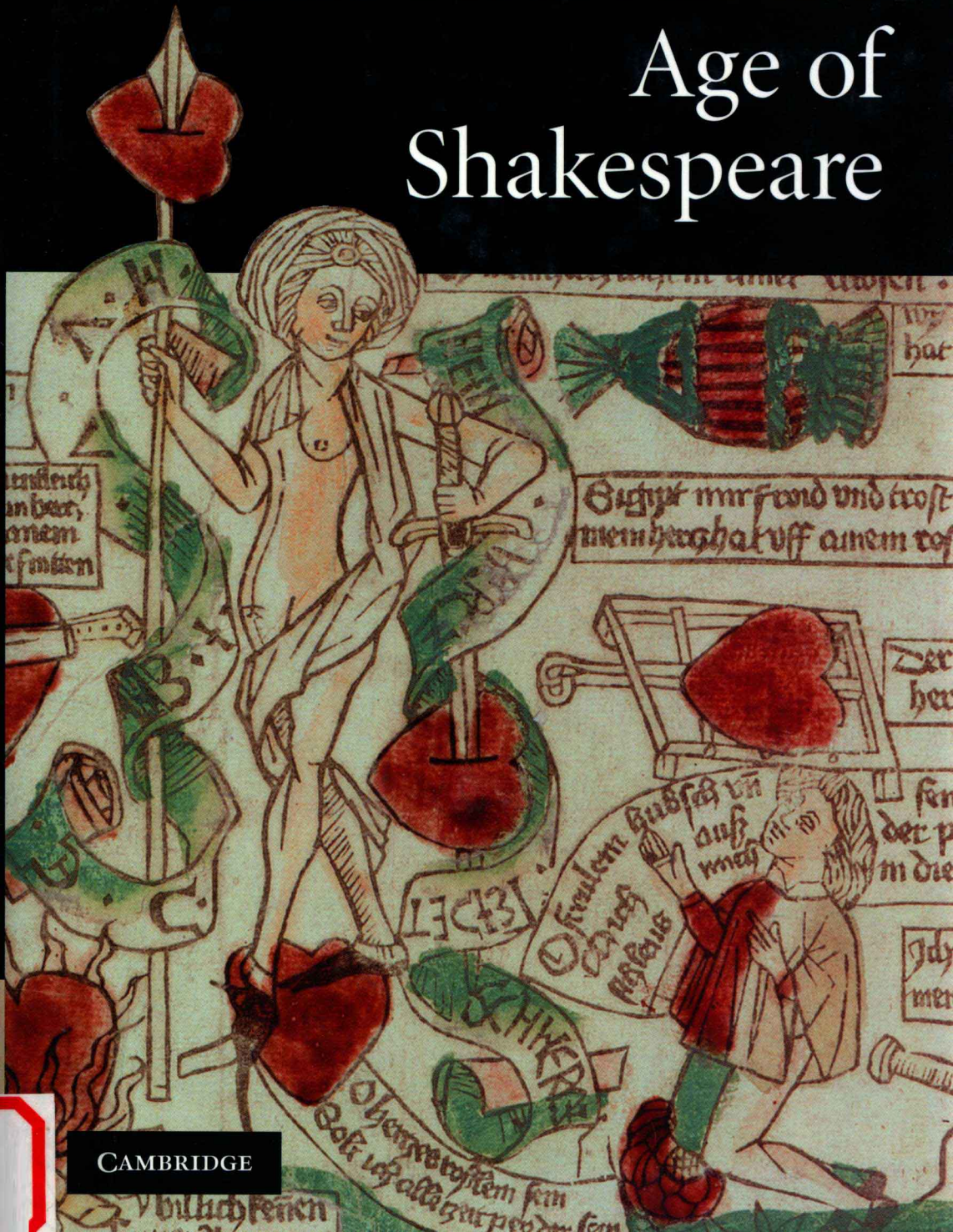
WILLIAM W. E. SLIGHTS

The Heart in the Age of Shakespeare



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THE HEART IN THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE

