

is typical of Ashgate's varied and innovative offerings, handsomely produced, and deserves to be on many library shelves.

GARY WALLER

Notes

- 1 See, for instance, 'Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England', *Renaissance Quarterly* 28.1 (Spring 1975): 38–58.
- 2 See *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 3 For a more nuanced reading of 'remembrance' in *Hamlet*, see Alison A. Chapman's recent essay, 'Ophelia's "Old Lauds": Madness and Hagiography in *Hamlet*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 20 (2007): 111–35.

William W.E. Slights. *The Heart in the Age of Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp xii, 205.

William W.E. Slights offers a refreshing entry into the increasingly crowded (but vibrant) field of body criticism in *The Heart in the Age of Shakespeare*. Ever since Jonathan Sawday published his important and influential book *The Body Emblazoned* in 1995, many critics have reinforced his assertion that the early modern period witnessed a dramatic, even revolutionary, break from past understandings of the body as the mechanical Cartesian subject was ushered in to displace the perspective that saw the subject as a microcosm of divine creation. Slights prefers the argument promoted by critics such as Andrew Cunningham and Nancy Siraisi who have 'tended to concentrate on continuity and incremental refinements of proto-body science rather than on the overt hostilities and thrilling reversals implicit in the revolutionary model of historical change' (16). Although the early modern period scrutinized and at times modified older systems of knowledge about the body, it did not reject them outright. Slights makes a convincing case for this thesis in chapters organized around a variety of early modern representations of the heart: the graphic heart, the passionate heart, the narrative heart, the villain-

ous heart, and, finally, the Shakespearean heart. The author disavows any one particular theoretical approach and chooses instead to draw on anthropology, art history, theology, medical and anatomical history, and literary criticism. While some might argue that this amalgamation does not do justice to the various schools of thought that Slights draws upon, he is largely successful in his efforts. The result is a critical text that examines a single anatomical part from numerous perspectives and embraces as productive the contradictions and conflicts between the various approaches to the heart.

In many ways, this text represents an act of historical reconstruction. Slights lists as one of his goals a desire 'to experience again the living pulse of the early modern heart and the vitality of the heart's language in the art, philosophy, literature, and everyday life of the period' (38). Although this is certainly a lofty aspiration, the range of sources used in this book is impressive; in addition to a number of Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean plays, Slights also examines medical and anatomical textbooks, emblematic literature, philosophy, theology, painted and printed images, and devotional poetry, among other genres, in order to cast his net as widely as possible in his search for early modern depictions and representations of the heart. When necessary, the author also incorporates a discussion of continental, classical, and medieval sources, all of which contribute to the comprehensiveness of *The Heart in the Age of Shakespeare*.

Although this catholicity of reference is one of the text's greatest strengths, it is also occasionally one of its weaknesses. Slights discusses many of his chosen texts (particularly the non-dramatic sources) only very briefly. Phineas Fletcher's massive and complex anatomical epic *The Purple Island* (1633) is dealt with in just two pages; the devotional poets Robert Southwell and Richard Crashaw are covered in a few paragraphs. Although the inclusion of such a wide range of evidence emphasizes the cultural and intellectual importance of the heart in early modern England, readers may be left wanting a more detailed discussion of many of the poems, plays, and other sources on which the author draws to make his argument. While this rapid use of sources rarely detracts from the overall strength of Slights' book, some of his comments are likely to evoke protests from specialists. For example, he reduces emblem books to a 'universalizing and, hence, anti-historical' set of texts that tend to 'epitomize familiar experiences and accepted values of their culture in a largely non-analytical shorthand' (58). Such a broad generalization is bound to raise the ire of emblem scholars because it does not take into account the

complexities of the genre evident in, say, Francis Quarles' *Emblemes* (1635), to name just one notable exception.

Slights argues that drama stands at the intersection of the various early modern narratives of the heart. Whether or not this assertion is truer of drama than of other types of writing is certainly debatable, but the author's focus on stage villains and on Shakespearean drama (and some sonnets) in his final two chapters emphasizes the 'pursuit of disguised truth' that unites the dramatist and the anatomist (135). In these chapters the author focuses primarily on the heart as the perceived core of human identity and subjectivity: a core susceptible to corruption. Stage villains often use the metaphor of the hardened heart to refute their own interiority as they 'insist that they have a vacuum where others have a conscience, a deep-seated sense of the divine, tender fellow-feelings, and a heart' (133). Slights suggests, however, that the efforts of villains to subvert accepted religious, anatomical, and cultural understandings of the heart by denying their own interiority paradoxically ends up reinforcing these accepted beliefs 'because the narratives and images of hidden interior lives that they seek to repudiate are precisely the ones they require to carry out their secret plots' (133). In chapter six, Slights considers whether or not a uniquely Shakespearean heart exists by discussing, among other things, the relationship between the heart and the body's 'organs of agency' (164) (such as the hand, tongue, and eye) evident in a variety of plays and sonnets. Slights ultimately argues that the heart emerges in Shakespeare's work as the battleground for the self but that the playwright offers no single, unified representation of the heart. The Shakespearean heart 'is not one thing but an accumulation of the forms and pressures of the times, classical and medieval as well as early modern' (177). The Shakespearean heart, then, seems to be less a unique representation and more the superlative example of the intersection of numerous early modern narratives of the heart. Slights' discussion of Shakespeare represents the culmination of his ultimately convincing argument that the early modern heart resists oversimplification and either/or classification. The same can certainly be said for many other anatomical parts; more studies like *The Heart in the Age of Shakespeare* are necessary in order to broaden our understanding of the early modern body.

JOHNATHAN H. POPE