The Narrative Heart of the Renaissance

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Résumé : *Les fictions de tels écrivains que Boccace, Dante, Shakespeare et Harvey ont été influencées par la redécouverte par les anatomistes de la Renaissance des documents de l'Antiquité sur la dissection, ainsi que par des redéfinitions théologiques du cœur comme le site d'intériorité spirituelle. Ces représentations diverses du cœur apportent de façon paradoxale du réconfort et de la terreur à la fois, en juxtaposant l'incertitude spirituel et le corps matériel. On en obtient un aperçu de la signification de la condition humaine dans un monde de plus en plus perturbé par l'avènement de la science médicale moderne.*

It is extraordinarily difficult to imagine living in an age whose strategies for coping with the vagaries of the human body were so different from our own. Heart transplants and quadruple bypasses were unimaginable to people living in Renaissance England, people who had only the most rudimentary grasp of preventive medicine, corrective surgery, and epidemiology, and none at all of biochemistry. Although much had been written about various parts of the body — notably, for my purposes, the heart — there was little diagnostic consistency and still less agreement about remedies when something went wrong. When Renaissance anatomists began to revive and extend the ancients' protocols for dissecting the human body, when natural philosophers began to reconceive the systemic functions of our internal organs, and when Protestant theologians began to redefine the heart as a locus for spiritual inwardness, society had to undergo a series of profound mental and cultural adjustments. These adjusted conceptions and circumstances were amply reflected in the prominent positioning of the heart in English Renaissance narratives.

Often enough the heart had its own story to tell about the experience of being human in a proto-scientific age. Those stories were solidly grounded in the legacy of ancient philosophers, medieval artists, and Renaissance medical practitioners, but they went far beyond these beginnings to register the collective trauma of an age increasingly dedicated to anatomizing the human body and the mysteries of the heart. The impact of the anatomical Renaissance on the narrative discourses of the period was often terrifying, though there were also sustaining comforts to be found in the heart stories of the past. To become familiar with these narratives and their distinctively Renaissance retellings is to understand something of what it meant to have a heart — that is, to be human — in a world increasingly perturbed by the advent of what was to become modern medical science.

Renaissance England inherited a distinguished classical tradition of representing the heart as the mainspring of life and nature's best evidence that the gods had lavished all their care on humankind. The most influential texts of natural philosophy all single out the heart for special comment.¹ For Plato the heart was the source of life-producing heat and passion, and its action was made to conform in the Platonic system to the will of the gods and the three parts of the soul. Aristotle located the vital functions of the animal soul in the heart, which, for him, was far and away the most important of the organs, the first to be created and the last to die. Galen followed Plato in locating spiritual and emotive vitality in the heart, though he assigned the rational and nutritive functions to the brain and liver, respectively. A complicating factor in the Galenic scheme is that blood is always being burned up and replaced, while other fluids vie for ascendancy in the humoral body. According to Robert A. Erickson, the result was "a fragile, unstable, vulnerable body."² Nevertheless, this model, so often represented by natural philosophers of the ancient, medieval, and Renaissance periods, generally joins heart and soul in a harmonious union. This philosophical harmonization of heart and soul, though marked by disagreements and distinctions, was not directly contradicted by the writings of the Renaissance anatomists from Vesalius and Fabricius to Harvey.

Besides being innovators in the field of anatomical knowledge and medical procedure, the Renaissance anatomists thought and wrote with great care about the relation of their own discoveries to past philosophical systems. They were deliberately repeating, reviewing, and reinterpreting the anatomical experiments of the classical past.³ Their public demonstrations of dissection, performed on human and animal subjects, provoked intense curiosity. In some quarters this curiosity produced deep respect for doctors of anatomy and medicine, who trained at such centers as Padua and Leyden, then practiced in London. A significant segment of the English populace,

however, responded to invasive anatomical procedures with fear and revulsion. Municipal governments throughout Europe had for many years enforced strict controls on the protocols of dissection in an attempt to curb such reactions, but the poetry, and especially the drama, of the English Renaissance suggests that such controls were never entirely efficacious.⁴ The art of the dissectionist, whether the university professor or the common barber-surgeon, never quite escaped derogatory comparisons with the art of the magician. While body studies in the period were part of what Keith Thomas calls “the decline of magic,” there remained a strongly negative cultural residue in this branch of knowledge.⁵ Interfering with the motive forces within the noblest of God’s creations, whether physically or spiritually, was always a sensitive business, and the stories that persisted in the philosophical, medical, theological, and poetic discourses of the heart in England provide an important measure of the widely perceived threat to personal integrity associated with the anatomical Renaissance.

In the Christian tradition, the heart is the most prominent metaphor for human spirituality. The biblical heart is searched, purified, and uplifted. It is the chief repository of the knowledge of God and the chief instrument of the higher love. The injunction to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart” is repeated in Deuteronomy, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It also features prominently in the *Book of Common Prayer*. As early as the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux’s prayers to *Cor Jesu dulcissimum* (the very sweet heart of Jesus) had helped to establish the Devotion of the Sacred Heart within the Church of Rome. The most direct access to Christ’s heart provided by scriptural and early iconographic traditions was through the wound made in His side at the time of the Crucifixion. For a devout Catholic, kneeling before a crucifix, this most conspicuous of the Savior’s wounds was not just a window of observation but a door for entry into the divine flesh. The fatally penetrated Sacred Heart of Jesus was complemented in Catholic iconography by representations of the agonized heart of the *Mater dolorosa*, dispensing life-giving milk, tears, and blood from the breast of the Mother of God. Images of this kind proved to be inspiring to Christian believers but deeply troubling to Protestant reformers in early modern England, where there was a concerted effort to transform the heart from a place of explicit suffering into a site of individual meditation.