When Hamlet says he wears Horatio in his "heart of heart," he is claiming that the strongest bonds between people are forged, stored, and understood in the heart. *The Heart in the Age of Shakespeare* sets out to trace the sources and subsequent impact of Hamlet's conviction. The book presents the case that, by studying the interlocking anatomical, religious, and literary discourses of the heart between 1550 and 1650, we can open a new window on the culture that produced such works as *The Faerie Queene*, Catholic and Protestant emblem books, George Herbert's lyrics, and William Harvey's treatise on the circulation of the blood. By crossing several disciplinary boundaries and combining the material with the metaphorical, the book identifies a complex set of cardiological concerns in the dramatic works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

WILLIAM W. E. SLIGHTS is Professor Emeritus in the Department of English, University of Saskatchewan. He is the author of *Managing Readers: Printed Marginalia in English Renaissance Books* (2001) and *Ben Jonson and the Art of Secrecy* (1994), and has published widely in books and journals including *Shakespeare Survey* and *Renaissance Quarterly*. In 2007 he was the recipient of the Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies Lifetime Achievement Award.

Immortal Shakespeare! Still thy lips impart
The noblest comment on the human heart.
Elizabeth Barrett, *An Essay on Mind* (1826)

How to explain
that which has no state
but the state of grace
erotic music
touching places deep
and worn an evensong resonating
the open strings of the heart
that belong to the state of longing
Heather Pyrcz, "The Book of Longing" (2006)

Acknowledgments

Between 1991 and 1993 a dazzling exhibit mounted by the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art and titled "*El Corazón Sangrante* / The Bleeding Heart" toured seven cities in Central and North America. One was Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, where I saw it – repeatedly. The show was devoted to the image and icon of the bleeding heart, and it included Aztec artifacts, baroque paintings, and contemporary installations with hubcaps and dozens of pipettes of blood dripping down a blank wall. Individually and collectively these heart-based pieces had immense visual and mental impact. Here was an image that for centuries had stirred visceral terror, religious fervor, medical curiosity, and delicate beauty in works ranging from anonymous Catholic icons to the highly sexual images of Frida Kahlo.

But what struck me over and over again was the way these works resonated with literary texts by Shakespeare and his contemporaries that I had been lecturing and writing about for several decades. I found here a pastoral treatment of the bleeding heart that might have served to comfort a character from a John Webster play or a John Donne poem. Here too was a painting of a heart brutally ripped from an innocent victim, the perfect complement to lines by Marlowe and Shakespeare that echoed in my head as I stood in the gallery. To paraphrase Lady Macbeth, who would have thought the old man (Shakespeare, that is) to have so much blood in him? And so many hearts yearning and breaking and dancing and bursting? It would take me years to accumulate, sort, and understand all these hearts.

And then there were the ancillary hearts, the ones whose wit and humanity kept me going through the years of my research. Their creators deserve to be acknowledged. There was the scene in the animated Jim Carey film *The Mask* (1994) when the hero's heart stretched far out of his elastic breast as he first spotted his true love. And the peculiar Benetton advertisement that ran in *The New Yorker* (April 26, 1996) and elsewhere, showing three nearly identical (pigs', I'm assured) hearts labelled "WHITE," "BLACK," and "YELLOW" and followed by a page showing a little blonde

girl and a black girl with their arms around each other and another page with the manacled hands of a white and a black prisoner. Somehow the would-be consumer was to get from disemboweled hearts to interracial bonding and racial injustice. More relevant to the ageing heart researcher was Matt Gerberg's 1997 *New Yorker* cartoon in which a balding, paunchy man sits on an examination table while his stethoscope-wielding doctor says, "Good. Now start it up again." Finally, there was my favorite, the cover of a Routledge "Literary and Cultural Studies" catalogue that appeared in my mailbox in 1997 picturing a robed and haloed Elvis Presley revealing his flaming heart, complete with cross and thorns, while he raises his hand in benediction, presumably over those professors who might purchase the publisher's books. These were the late, indeed post, modern instances of the symbol and the reality I had chosen to pursue through the art, medicine, philosophy, and literature of the early modern period, and they did my heart good.

