
Synthesizing the state of scholarship in a field as complex as Renaissance humanism requires an impressive collaborative effort. In this 3-volume anthology A. Rabil has brought together some of the most respected scholars in Renaissance studies to give summary accounts of various aspects of humanism. Demonstrating the competence one has come to expect from the authors, the contributions nevertheless vary in the degree of satisfaction they give to the reader, ranging from déjà vu to original research, from pedestrian rehearsals of facts to lucid analyses of complex subjects. In the latter class is P.O. Kristeller’s overview of the cultural heritage of humanism, the three essays summing up the relationship between humanism and theology by Charles Trinkaus, Lewis Spitz, and the late John D’Amico respectively, and Pamela Long’s inquiry into the difficult subject of “Humanism and Science”. Kudos should also go to A. Grafton for his essay on Quattrocento humanism and classical scholarship, which is based largely on primary sources, and to D.B. Ruderman for casting light on the neglected subject of “The Italian Renaissance and Jewish Thought”. Both essays have appeared in print before, but have been updated and (in Ruderman’s case) expanded for the present publication. Readers will also be grateful to D. Budiva, M. D. Birnbaum, and R. L. Lencel for their essays on Humanism in Eastern Europe, an area not readily accessible to those who lack a knowledge of Slavic languages. In many cases the editor succeeded in enlisting the undisputed experts in the field: Eugene Rice on patristic scholarship; Margaret King on women in the Italian Renaissance; J. Ijsewijn on humanism in the Low Countries, to name just a few. The result in each case is an authoritative treatment of the subject at hand.

It is clear that no arrangement of the heterogeneous material collected in these volumes will satisfy all criteria. Certain matters of organization could, however, have been handled more effectively in my opinion. Part I, “Foundations of Humanism,” is an inquiry into the roots of humanism; Parts II, III, and IV examine the various forms of humanism by region and discipline (not “disciples” as a misprint on the cover of Volume III would have us believe). More specifically, Part II deals with humanism in Italy and includes a section on the “margins of society”, that is, Byzantine émigrés, Jews, and women scholars; Part III deals with humanism beyond Italy; and Part IV is subdivided into sections examining the contribution of humanists to the theory and practice of education, the professions, and the arts and sciences. Part V, finally, deals with the legacy of humanism. On the whole, these divisions function well, but some contributions do not fulfil their promise. For example, A. Bernardo’s “Petrarch, Dante, and the Medieval Tradition” might have been more appropriately named “... and the Classical Tradition”; the section “Humanism and the Professions” is in fact restricted to two: jurists and theologians; and the concluding section on “The
Legacy of Humanism" deserved more than one entry, however impressive. More confusing is the random insertion of biographical essays. In volume II, for example, we find sandwiched among essays on regional humanism beyond Italy (England, Spain, France, Germany, the Low Countries, Croatia, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia) a study of Erasmus, who is apparently considered an island onto himself. Similarly incongruous is the placement of another biographical essay in volume I, where studies of regional humanism in Italy (Florence, Venice, Milan, Rome, Naples) conclude somewhat surprisingly with a section on "Italy's leading Humanist", with the title going to Lorenzo Valla. I do believe that a separate section on leading humanists, Italian or otherwise, would have greatly benefited the overall arrangement.

One of the great advantages of anthologies is the wealth of bibliographical information they offer. In this case, too, the notes to individual essays contain copious references, which are collected in a master list at the end of the third volume. The yield is uneven, however. Some contributors managed to include publications up to 1987, others provided less current information. Considerations of time and space no doubt played a role here and Rabil’s disclaimer that bibliographical studies in his own subject has "become an industry in itself" could be applied to other subjects in the anthology. In the index, an important tool in a book where an overlap between sections is unavoidable, more extensive subject headings would have been helpful. In its present form, the index is largely confined to proper names.

Such considerations not withstanding, the anthology is an admirable achievement and will prove a valuable resource for students of the Renaissance. Addressing a wide audience, it provides undergraduates with lucid introductions and scholars in related fields with convenient summaries of the various aspects of humanism.

ERIKA RUMMEL, University of Toronto