In order to gauge the traumatic impact of anatomical instruction and practice on late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, I will look particularly at narratives that involve cutting the heart and shedding life-blood. I begin with two very different, representative texts regarding the human heart, one fourteenth-century Italian, the other biblical. The first captures the brutal, negative impact of cardiectomy and the second the

positive, inspirational potential of invading the heart. They record the poles of cultural response to the heart in the Renaissance.

Boccaccio's *Decameron* includes the story of the incestuously driven Prince Tancred sending his daughter Ghismonda the heart of her clandestine lover, Guiscardo, in a golden chalice. The betrayed girl adds her copious tears and a vial of poison to her lover's blood, drinks off the fatal mess, and mounts her bed to await death, pressing his heart to her breast.⁶ The spectacle is exceedingly grisly, parodically religious, and deliberately eroticized. It suggests, among other things, a strange devotion to the erotics of the innards and the futility of suppression in the affairs of the heart.

A second representative selection, this one from the Geneva Bible (1560), associates the cutting of flesh with spiritual amelioration: "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and harden your necks no more."⁷ As John Donne explains in his sermon preached at St. Dunstan's on New Year's day, 1624/5, this verse is concerned with purifying the profoundest recesses of the inner self, the heart, where the word of God is imprinted on man's most tender flesh. But that private, interior place becomes, in this odd injunction, the penis as well, suggesting that the discourse of sacred interiority is simultaneously the discourse of sexual privacy and male initiation.⁸ The compelling point for me is that both these texts, and many like them in the early modern period, turn on the struggle to conceal but also to reveal, to protect but also to display and touch, inner spaces that are at once sacred and sexual. The display of the bleeding heart, which occurs in such Elizabethan plays as *Cambises*, reaches orgiastic levels of display in the theater of Jacobean and Caroline England. Extravagant, often mad, forms of inwardness in this drama seem to require equally extravagant acts of evisceration that are at once titillating and repugnant. These works reflect more than a taste for theatrical sensationalism. They are complex responses to a narrative tradition encompassing sacred and secular hearts and to the quest for new anatomical knowledge.

The literature of the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance is replete with images of the adored and agonizing heart. Poets invested the heart with metaphoric life apart from, and far beyond, that of the rest of the body. There is ample evidence in *Tristan and Isolde*, Dante's *Vita Nuova*, and Petrarch's *Canzoniere* that, during the period from the twelfth to the fourteenth century, the heart emerged as a fully detachable sign of amorous passion, one capable of sustaining both negative and positive associations. For example, the opening of the third paragraph-section of the *Vita Nuova* presents a dream vision in which a lordly, white-robed figure offers Beatrice Dante's heart, so that she may eat it:

I seemed to see in his arms a person asleep, naked except that she seemed to me lightly wrapped in a crimson cloth; one whom I, regarding with great attention, recognized as the lady of the salutation [*i.e.*, Beatrice], who the day before had deigned to greet me. In one of his hands he appeared to hold something all aflame, and he seemed to say to me these words: “Vide cor tuum” [“Behold your heart”]. And after he had waited awhile, he appeared to waken her who slept; and he so constrained her in his way that he made her eat this thing ablaze in his hand, which she consumed hesitatingly.⁹

After the lady ascends to the heavens, Dante wakes, feeling inspired to write a sonnet addressed to those poets who have written of love. The vision of the beloved constrained to eat of the poet’s flaming heart is presented as terrifying and baffling. At the same time, the themes of annunciation, ascension, and inspiration woven into the story lend a decidedly uplifting tone to Dante’s dream and its aftermath. The sacrifice of the lover’s heart in the ritual eating of flesh is, as Milad Doueihi argues, Dante’s initiation into the mysteries of his poetic vocation.¹⁰ What moment could be more positive than this in the poet’s spiritual autobiography? Still, the terror of heart excision and consumption throws something of a pall over the episode and indicates a tragic direction that English poets and playwrights were to pursue with what at times seems ghoulish persistence.

The terrible act of cutting the heart is often associated metaphorically with the brutal honesty required by religious self-scrutiny. Returning for a moment to the phrase from Deuteronomy, we can see that circumcision, the ritual act of purifying the flesh at its male reproductive source, can encompass the editorial act of expunging all unworthy matter from what was commonly referred to as the book or tables of the heart.¹¹ Insofar as the heart is the place where faith is reproduced and inscribed, it resembles the organ of sexual generation.¹² The extravagant metaphoric gesture of circumcising the heart came to exemplify not only the ritual marking of Jewish males but the cleansing of flesh and spirit also figured in Christ’s passion. The metaphor and the spiritual narrative that it epitomizes are both torturing and tortured. It is the kind of complex metaphor that Donne used in his poems to expand the boundaries of religious and amatory experience, and in the biblical context it has special force. The idea of circumcising the heart conveys with extraordinary immediacy the need for lacerating honesty and ritual marking in explorations of the spiritual self.¹³ The symbolic suppression of the desires of the flesh continues to involve the presence of the flesh.