As I have traveled to museums and libraries over the past fifteen years in search of hearts, bleeding and whole, medical and religious, I have been helped by a great many institutions and individuals. For day-to-day help, the libraries of the University of Saskatchewan and Acadia University deserve repeated thanks. The Huntington Library and Art Gallery, the Folger Library, the British Library, the Yale Library of Medical History, the Osler Library at McGill University, and the Wellcome Institute have all provided me with helpful materials in a courteous and timely manner. Between June 21 and September 16, 2007, the Wellcome Collection mounted a sumptuous exhibition, curated by Emily Jo Sergant and James Peto and called simply "The Heart." The exhibition encompassed heart knowledge from ancient Egypt through the discoveries of Galen, Leonardo, and William Harvey to the pop songs, Valentine cards, and open-heart surgeries of our own time. The show reminded me of the pleasant hours I spent tracking down heart images in the Wellcome archives and of the persistent, ever-growing medical and cultural fascination with the heart in the twenty-first century.

I particularly want to thank Rick Bowers, Robert Erickson, and Albert Tricomi, who read entire drafts of the manuscript and made invaluable suggestions about everything from pertinent cartoon characters to omitted chapters. Others who have generously shared their knowledge about medieval and early modern history, emblems, poetry, science, and art include Doris Bietenholz (a fellow Saskatoonian who published her own heart book on Valentine's Day, 1995), Barbara Bowen, Jann Boyd, Steven Buhler, Peter Burnell, Richard Cunningham, Anthony Harding, Richard Hillman, Carole Levin, Yin Liu, Raymond Stephanson, Mark Stein, Lewis Stiles, Kevin

Whetter, and Kurt Wittlin. I was kindly invited to lecture on material from the book by the Renaissance Group at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the Body Project conference at the University of Saskatchewan, the Faculty Exchange Lecture Committee at the University of Regina, the Authors at Acadia series at Acadia University, and the English Lecture Series at Dalhousie University. For these invitations I wish to thank particularly Achsah Guibbory and Michael Shapiro, Len Findlay, Jeanne Shami and Ken Mitchell, Ralph Stewart, and Ronald Huebert.

An earlier version of Chapter 4 appeared as "The Narrative Heart of the Renissance" in *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* 26 (2002): 5–23, and Chapter 5 was published as "My Heart upon my Sleeve: Early Modern Interiority, Anatomy and Villainy" in *The Dalhousie Review* 85 (2005): 163–79. I am grateful for permission to reprint this material.

While writing the book, I have been helped in myriad ways by two first-rate scholars at the University of Saskatchewan, Shelley Woloshyn and Pamela Giles. Dr. Giles, with the help of her husband Craig Bowman, has tracked down and evaluated research materials, negotiated with libraries and galleries for permission to publish illustrations, spent hours checking quotations, and generated an index that I hope will serve readers well. The protracted labors of these good friends have certainly made this a better and more useful book. Any errors and infelicities are my own.

For providing me witty and rigorous feedback throughout the entire process of writing *The Heart in the Age of Shakespeare*, I reserve my deepest thanks for my family: Camille and Jessica Slights; Stephen, Madeleine, and Will Ahern. In the final years of its composition, Will and Madeleine have found my heart ready at a moment's notice to sing and dance with them.

I have benefited substantially in writing the book from funds awarded by the President's Research Fund at the University of Saskatchewan and from two generous grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I am proud to have been adopted by a university and a country that continues to support individual scholars in the pursuit of their intellectual passions and curiosities.

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CHAPTER I

A window on the heart

The satirist Lucian of Samosata (*c.* 125–180 CE) imagined how instructive it would be to gaze through a window in a man's breast that would reveal all the secrets of his heart. In Lucian's *Hermotimus* Momus, called upon to judge the human form constructed by Hephaestus, reproves the craftsman because "he had not made windows in his chest which could be opened to let everyone see his desires and thoughts and if he were lying or telling the truth."[1] This literal-minded approach to inadvertent self-revelation is, of course, intended to be humorous, but the idea that the heart is always open to scrutiny – especially to divine scrutiny – is prominent in both ancient and modern thought. Perpetual surveillance of the heart's motives serves as reassurance and as warning in the Bible: "For the worde of God *is* liuelie, & mightie in operation . . . and is a discerner of the thoghtes and the intentes of the heart."[2]

