

Book Reviews

LEONARD BARKAN, *Nature's work of art. The human body as image of the world*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1975, 8vo, pp. x, 291, £7.50.

A fundamental Renaissance concept was that man is a miniature cosmos, a microcosm, and that the world is a body, a macrocosm. It is Dr. Barkan's purpose to trace through various Renaissance authors this cosmology of the body image (a term not used in the medical sense) in particular, and also the analogy between the human body and the commonwealth. Such writers used imaginative thought in an attempt to bridge the gulf between man and his surroundings and to describe his relationships with them. One way of doing so was the microcosm idea, which is, in fact, a true inter-action as regards biology, behaviour, intellect, and spirit. Yet when man's behaviour, thought, feeling, and biological status are excluded, the physical body which remains has an imaginary oneness with the cosmos. Better to understand the world with man's place in it, writers in the Renaissance, and before and after, have distorted either man's body or the cosmos, or both for didactic or poetic purposes. Being concerned with abstract truths, and with neither anatomical nor cosmological reality, they could create a metaphor, and Dr. Barkan's book focuses upon the use of the body in a complete and systematic fashion, not devoted to structural details. His objective is the study of the presuppositions and literary practices of selected Renaissance poets, and to show that men at that time were not concerned only with man as multiple rather than single beings; the poet attempts to depict this complexity, which is analogous with that of the world.

To achieve this the author divides his book into three parts; body and cosmos, the domain of natural philosophy and science; the body and commonwealth, based on social and political philosophy; the body and man-made constructions, the domain of estheticians and architects. He then devotes his critical attention to two outstanding sixteenth-century poems: *Astrophil and Stella*, the human body as setting for the Petrarchan drama; and *The Fairie Queen*, allegory, iconography and the human body.

This fascinating and scholarly study should be read carefully by all those whose interests include Renaissance medicine. It not only gives new insight for example into contemporary ideas of human anatomy, but also provides part of the essential background needed for work in this period, and so allows a more complete comprehension of a difficult historical era.

ROBERT S. KINSMAN (editor), *The darker vision of the Renaissance. Beyond the fields of reason*, Berkeley and London, University of California Press, 1974, 8vo, pp. [vi], 320, £6.50.

All historical periods have their hidden or less obvious aspects, and these are usually given less attention than the more orthodox features. This collection of nine essays explores the dark under-belly of the European Renaissance (taken here to be 1300–1670), the non-rational, irrational and supra-rational phenomena, and deals with certain political, literary, social, religious, musical, artistic and medical events of this nature. The medical piece, "Folly, melancholy, and madness: a study in the shifting styles of medical analysis, and treatment, 1450–1675", deals with shifts in social, psychological and medical concepts of the various kinds of irrational behaviour due to