A parallel narrative of the suppression of individual desire, this time in the service of the state, unfolds on the English Renaissance stage. Marlowe’s Tamburlaine feels compelled to penetrate any body that gets in his way. He commands his horsemen to drive their spears through the four Damascan

virgins; he mummifies the dead Zenocrate; and he exchanges the following threats with the caged, starving Bajazeth:

Bajazeth. I could
Willingly feed upon thy blood-raw heart.
Tamburlaine. Nay, thine own is easier to come by. Pluck out that,
And 'twill serve thee and thy wife. (4.4.11–14)¹⁴

Such utterances supplement the physical violence of both parts of the play, as the unrestrained tyrant of the East extends his military might with non-stop threats of yet more bloodshed. The sneering invitation to Bajazeth to turn his warrior's heart into a convenient meal is just one of a series of heart attacks that recur with increasing frequency in the second part of the play: "our murdered hearts have strained forth blood" (2.4.123); "rip thy bowels and rend out thy heart" (3.5.121); "our bleeding hearts, / Wounded and broken" (5.3.161); "our hearts all drown'd in tears of blood" (5.3.214). The heart is the target of violent action in all of these phrases. Here, as elsewhere in Marlowe, the state demands from its adherents as well as its enemies the ultimate sacrifice of heart's blood. A major crisis arises for Tamburlaine in Part 2, when one of his primary supporters, his son Calyphas, reveals cowardly tendencies and is branded his father's chief enemy. The ambivalence of the heart — stalwart in battle, tender in affection, remorse, and suffering — takes its toll on a tyrannical father, who mainly experiences the aggressive urges. When he slays his flesh and blood, his own end is not far away.

A similar situation involving a father's aggression against his own child arises in *Titus Andronicus*, when Rome's most revered military hero commands his ravished, tongueless, handless daughter,

... get some little knife between thy teeth,
And just against thy heart make thou a hole,
That all the tears of thy poor eyes let fall
May run into that sink, and soaking in,
Drown the lamenting fool in sea-salt tears. (3.2.16–20)

Lavinia eventually perishes from a real thrust to the heart, administered by her father in Act 5, the fatal mixture of blood and tears having taken its toll on behalf of honor and the state. A similar ritual becomes an orgy of blood-lust in Ben Jonson's *Sejanus His Fall* (1603) when the heart of the fallen Roman prince is claimed by the mob as a souvenir, along with his liver and toes. The despised heart of Tiberius's former favorite and almost-son loses all distinction among his other, equally inconsequential body parts in this ritual run amok. Even in plays such as *Titus* and *Sejanus* that are not

concerned with the romantic potential of the heart, betrayal of and by parental affection overtakes military and political prowess and devours the heart. The demands of the state swallow up individual agency, and the heart's desires are undone. This pattern is worked out, for example, by George Chapman in *Bussy d'Ambois* (1604) and by John Ford in *The Broken Heart* (1627–31). The drama becomes a rich breeding ground for spectacularly destructive invasions of the inner sanctum of the stoic heart.

Actual invasions of the human breast were carried out by soldiers, murderous outlaws, executioners, and those skilled in anatomy. As guns became the weapon of choice for invading armies and outlaws, the anatomists and executioners were left to practice the rituals that to some extent insulated their respective professions.¹⁵ The anatomists carried out their studies in public arenas, exploring interior spaces that had formerly been represented only metaphorically but which were now being revealed literally in dissection theatres and illustrated graphically in such influential texts as Andreas Vesalius's *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem*, published in Basel in 1543, and in the so-called anatomical fugitive sheets. This graphic material, though at times aestheticized by the classical poses of the dissected bodies, still contained an element of the grotesque reminiscent of the brutal flayings and eviscerations performed by state executioners and torturers.

While it is impossible to say with any certainty that a poet like Edmund Spenser was directly influenced by the anatomists of his time, he definitely made the ghoulish pursuit of knowledge harbored within the human heart central to the story of Britomart's daring rescue of Amoret from the toils of the enchanter, Busirane, in Book III of *The Fairie Queene*. The defilement and subsequent rescue are prepared for by the processional figure of a "dolefull Lady" with "deathes owne image figurd in her face" (III.xii.19), called back to life only to be further tormented by Despight and Cruelty.¹⁶ The lady's "brest all naked, as net ivory" (Stanza 20) has been laid open and her heart placed in a basin and pierced with a "deadly dart":

At that wide orifice her trembling hart
Was drawne forth, and in silver basin layd,
Quite through transfixt with a deadly dart,
And in her bloud yet steeming fresh embayd:
And those two villeins, which her steps upstayd,
When her weake feete could scarcely her sustaine,
And fading vitall powers gan to fade,
Her forward still with torture did constraine,
And evermore encreased her consuming paine. (III.xii.21)

Here certainly is the body in pain — silenced, subjected to the penetrating gaze of all who choose to look, upheld by her cruel captors simply to prolong her suffering. Britomart witnesses all this suffering, then encounters an identical spectacle in the form of the imprisoned Amoret just ten stanzas later, on the second day of her vigil in Busirane's enchanted house. She watches in horror while the enchanter "figures" his spells to enslave the virgin Amoret to his lusts:

And her before the vile Enchaunter sate,
Figuring straunge characters of his art,
With living bloud he those characters wrate,
Dreadfully dropping from her dying hart,
Seeming transfixed with a cruell dart,
And all perforce to make her him to love. (III.xii.31)

The spell-binder writes his mysterious characters in Amoret's heart's blood, but we are initially assured that her innermost being is proof against his blandishments: "A thousand charmes he formerly did prove; / Yet thousand charmes could not her stedfast heart remove" (Stanza 31). Britomart finally intervenes and gains the upper hand, in the process being wounded herself in her "snowie chest" (Stanza 33).¹⁷ Before she can deliver Busirane's death blow, Amoret enjoins her to spare his life, "For else her paine / Should be remediesse, sith none but hee, / Which wrought it, could the same recure againe" (Stanza 34). Under the female knight's careful scrutiny and threat of execution, Busirane retrieves his book of spells and begins "his charmes back to reverse" (Stanza 36), deconstructing the false charms of his forcible seduction and mending the wounds in Amoret's virgin flesh and her fainting (though still pure) spirit. By rehearsing his "bloody lines" of "sad verse," Busirane is made to re-cant the unholy power of his former incantations to a god of love somehow made incarnate in the maiden's heart.