An analogous fantasy of physical and mental transparency is illustrated in a seventeenth-century Dutch emblem book called *Openhertighe Herten* (Open-Hearted Hearts) in the form of a heart with a mullioned window in it.[3] The emblematist offers a graphic representation of the ideal of human transparency in the eye of God. What God sees and mere humans can only labor to piece together from bits of external evidence – a glance, a grimace, an unguarded remark – is a coherent picture of a person's motives. To be able to spy into others' hearts and to read their desires and intentions was a powerfully attractive prospect for churchmen, politicians, and artists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Just exactly what would be found in the heart was notoriously difficult to predict, but any persons or institutions that

[1] Lucian, *Works*, trans. A. M. Harmon, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1959), 6: 299.

[2] Heb. 4: 12. I quote from *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*, intro. Lloyd E. Berry (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

[3] The emblem is reproduced in Mark van Vaeck, "The *Openhertight Herten* in Europe: Remarkable Specimens of Heart Emblematics," *Emblematica* 8 (1994), 278.

could gain a reputation for being discerners of the heart wielded enormous power.

That Charles I and his royal physician, William Harvey, were able to reach through a window in the side of a "*Noble* young Gentleman, *Son* and *Heire* to the honorable the *Vice-Count* of *Mountgomery* in *Ireland*," and touch his heart was much more than a scientific breakthrough. A quality of wonder infiltrates the precise record of their observations in Harvey's *Anatomical exercitations concerning the generation of living creatures* (London: J. Young for O. Pulleyn, 1653).[4] Harvey, who had studied a great many hearts in preparing his immensely influential treatise on the circulation of the blood, *De motu cordis*, a quarter of a century earlier, admits that he was "amazed at the novelty of the thing."[5] The thing had been incorrectly identified by other observers as Hugh Montgomery's lungs, opened to sight and touch through a removable metal plate that protected a hole in his left side caused by a childhood accident and kept perpetually open by an unhealed abscess. The king, fascinated by accounts he had heard, commanded Harvey to examine the young man when he passed through London on his way home from a continental tour. Montgomery cooperated fully:

> [H]e discovered all to me, and opened the void part of his *left side*, taking off that small *plate*, which he wore to defend it against any blow or outward injury. Where I presently beheld a vast *hole* in his *breast*, into which I could easily put my three Fore-fingers, and my Thumb; and at the first entrance I perceived a certain *fleshy part* sticking out, which was driven in and out by a reciprocal *motion*, whereupon I gently handled it in my hand. (*Exercitations*, 286)

By coordinating the "*rythme*" of the internal organ with the pulse in Montgomery's wrist, Harvey was able to determine conclusively that what he was handling was "no part of the *Lungs*, but the *Cone* or *Substance* of the *Heart*" (286). This, he further decided, was a spectacle fit for a king, the very king whom he had described as "the heart of the state" in his dedication to *De motu cordis* and who had since been beheaded.

> I brought the Young Gentleman himself to our late *King*, that he might see, and handle this strange and singular Accident with his own *Senses;* namely, the *Heart*

[4] Harvey's fascinating account of cardiac manipulation occurs on pp. 285–7 (quotation from p. 285) of the *Exercitations* and has been mined for its biographical revelations in Sir Geoffrey Keynes's *Life of William Harvey* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 155–7 and for its political allegory in Jonathan Sawday's "The Transparent Man and the King's Heart," in *The Arts of 17th-Century Science: Representations of the Natural World in European and North American Culture*, ed. Claire Jowitt and Diane Watt (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 12–21.

[5] Harvey, *Anatomical exercitations*, 286. Subsequent references will appear parenthetically.

and its *Ventricles* in their own *pulsation*, in a young, and sprigtly Gentleman, without offense to him: Whereupon the *King* himself consented with me, That the *Heart* is deprived of the *Sense* of *Feeling*. For the Party perceived not that we touched him at all, but meerly by seeing us, or by the *sensation* of the outward *skin*. We likewise took notice of the *motion* of his *Heart*. (*Exercitations*, 287)

