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## PHANTOM PAINS AND PROSTHETIC NARRATIVES

*From George Dedlow to Dante*

Alastair Minnis

*Yale University, Connecticut*



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# Phantom Pains and Prosthetic Narratives

## From George Dedlow to Dante

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Alastair Minnis  
*Yale University, Connecticut*

**Author for correspondence:** Alastair Minnis, [alastair.minnis@yale.edu](mailto:alastair.minnis@yale.edu)

**Abstract:** ‘George Dedlow’ is a fictional amputee invented by American Civil War surgeon Weir Mitchell, who coined the phrase ‘phantom limb pain’ to designate the sensations which seem to emanate from limbs that in reality are missing. Contemporary neuroscience holds that the brain encloses a schema which covers the whole body and asserts its unity, even if certain parts are missing. Reading backwards from Dedlow’s sufferings, I trace medieval precedents and parallels, focusing on Augustine and Dante, who subscribed to the notion of a ‘body in the soul’. Dante’s souls in purgatory self-prothesize with aerial phantoms as they long for the full embodiment which only the Resurrection can bring. Is a complete body necessary for personhood? And how can the gamut of human feelings be run if parts or indeed the entirety of one’s body does not exist? Those issues were as absorbing for medieval thinkers as they are for modern neuroscientists.

**Keywords:** pain, prosthesis, body schema, Augustine, Dante

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