Spenser's enchanter acts out of a curious combination of hostility and fervent adoration, which, I would argue, exposes the dangerous motives that can underlie attempts to delve into the heart's secret knowledge. Lacking faith that love can be moved by conventional rhetorical means such as praise or prayer, he assaults the resisting center of passion in Amoret. His ritual incantations over her heart, involving imprisonment and the writing of arcane text with her blood, must have been efficacious in some way, since he is required to undo what he has achieved, to relieve the pain he has inflicted, to release her from the contract he has inscribed in her heart's blood. Discussing the potential dangers of the word as Spenser represents them, Kenneth Gross speaks of a "deadly symbiosis that reading and writing entails."¹⁸ Through the invasion of Amoret's heart, the inner secret of love

is legibly written. Once it has been so materialized, it can be figured out — traced, that is — with Busirane's magic figures. Composed in this way, the power of figures becomes terrifying, mesmerizing, arresting. The horror and arousal are as intense in Spenser's reader as in his would-be iconoclast, Britomart. The warning seems to be directed against the erotics of iconography itself, especially as it is embodied in Busirane's allegorical statue of Cupid: "Ah man beware, how thou those darts behold."¹⁹ The blind boy can strike the viewer blind; the words inscribed by the phallic dart are as treacherous as the image itself.

It is possible, then, that Busirane's vicious attack on the shrine of Amoret's heart is Spenser's allegorical recapitulation of the struggle over iconographic representation, especially Catholic icons of the tortured heart. Certainly, the struggle for dominance of the symbolic heart had engaged the minds of some of the most powerful men of his generation, such men as Somerset and Cranmer, who were major players in the Protestant iconoclasm debates of the sixteenth century. Spenser's explicit depiction of the operation that reveals Amoret's heart links the traumas of the new anatomical science with the superstitious iconography of the Old Religion.

Tracing the trajectory of the violated heart into the seventeenth century, we find even more radical forms of iconoclasm than in Spenser. Traditional values are regularly mocked and desecrated in the English drama of the period. John Fletcher's bizarre tragicomedy *The Mad Lover* uses the threat of cutting into the heart to dismantle Marlovian heroic values along with Spenserian courtly ones. A bragging soldier named Memnon returns triumphant from the wars and offers the youthful Princess Calis his heart on a plate — or, rather, in a cup. At first this "mad" lover insists that his heart contains true love made visible: "I would you had it in your hand sweet Ladie / To see the truth it bears ye" (1.2.89–90).²⁰ Before long it has been transmuted into a token of "the honour and the valour of its owner" (3.2.62). But honor and valor are precisely the virtues rendered irrelevant in a post-war world where lust for the princess-prize drives out any sense of military loyalty.

Fletcher's play oddly blends the anatomical and medical with the farcical in its representations of the heart. While Memnon's messenger is delivering a message to the princess about the gift of his commander's heart, she callously asks her attending ladies, "what should we doe wo't? dance it?" The suggested alternative is to "Drie it and drinke it for the wormes" (2.3.16–17). The proposals to dance a jig with the bloody heart or to use it to concoct a traditional home remedy for intestinal parasites indicate the material depths to which the romantic image has declined.²¹ Calis's attendants jokingly recommend that, since the weather is unusually warm, the extracted heart should be perfumed, wrapped in a napkin, and preserved in

a gold goblet to retard spoilage, chief enemy to the anatomically curious from time immemorial. Memnon, the would-be heart donor, becomes a figure of ridicule, even as he tries to construct himself as the ecstatic high priest, sacrificing himself on the altar of love (3.4.58–60).²² Just before the surgeon is contracted to perform the cardiectomy, Memnon's brother convinces him to substitute another man's heart. The anatomically extravagant gesture is thus cynically emptied of romantic significance. While Fletcher avoids the horror of displaying the removal of Memnon's heart, he permits the literal treatment of human interiority to obliterate the tenderness of the lover and the courage of the soldier, both formerly located in the heart.

When he wrote *The Mad Lover*, Fletcher knew he could represent the potent mix of horror and absurdity in his main character simply by literalizing the gestures of generations of heart-struck lovers. Embedded in the heart image he found the most potentially disturbing indicator of the self in extremity, including the extremities of terror, eroticism, and foolishness. Memnon goes mad in his heart, not his head. That is what makes his story the perfect vehicle for Fletcher's complex analysis of the collapse of heroic and generic purity. What is hidden at the secret heart of this play is not an integral self but a travesty of conventional gesturing, a bittersweet glimpse of a once great but now shrivelled heroic heart. This literalized heart represents for Fletcher not just a comic turn but also a tragic loss, the loss of a world adequate to its heroes and, hence, the loss of the heroes themselves.