Jonathan Sawday construes the phrase "the *Heart* is deprived of the *Sense* of *Feeling*" to mean that Aristotle had been wrong to tout the heart as the seat of sensation and that Descartes was right to call it a purely mechanical pump. The collapse of Charles's (the "late" king's) mystique of monarchy in 1649 becomes allegorically joined in Sawday's account with the harsh demystification of the heart by mid-century scientific probing:

> Peering into the human body, we encounter an organ (the heart) disrobed of its former majesty, unfeeling and blindly pumping. The dense web of allegory, resemblance and metaphor which had surrounded the heart in Galenic and Aristotelian physiology has collapsed as completely as the quasi-divinity which had surrounded the King's political *persona* prior to 1649.[6]

But this story of the complete collapse of the metaphorical vitality of the heart is considerably weakened by texts and graphic images that we will consider shortly. What we can safely conclude from Harvey's narrative is that the heart's majesty remained "amaz[ing]" even in the hands of potential Doubting Thomases reaching into a living human body. At the very least, the heart remained the "minister of State" to the Soul and the "Queen Regent of the animal body," as Harvey (quoting Fabricius) says (*Exercitations*, 314). Even when the rule of the monarchy had been temporarily suspended, the regal pageant of the heart continued to be visible through windows that were both metaphoric and literal. As Harvey says later in his book on generation, "we may conclude (with *Aristotle*) That the *Heart*, and not (with the *Physitians*) that the *Brain* is the first *Principle*" (*Exercitations*, 348). Understanding this first principle of life was the responsibility of all monarchs and their subjects.

Elizabeth I's reputed disinclination "to make windows into men's souls" notwithstanding, Shakespeare's age is characterized by fierce competition to read and to control people's hearts. Dominant and emergent institutions – churches, schools, courts – sought to govern the hearts of the nation by radically reconfiguring inherited medieval constructions of social identity. The heart became the locus for the private desires that keep identity in flux, as well as for the sociopolitical affiliations and loyalties that provide a

[6] Sawday, "The Transparent Man," 19–20.

degree of stability in human communities. In early modern England, the battle lines were continuously being redrawn between the Old Religion and the New, between prior formulations of the "natural" body and fresh observations of its structure and functions, between established literary forms and new ones. These lines converged in the amatory, political, and devotional heart, where difficult choices were always being made, former alliances abandoned, new forms of practice embraced, and new loves declared. The argument I wish to make is that our habit of scholarly compartmentalization obscures the subtle permeability of intellectual, bodily, and spiritual life in the age of Shakespeare, and, specifically, that we can best understand the early modern heart as the primary point of connection between felt interiority and the systems that helped to make sense of the social and physical universe.

Recovering the full range of the heart's significance for the age of Shakespeare entails learning how its structure and motions were reconceived from ancient natural philosophy by the Renaissance anatomists, how Roman Catholic iconography of the heart was rewritten and redrawn by the Protestant reformers, and how the amatory narratives of the Middle Ages were reinterpreted in the lyric and dramatic poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The many claims made in the early modern period regarding the powers and prerogatives of the heart need to be viewed within a matrix of social and intellectual exchange and as parts of a larger historical process. First, we must know about the inherited systems of thought that defined the physiological and spiritual functions of the heart in early modernity. The main sources of these ideas were (1) the ancient natural philosophers and their redactors, and (2) the Bible and its medieval exegetes. I propose to look at these sometimes contradictory conceptions of the heart and then at the early modern innovations that caused these ideas to change in the period between roughly 1550 and 1650.

The first thing to insist on is that the part cannot be understood apart from the whole system in which it functions, be it physiological, instructional, doctrinal, or poetic. Rather than continuing to study what one collection of essays calls "the body in parts," we need to reintegrate the early modern heart back into the systems that made it intelligible at the time.[7] By far the most influential of these postulated that the body is governed by four humors – blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black

[7] *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997). Many of the essays in this important collection incorporate the wider perspective that I am advocating, but some readers have construed its title too literally.

