Boston Athenæum.





[above] Figure 7. Southworth & Hawes, "Untitled (Early Operation Using Ether)," 1847, daguerreotype, whole plate: 15 x 20 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Loan from the Massachusetts General Hospital Archives and Special Collections. Photo: Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

[left and right] Details of Figure 7.