The pattern of evisceration as a show of power diminished to a spectacle of futility is most readily apparent in John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633). Annabella's heart is the target of grotesque emotional and, finally, physical abuse. It is identified with the fraternally impregnated womb, ripped out of the murdered girl, and presented by her brother on a dagger's point as fit fare for a banquet:

You came to feast, my lords, with dainty fare;
I came to feast too, but I digg'd for food
In a much richer mine than gold or stone
Of any value balanc'd; 'tis a heart,
A heart, my lords, in which mine is entombed.²³

At the moment of Giovanni's phallic thrust into his sister's heart, the horizontal structures of kinship and the vertical structures of power clash. Annabella's heart/womb/tomb has fallen prey not only to the sin of incest but also to the imperial conqueror who comes to worship at, and finally to destroy, the rich, illicit shrine of the female heart.²⁴

In considering the kinds of cultural work being accomplished by these violent acts of evisceration, it is worth asking whether they present a moral perspective on the fragility of the body and the need to defend it against assault. Alternatively, we may ask whether playgoers are simply being confronted with the spectacle of the flesh *in extremis*, undergoing final torments such as no one would wish to suffer but many would enjoy observing from a safe distance. That such questions arise suggests that there may be other forces at work, redistributing among the audience the power resident in the idea of the excavated heart.

A common strand of ritualized public spectacle connects the tragic acts of heart cutting that we have been considering. In each case, the rituals run directly counter to the transcendence of spirit over flesh that characterizes ritual enactments of Christian suffering. These tragic rendings of the heart have more in common with the satirist's impulse to interrogate the human condition by anatomizing it than with the celebratory gestures and incantations of the priest re-enacting or memorializing the sufferings of Christ. Rather than a top-down reading of the heart icon — one in which the suffering of lower subjects is assigned meaning through divine mediation — these tragic instances present us with an inferior being (a deranged father, an incestuous brother, *etc.*) absconding with a radically desacralized heart. Insofar as their surgical acts function as aids to moral scrutiny in their tragic worlds, they do so from a position of no plausible authority. The only aspects of the interior self revealed by these acts are the perpetrators' own morally questionable desires to possess or, failing that, to dominate another's heart. At this point in the history of the heart an intensely anti-romantic hostility toward the female body seems to dominate dramatic writing.

The act of excavating the heart in this drama does not always guarantee moral discoveries. Much as the moralists and ecclesiastical authorities of the time wished the hearts of their charges to be the residence of God's word, delving into the human breast sometimes revealed a vacuous or hopelessly corrupt heart. Villains of the Richard III variety are represented as heart-less in moralized history, as well as drama. Lacking the seat of moral reason, they cannot be assailed by virtuous motions, except perhaps as a despairing after-thought. At the other end of the spectrum are those characters of such stoic resolve that they can never be dis-heartened. John Ford's Calantha in *The Broken Heart* remains outwardly implacable while the strings of her constant heart are severed. But by far the vast majority of stage representations of the heart under siege show a moral proving ground which is neither vacant nor adamant. The heart is precisely not the place of stability but the center of torment and turmoil.

What we have noted thus far about the terrifyingly negative impact of dissection procedures on narratives of personal integrity in early modern England tells only part of the story. The demetaphorizing of the heart in the plays we have been examining was counterbalanced by a fresh and vibrant response to the anatomically revealed heart in the corpus of English Protestant poetry. A characteristically Protestant sense of the inner self was fed by the increasingly detailed knowledge of the interior of the body. Precise information about what were called “the motions of the heart” provided metaphoric material for poets seeking to describe the inward-looking spirituality of Protestantism. The rules for tending the soul were rewritten with greater emphasis on individual interiority and less on the role of the priest and the sacraments. Not surprisingly, the heart was at the center of this new sense of interiority.

The distinguished line of Protestant poets who generated an intense feeling of vitality around the spiritualized heart includes figures such as Edmund Spenser, John Donne, George Herbert, Aemelia Lanyer, and John Milton. Rather than review their work, I will consider a less canonical but entirely representative seventeenth-century poet, Christopher Harvey — not to be confused with the anatomist, William Harvey. Christopher Harvey’s volume of lyrics, entitled *Schola cordis* (1647) and called *The School of the Heart* on the title page of the 1664 edition, derives from a Jesuit emblem collection, Benedict van Haeften’s *Schola Cordis* (1629), but Harvey owes his distinctively Protestant readings of the heart to the “displacement of image by language.”²⁵ Sketching out the transition from Old to New Testament typologies, Harvey’s God outlines the failure of commandments written in stone and proposes the heart as the new, lively site of inscription:

My Law of old
Tables of stone did hold,
Wherein I writ what I before had spoken,
Yet were they quickly broken:
A signe the Covenant
Contain’d in them would due observance want.
Nor did they long remaine
Coppied again.
But now I’ll try
What force in flesh doth lie:
Whether thine heart renew’d afford a place
Fit for My law of grace.²⁶

In these lines, a virtual gloss on Ezekiel 11:19, the personalized word of God replaces not only Moses’s tabular icons but also the iconography of the bleeding heart, so evident in Counter-Reformation poetry of Richard

Crashaw.²⁷ Gone, too, is the violence of the tragic stage spectacles of Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Ford. Christopher Harvey's hearts are coddled and bathed, preparing the path of personal Puritan redemption that John Bunyan's pilgrim was to follow.