bile – which function in sympathetic harmony (at least in the healthy body) with the elements of earth, air, fire, and water, which in turn can be symptomatically described as cold, dry, hot, moist, or some combination of these properties. All physiological states and alterations could be conceived within a mandala constructed from these interlocking tetrads. Gender and generation, health and illness, inherited traits and individual inclinations could be accounted for by this firm yet admirably flexible system of thought. The role of the heart in the scheme was crucial. As generator of heat and distributor of refined fluids and *spiritus* to the rest of the body, the heart kept the body alive and well regulated. Its initial beating signaled the start of life, and its cessation marked the moment of death. Though it could not ordinarily be seen or touched and still be able to perform its vital functions, it was the wellspring of life and health. While early modern conceptions of the heart are nearly always inflected with metaphors of spiritual health or corruption, it was the hydraulic, pneumatic, and caloric forces propelling the dynamic humoral system that provided the vocabulary that natural philosophers had long called upon as literal descriptions of the body and its functions.

Well before Christian theologians began their long and careful colloquy on the meaning of scriptural depictions of the heart and its devotional functions, the natural philosophers of antiquity had identified the heart as the vital center of the humoral body. In antiquity, the study of animal bodies, including human ones, was a subset of the amorphous discipline of natural philosophy. An organ such as the heart was not just observed (in "lower" animals) and described, it was made the subject of intense debate. Why did all-creating Nature build the heart with two main chambers (the auricles were often not considered to be integral parts of the heart), thick walls containing few nerves, and an arterial connection to the lungs? Why did the heart attract blood and *spiritus*? How did this organ process and distribute nourishment and air to the entire body? Aristotle's *De generatione animalium* and *De partibus animalium*, a number of Hippocratic texts, and Galen's *De anatomicis administrationibus* and *De usu partium* address these and similarly challenging questions through strenuous deductive and inductive arguments and debates with earlier authorities. A representative passage from Galen's treatise *On the Usefulness of the Parts* (*De usu partium*) describes the ways that Nature has "managed" the design and distribution of the veins and arteries of the heart, giving some of them far thicker walls ("tunics") than others in order to transmit blood in different forms and amounts.

All these facts, then, are weighty proof that Nature did well to make two kinds of vessels, and besides these there are also the considerations that the arteries, which must be constantly in motion, need strong tunics, that a tunic cannot be strong and thin at the same time, and that if, on the other hand, it is made thick, many parts of the body cannot be properly nourished. So Nature has managed all these things excellently both throughout the body of the animal and especially in the heart itself by contriving communication between veins and arteries through those small orifices. This is the reason why the vein [the vena cava] inserted into the heart is larger than the one [*a. pulmonalis*] issuing from it, even though the latter receives blood fused by the heat of the heart. Since a considerable quantity of blood is taken over through the central partition and its perforations into the left ventricle, there is good reason why the vein [*a. pulmonalis*] inserted into the lung is smaller than the one [the vena cava] that introduces the blood into the heart.[8]

The language of logical argument ("weighty proof"; "This is the reason why") transforms sporadically observed phenomena into a coherent, though not always accurate, defense of natural necessity. In this case, Nature cannot quite be shown to manage the movement of blood through a perforated *septum ventriculorum* or central wall since, as the sixteenth-century Flemish anatomist Andreas Vesalius was to argue repeatedly in his lectures and published texts, no such "perforations" exist within the heart. Still, Galen's opinion, or, rather, his persuasive argumentation on this and other matters, remained in the ascendancy until microscopic magnification resolved the issue in the late seventeenth century.

The ancients were drawn to debating not only the structure and function of the heart but also its relation to the soul. The trope of *profundity* emerged early and persistently as a defining quality of philosophical truth. Knowing the depths of natural bodies, not just their outward forms, was the hallmark of genuine value in this area of human endeavor. In the study of "man," no part was considered more profound than the heart, seat of the intangible truths of faith (the *invisibilia*) and the original instigator of corporeal motion. Aristotle, the most widely revered and imitated of the natural philosophers in the early modern period, postulated a soul animated by the heart. In his *On the Soul* and *On the Parts of Animals*, he is concerned to describe precisely what is *not* visible to the eye. He defines *anima*, the force that animates all creatures, in terms of substance, location, and movement but never by visual images. He eventually locates *anima* in the brain, but most of its functions depend upon the heart. *Pneuma*, the refined air that sustains the soul, is produced by the heart and distributed

[8] Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, trans. Margaret Tallmadge May (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 1: 324.