the play, though the principles established in this parable were broadly influential in the Middle Ages' (p. 39). He ponders why Shrift in that play is a woman and reaches the unconvincing conclusion that it is because 'the feminine had had a function first of all in the initial act of alienation' (p. 62). He suggests puzzlingly that, in the description of Mankind's restoration, 'rewyvyd and restoryd ageyn' seem 'suspiciously like gardening terms' (p. 43). Elsewhere, material seems expanded unduly, as in the exposition of the passing allusion to 'oil of mercy' in Wisdom ('significant for our understanding of the theological and devotional structure of the play', p. 97), and allusions are dangled tantalizingly before us (e.g. 'in a manner reminiscent of St. Basil's exegesis of Psalm 33', p. 60). It is perhaps surprising that the image of Mercy with a whip in Mankind was not related to the cleansing of the Temple, and hence to the identification of the 'moral' Mercy with the 'tropological' Christ.

Nevertheless, Davidson has important things to say. Some, such as the image of Adam delving, or Job on a dunghill in Mankind, or the wounded Christ in Wisdom, are familiar but necessary points of reference for those plays. But other comments are more powerful. The discussion of Mankind, for example, demonstrates that iconography need not simplify interpretation, but can provide a context that is complicated and even inconsistent. The iconography of the Castle's staging-diagram defining a space 'analogous to the architecture of the church building' (p. 50) is developed intelligently and with admirable caution as one of several factors feeding our response. The suggestion that Humanum Genus or Everyman represents the collapsing of the Dance of Death estates into a single representative figure at the moment of accost by Death is provocative. The essay on Wisdom, where complex theological issues such as the character and iconography of Anima are made readily intelligible, is particularly valuable.

This deceptively brief book is not for beginners in medieval drama, for its norm of reference lies outside the texts it studies. But it is a well-written study, founded on considerable scholarship, whose details fascinate, illuminate, and provoke.

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The authors are already known to us through previous distinguished publications, and this new book under their joint authorship in general lives up to their reputation and the promise of the title. They offer material here which is always worth while, often exciting, and at times brilliant. The enormous range of the book commands respect, and the subject is of the utmost cultural importance. Nevertheless, there are some surprising shortcomings.

I have little doubt that the book will be often and extensively discussed, and I hope it will be seminal in reviving Burckhardt's notion that the key feature of the Renaissance was individualism. I say this, not because I believe that Burckhardt offered a perfect 'model', but because, if we must have such a thing at all, his was surely nearer the mark than subsequent ones which have proved influential, such as that of E. M. W. Tillyard in his still too popular The Elizabethan World Picture or that of the fashionable modern books which in effect offer a mirror image of Tillyard (e.g. Jonathan Dollimore's Radical Tragedy).

One must doubt that 'spirited undergraduates will profit from this account of Renaissance culture', as the authors trust, for the book is abnormally difficult and demanding. Even so, the first chapter, 'Burckhardt's Renaissance', ought to be prescribed reading for anyone specializing—or already specialized—in the Renaissance. Here and throughout their book, the authors mount a strong defence of
Burckhardt, and produce their own evidence and reasons in doing so; in the end they provide firmer support for Burckhardt's theory than Burckhardt himself did, and go well beyond him in seeing the implications of his view. Chapters 2 and 3 are significant in this respect, as is Chapter 4, concerning 'Cassirer's Legacy to the Burckhardt Tradition', although at this point the discussion seems a little perfunctory.

Subsequently we are treated to extremely valuable material which would be difficult to find elsewhere, in the form of a series of essays on Renaissance thinkers who illustrate interesting aspects of individualism: Nicolas of Cusa (Chapter 5), Marsilio Ficino (6), Pico della Mirandola (7), and Descartes (8; extremely interesting in this context). From all of these chapters I for one learned a great deal, and I dare cheerfully predict that my position is not unique, for with the exception of Descartes these intellectuals are not well known to most readers of Renaissance literature. The authors not only discuss these writers with great lucidity, but also reveal that they are well worth reading, even outside the argument of The Idea of the Renaissance.

Finally, the authors show individualism at work in the Petrarchan love poetry of the English Renaissance: there is an all too short but intelligent and original Chapter 9 on 'The Evolution of the English Love Lyric', and a more profound and comprehensive discussion of Paradise Lost in Chapter 10, which may be recommended to all readers of Milton, including those who have no time for the remainder of the book.

When there is so much of value offered, why should one feel less than fully happy after reading the book as a whole?

For one thing, the authorial division into three sections, 'Power', 'Thought', and 'Love', is unsatisfactory. 'Power', especially, is a misleading word, as much of this section goes well beyond that concept. Indeed, the use of such a label cannot be reconciled with the eminently sensible observation on p. 7 that 'It is not for its political history that what we now designate as the Renaissance comes to be called that. More telling in the long run is the cultural program that springs up with the political program but takes on an enduring life of its own.'