Bunyan explicitly reworked the idea of the broken heart in his late devotional work called *The Acceptable Sacrifice or Excellency of the Broken Heart: showing the nature, signs and proper effects of a contrite spirit* (1689). The broken heart is not the cause of a lover's or a father's death, as it is in plays by Ford, Shakespeare, and others, but the precondition for accepting God's imprint. "This broken heart," he says, "is . . . a pliable, and flexible Heart, and prepared to receive whatsoever impressions God shall make upon it, and is easy to be moulded into any frame that shall best please the Lord."²⁸ It is auspicious, then, that Christian's wife in the second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1685) finds "the Caul of her Heart [rent] in sunder," as though by lightning.²⁹ Robert A. Erickson has brilliantly unpacked the "caul" metaphor:

The "caul" was literally the pericardium, the thin membranous sac surrounding the heart, but it was also the term for the amnion or inner membrane enclosing the fetus before birth, and it could even mean a woman's hair net. The caul of the heart was then a birth metaphor and a woman's word. It enclosed a pun on God's "call" of the heart to regeneration. But the "caul of the heart" was often interpreted as a symbol of the hard, unregenerate heart and was thus analogous to the foreskin that had to be removed for acceptance into the male theocratic community. Hence the image of the caul of the heart was found in everyone and not confined to one gender.³⁰

As Erickson goes on to argue, Bunyan's strategy of double-gendering the heart, then releasing it from its restraining containers, may indicate a libidinal release, but clearly, spiritual discipline, not sexual indulgence, is the characteristic behavioral mode of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The imagery of the heart serves both ends. Erickson goes on to argue that even the scientific work of William Harvey on the heart develops an elaborate ejaculatory metaphor to figure the systolic propulsion of blood through the circulatory system.³¹ But the erotics of the heart are just one aspect of Harvey's methodical observations of the heart in *De moto cordis*.³²

Harvey's book is a dissertation that stops short of being a disputation. While his conclusions differ vastly from those of Aristotle, Galen, Mondino, and Vesalius, he always manages to convey an attitude of respect for the previous studies from which he learned so much. His approach combines rhetorical tact (since disrespect would alienate many readers), political expediency (dedicating the work to Charles I, "the heart of the state" [p. 3]), and intellectual deference (acknowledging that earlier methodologies produced important, if flawed, results).³³ His small book is charged with

excitement and ideas. On the basis of his direct observation that “the heart empties during its contraction,” he concludes, “Hence the heart movement which is commonly thought to be distole is in fact systole” (p. 28). His emphasis on the pumping action of the heart and the crucial postulation of a connection between arteries and veins at the body’s extremities led him to a clear explanation of what had previously only been suspected — that the blood circulates continuously through the body. His conclusions rest on first-hand observations of many species, alive as well as dead, and are bolstered by the judicious use of an array of dynamic metaphors. His heart science cannot work without poetry, and his pleasure at revealing the divine perfection of the human form is everywhere evident. He declares at one point that “[n]ature, perfected and divine, making nothing in vain, has neither added a heart unnecessarily to any animal nor created a heart before it had a function to fulfill” (p. 107). He compares the “harmoniously and rhythmically” synchronized movements of auricle and ventricle to the rapid, continuous movement of a flintlock gun striking the spark, igniting the powder, and shooting the ball (p. 39). He then compares the periodic pulsations of the heart to a horse swallowing water “with successive gullet movements, each one causing a sound and an audible and tangible thrill” (p. 40). He records a thrill of a different kind to dramatize the heart’s life-and-death function:

In an experiment carried out upon a dove, after the heart had completely stopped moving and thereafter even the auricles had followed suit, I spent some time with my finger, moistened with saliva and warm, applied over the heart. When it had, by means of this fomentation, recovered — so to speak — its power to live, I saw the heart and its auricles move, and contract and relax, and — so to speak — be recalled from death to life. (pp. 35–36)

The concluding poetic phrase in the Latin version reads “*et quasi ab orco revocari, videbantur*” or, literally, “as if summoned back from the depths, so it seemed.” While he is clearly anxious about the possibility of sacrilege in his act of revivification, Harvey is irresistibly stirred by his proximity to the secrets of life initiated and sustained by the motions of the heart.

If correcting basic misapprehensions about the movement of the blood through heart, lungs, veins, and arteries required minute observation and a keen conceptual mind, penetrating the depths of human emotion involved the transfer of these mental qualities into broader cultural realms. The idea of the heart as the center of human identity and love remained vibrant throughout the English Renaissance. In much the same way that the classical idea of the heart as seat of the soul and chief example of divine ingenuity persisted through the anatomical Renaissance, the hearts of Renaissance

lovers, holy and profane, continued to figure prominently in the works of Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Fletcher, Ford, Harvey, and Bunyan. As Scott Manning Stevens remarks, “the heart, as symbol, could absorb the shock of its own realistic representation.”³⁴ Even when plucked out, mocked, and desecrated, the heart remained a mysterious and compelling metaphor for the affective life of the period.

Most historians of science hold that Renaissance anatomical studies of the heart constitute a revolutionary departure from the traditions of natural philosophy, eventually replacing the seat of emotion and intellect with a mechanical pumping station devoid of spiritual significance. Another conclusion, the one favored by Andrew Cunningham in *The Anatomical Renaissance*, emphasizes continuity with the natural philosophers and the predominance of “pious motives” (p. 206) in the anatomical enterprise. The evidence provided by writers of the English Renaissance shows clearly that both views persisted through the seventeenth century. As medical practice developed out of anatomical theory and demonstration, popular culture responded with a combination of anxiety and relief. Far from losing its importance as a human signifier, the heart continued to be a focal point for the intellectual and emotional turmoil of the age.