Yet the division suggested by the labels is also very real in that the book falls apart into three separate sections which are not properly unified. Although there is concern with individualism throughout, it might have been better to write either one more coherent though longer book or several shorter books or articles. As things stand, a coherence is perhaps implied but not fully articulated, or, when it is, is doubtful. Most conspicuously, we are told that the intention in the third part ('Love') 'was to give the period concept developed in the first two sections a workout, what for us constitutes a practical application' (p. xii), but the section is in fact not a 'workout'. This is a significant matter, for the underlying assumption is that if once a 'period concept' has been developed on the basis of a study of politics, philosophy, and so forth, literature puts into practice what is found elsewhere. But this is not demonstrated at all. Instead, the third section gives us reasons for believing that literature is one out of many activities in which individualism is found, but the connection between it and the other activities discussed is not clear.

What the book does establish is that individualism is, at the least, one significant characteristic of the period which we call the Renaissance. In spite of what the authors claim, it is best to read section three as though literature is simply being used as one area of evidence in the book as a whole, which is not ultimately concerned with literature any more than with, for example, philosophy. The overriding interest is in the question of the 'period concept', and the book is not a literary study as much as an example of Geistesgeschichte.

In using that term I particularly have in mind what René Wellek and Austin Warren wrote in Theory of Literature (New York, 2nd edn., 1956) when 'The New
Criticism' was still the rage: 'Geistesgeschichte may be used widely as an alternative term for intellectual history ... it assumes that each period has its "time spirit" and aims to "reconstruct the spirit of a time from the different objectivations [sic] of an age ..."' (p. 108). They go on to say that 'the whole assumption of a complete integration of a time, of a race, of a work of art is open to serious question' (p. 110). Nowadays, of course, the new criticism is old-fashioned, and the very assumption which Wellek and Warren question underlies much of what is written, including the present book. I must say that I find Kerrigan and Braden unusually persuasive in their attempt to reveal the existence of a 'time spirit' in the Renaissance. Nevertheless, I cannot forget the caveat of Theory of Literature. And when I think of a play like Richard II I do not find that its complexity is adequately accounted for by any assumption concerning the supposed time spirit of the Renaissance. There is the possibility that the authors' advocacy of individualism as a dominant factor will eventually seem no more seductive than the efforts of Tillyard and others to give us the Elizabethan world picture. However, if Kerrigan and Braden are found to be right I shall not be sad, for in that case we must believe that Renaissance authors wrote as individuals, and then we may once again come to study literary works as aesthetic creations, as the much maligned new critics urged us to do many years ago.


Professor Mebane has as one of his 'major purposes . to construct for Renaissance plays on magic a more detailed and genuinely illuminating historical context than has previously been provided' (p. xi). His thesis is 'that philosophical occultism carried to its logical extreme the humanists' affirmation of the power of human beings to control both their own personalities and the world around them' (p. 3). He argues that a study of the plays he has chosen in the context of 'the controversies concerning magic, science, and the renewal of human knowledge and human society can illuminate both philosophical and aesthetic dimensions of the works which we cannot otherwise appreciate' (p. 4).

In pursuit of these aims, Mebane first discusses Renaissance attitudes to magic, with particular reference to Ficino, Pico, and Agrippa, before considering Dr Faustus, The Alchemist, Jonson's masques, and The Tempest. But the result is a curiously old-fashioned essay in the history of ideas. In its course we learn about attitudes to 'magia' and 'goetia', the view that magic could not compel a spirit to do human bidding, the relationship between magic and socio-political radicalism, the aspirations of some practitioners to achieve godhead, the theme of regeneration through magic, and (among much else) how magicians might seek material goods.

It is evident that such ideas have relevance to the texts Mebane discusses, but he fails to show that his line of investigation reveals 'dimensions ... which we cannot otherwise appreciate'. In fact the chapters on the texts are mundane and of limited critical value, partly because the author lacks a sense of drama. He (rightly) sees Dr Faustus as an ambivalent play (e.g. p. 130) but in his anxiety to show that the text is 'the product of consciously controlled artistry' (p. 116) he almost completely ignores the power of Faustus's last soliloquy. The discussion of Lovewit in The Alchemist (p. 154) is curious. Mebane's thesis leads him to see Lovewit as a character 'whose clear-sightedness, good nature, and common sense contrast sharply with ... Mammon or the Puritans'. He admits that Lovewit 'does not force Dol, Face, and Subtle into prison', then adds that 'he does at least require them to give up their costumes and assumed personalities'. But Lovewit does not meet Dol or Subtle. So