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Notes

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1. The relevant primary texts include Plato’s *Timaeus*, Aristotle’s *Physics*, Galen on *Respiration and the Arteries*, the *Hippocratic Writings* (especially *De corde*), and Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*. For careful surveys of this tradition see Andrew Cunningham, *The Anatomical Renaissance: The Resurrection of the Anatomical Projects of the Ancients* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1997), pp. 10–36, and Robert A. Erickson, *The Language of the Heart, 1600–1750* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp. 1–24.
2. Erickson, p. 10. Gail Kern Paster describes the humoral body, the basis of most Renaissance physiology, as “porous” and “leaky.” See *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 23–63.
3. See Cunningham, pp. 167–84 and 258–68.
4. On the rules for acquiring corpses for dissection, licensing anatomical demonstrators, and proceeding systematically with the entire procedure, see Andrea Carlino, *Books of the Body: Anatomical Ritual and Renaissance Learning*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
5. See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribners, 1971).

6. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. John Payne, rev. and ed. Charles S. Singleton, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 1: 302–3. This is the first story of the fourth day.
7. Deut. 10:16 (*The Bible and Holy Scriptvres conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament* [Geneva: Rovland Hall, 1560]).
8. Erickson, commenting on allusions to the circumcised heart in Jer. 4:4 and 4:9, observes, “the male heart must be circumcised, opened, revitalized, made receptive to a new truth” (p. 51). He lists several other biblical references to this injunction (p. 233, n. 27) and notes the frequent conflation of sexual and textual hearts, concluding that the heart is as much a site of reproductive power as are the penis and the womb. Male generative power is attributed by the ancients to greater heat than in the female, and the heart is the source of all bodily heat, according to Plato, Aristotle, and Galen.
9. Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Dino S. Cervigni and Edward Vasta (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), pp. 49–51.
10. Doueihî’s *Perverse History of the Human Heart* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) is almost exclusively concerned with the narrative trope of the devoured heart from Dionysus and the Titans through such French versions as the early thirteenth-century *Lai d’Ignaure*, the late thirteenth-century *Roman du châtelain de Couci et de la Dame de Fayel*, and Jean-Pierre Camus’s “Le cœur mangé” (1616), culminating in a section of the book called “Incarnation, Sacred Heart, and the Eucharist.” He associates the passage I have quoted from the *Vita Nuova* specifically with the Annunciation (pp. 56–62).
11. Helena uses a puzzling image in *All’s Well that Ends Well* (1.1.91–96) that involves imprinting Bertram in her “heart’s table.” Being the “hind [*i.e.*, hart/heart] that would be mated by the lion,” Helena bears the emotional scars of the lion’s claws all too willingly and seems to be the instrument of her own torment. I quote here and below from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, J. J. M. Tobin, *et al.*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).
12. See Erickson, pp. 49–52, on the subject of biblical heart-inscription.
13. Donne’s younger contemporary Robert Herrick links the circumcision of Christ to a ritual exchange of gifts between Savior and saved at New Year’s in “To his Saviour. The New yeers gift” (*The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick*, ed. J. Max Patrick [New York: New York University Press, 1963], p. 496):

That little prettie bleeding part
 Of Foreskin send to me:
 And Ile returne a bleeding Heart,
 For New-yeares gift to thee.

Rich is the Jemme that thou did’st send,
 Mine’s faulty too, and small:
 But yet this Gift Thou wilt commend,
 Because I send Thee *all*.

Though diminished to the size of the baby Jesus’s foreskin, the poet’s bleeding heart still represents the totality of his being and hence is a commendable ritual offering.
14. Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great, Part I*, in *Tamburlaine the Great, Parts I and II*, ed. John D. Jump, Regents Renaissance Drama Series (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967). Subsequent references will be included parenthetically.

15. Carlino studies in detail the regulation of anatomical procedures by law and ritual practice in Renaissance Rome. He concludes that "the norms governing the practice of public anatomies in the *Studium Urbis* in the sixteenth century, the criteria followed for the selection of the subjects of dissection, and the procedures and acts done before, during, and after the desecration of their remains, emerge as a series of prudent strategies implemented to limit the circumstances under which anatomical demonstration could be legitimately allowed. Public anatomy in Rome, as in other Italian university seats, was a rigid academic ceremony. The ritual surrounding dissection seems to have served to domesticate and curb the anthropological risks of the operation" (pp. 3–4). Carlino's assertion is challenged by evidence from the most influential of the body books that he studies, Vesalius's *Fabrica* (1543), in which a set of historiated capitals depicts a group of *putti* fetching a cadaver from the gallows and robbing a grave to provide fresh corpses for the dissection table. While academic protocols might reassure the populace to a degree, certain allied practices smacked of magic, sacrilege, and horror.
16. I quote from *Edmund Spenser's Poetry*, ed. Hugh Maclean, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1982). Subsequent references will be included parenthetically.
17. The full line is "Unawares it [Busirane's knife] strooke into her snowie chest, / That little drops empurpled her faire brest." Rendering the wound diminutive, as Titus does Lavinia's "little hole" in the chest, is a standard ploy used in heroic poetry to diminish and aestheticize violent assaults on the female heart.
18. Kenneth Gross, *Spenserian Poetics: Idolatry, Iconoclasm, and Magic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 169.
19. *The Fairie Queene*, III.xi.48. Gross comments, "In line with much Reformation theology, Spenser suggests that the image is not so much deceptive in itself as it is made deceptive by its worshippers, who are themselves turned from true worshippers into fetishists as empty as their object" (p. 160).
20. *The Mad Lover*, ed. Robert Kean Turner, in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, gen. ed. Fredson Bowers, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Subsequent references will appear parenthetically.
21. In his "anatomical duel between Aristotle and Galen," Alexander Ross gives his prescription for curing heart worm: "I have read of one whose heart being opened, there was found in it a white worm with a sharp becke, which being placed on a table, and a circle of the juice of Garlick made about it, died, being overcome with that strong smell" (*Arcana microcosmi: or, the hid secrets of man's body discovered* [London: Thomas Newcomb, 1652], p. 74). The particular worm he discusses is doubtless the one pictured and discussed at length by Edward May in *A most certaine and true relation of a strange monster or serpent found in the left ventricle of the heart of Iohn Pennant . . .* (London: George Miller, 1639). May construes Pennant's problems as spiritual as well as medical.
22. Derision is likewise heaped on a man attempting to communicate his love in the anonymous English tragedy *Arden of Faversham* (1592). In Scene 1, lines 151–59 (ed. Martin White, New Mermaid Series [New York: W. W. Norton, 1982]), a jealous lover rants about a love token sent by an artist to his beloved:

But he hath sent a dagger sticking in a heart,
 With a verse or two stolen from a painted cloth,
 The which I hear the wench keeps in her chest.

I'll send from London such a taunting letter
 As she shall eat the heart he sent with salt
 And fling the dagger at the painter's head.

The phrase "painted cloth" suggests that both verse and heart have been plagiarized from a cheap, commonplace wall hanging. The detail of saucing the heart with salt is a particularly vicious touch. I am grateful to Jessica Slights for this reference.

23. John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, ed. N. W. Bawcutt, Regents Renaissance Drama Series (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 5.6.24–26.
24. Surgical assaults on the womb were sparked by an insatiable curiosity about what goes on there, especially during pregnancy, a curiosity still only partly satisfied in our own time by ultrasound technology. The gravid woman is a frequent subject of the anatomical fugitive sheets, which allowed the viewer to lift a flap of paper representing the belly to see inside the figure's womb. A representative example, engraved by Cornelis Bos (1539), is used as frontispiece in Andrea Carlino, *Paper Bodies: A Catalogue of Anatomical Fugitive Sheets, 1538–1687*, trans. Noga Arikha (London: Wellcome Institute, 1999).
25. Ira Clark, *Christ Revealed: The History of the Neotypological Lyric in the English Renaissance* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1982), pp. 67–68.
26. Christopher Harvey, *Scholia cordis, or the heart of it selfe, gone away from God . . . in 47 Emblems* (London: for H. Blunden, 1647), p. 106. The related image of the sinner's stony heart that must be broken down and rebuilt by God constitutes the central, supporting section of George Herbert's concrete poem, "The Altar" (1633), here cited from *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), p. 26:

A broken ALTAR, Lord, thy Servant reares,
 Made of a heart, and cemented with teares:
 Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;
 No workmans tool hath touch'd the same.
 A HEART alone
 Is such a stone,
 As nothing but
 Thy pow'r doth cut.
 Wherefore each part
 Of my hard heart
 Meets in this frame,
 To praise thy Name:
 That, if I chance to hold my peace,
 These stones to praise thee may not cease.
 O let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine.
 And sanctifie this ALTAR to be thine.

27. Crashaw's poem "The Flaming Heart," for example, conflates the male and female organs of sexual generation with the bleeding heart of Saint Teresa in a typically extravagant image: "Oh heart! the equal poise of love's both parts / Big alike with wounds and darts" (lines 75–76, in *The Poems English, Latin and Greek of Richard Crashaw*, ed. L. C. Martin [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957]). In the original editions of Crashaw's poems, graphic heart emblems appear twice. The second depicts the weeping Magdalene from whose torso appears a winged heart.

28. John Bunyan, *The Acceptable Sacrifice* (London: for George Larkin, 1689), sigs. A4^r-v.
29. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. James Blanton Wharey, rev. Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 178.
30. Erickson, p. 44.
31. "The unmistakably phallic — even masturbatory — characteristics of 'Harvey's' depiction of the heart recall the phallic, life-giving power of the seminal God" (Erickson, p. 76). See, for example, Harvey's assertion that "the contained blood escapes in spurts at each movement or pulsation during the contraction of a heart which as undergone a penetrating wound of the ventricle" (*Movement of the Heart and Blood in Animals* [*De moto cordis*], trans. Kenneth J. Franklin [Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1957], pp. 27–28). Subsequent parenthetical references are to this edition.
32. Harvey's methodological concerns are evident, for example, at the start of Chapter Six of *Movement of the Heart and Blood*, where he stresses the importance of studying not one but many species of animals.

[T]hose persons do wrong who while wishing, as all anatomists commonly do, to describe, demonstrate and study the parts of animals, content themselves with looking inside one animal only, namely, man — and that one dead. In this way they merely attempt a universal syllogism on the basis of a particular proposition (like those who think they can construct a science [*disciplinam*] of politics after exploration of a single form of government, or have a knowledge of agriculture through investigation of the character of a single field). (p. 44)

There may be an implied critique here of his classical predecessors: Aristotle carried out many of his anatomical experiments on pigs, while Galen dissected apes.
33. See Peter W. Graham, "Harvey's *De motu cordis*: The Rhetoric of Science and the Science of Rhetoric," *Journal of the History of Medicine* 33 (1978): 469–76. On subsequent political applications of Harvey's scientific theory, see I. Bernard Cohen, "Harrington and Harvey: A Theory of the State Based on the New Physiology," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55 (1994): 187–210. The use of such organicist political metaphors in England dates back at least as far as John of Salisbury (1159), according to Jacques Le Goff, "Head or Heart? The Political Use of Body Metaphors in the Middle Ages," trans. Patricia Ranum, in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff, and Nadia Tazi, 3 vols. (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 3: 17.
34. Scott Manning Stevens, "Sacred Heart and Secular Brain," in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 275.