

Book Reviews

neutrum, and *ut nunc* and *simpliciter*. The more technical chapters devoted to explaining these theoretical concepts are nicely balanced by an excellent introductory chapter on Galenic medicine in the Renaissance, and a fascinating closing chapter on Renaissance discussions of whether neutral bodies really do exist in nature and whether ageing bodies and convalescing bodies provide practical examples of neutral bodies.

But was there really a continuous history of the “idea” of the neutral body? Though the author admits that each commentary introduces conceptual changes and is itself a reflection of new contemporary issues, he never directly addresses the problem of essentialism that inevitably arises when writing the history of an idea. Even though Joutsivuo wisely focuses upon texts and interpretations rather than ideas, one is still left wondering whether all his commentators really are talking about the same thing.

Joutsivuo is also rather free with his use of the categories “scholastic” and “humanist”. In order to highlight the impact of humanism on discussions of the neutral body, he contrasts the views of Renaissance expositors with those of scholastic commentators on the matter. But this assumes that there was indeed an identifiable “scholastic” interpretation of the neutral body, which some Renaissance expositors were closer to than others. Yet, as the author’s own research shows, there was as much diversity of opinion among scholastic commentators as among Renaissance expositors.

Does the concept of the neutral body in the Renaissance really tell us anything new about medical humanism? Joutsivuo’s work is certainly valuable in confirming what we already know about the novelty of humanist exegesis, its concentration on philological and inter-textual analysis, its new historical sensitivity, its concern for discovering the origins of ideas, and its interest in establishing the integrity of an author’s

entire output. But as Joutsivuo admits in his conclusion, his story tends to reaffirm the traditional picture that, though new sources and translations were used and new literary techniques adopted, university medicine was stubbornly resistant to the broader philosophical challenges of Renaissance humanism.

These are but minor quibbles with an exemplary piece of scholarship. The impeccable explication of text, the copious footnoting, and the excellent appendices make this an invaluable reference tool that will be treasured by scholars of early modern medicine for a long time to come.

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Rona Goffen (ed.), *Masaccio’s Trinity*, Masterpieces of Western Painting series, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. x, 166, illus., £30.00, \$49.95 (hardback 0-521-46150-2), £11.95, \$15.95 (paperback 0-521-46709-8).

The seven essays in *Masaccio’s Trinity* utilize a wide range of approaches to examine one of the most familiar paintings in Italian Renaissance art. Written by six authors, all were extracted or expanded upon from other sources, excepting the introduction by the editor, Rona Goffen, and the last essay by Katharine Park. Despite their disparate origins, together they provide an impressive overview of this so-called “masterpiece” from a variety of perspectives.

Two essays by Goffen and one by Gene Brucker situate the painting and its patrons in the context of early fifteenth-century Florence and Dominican theology, despite Goffen’s incomprehensible placement of Gentile da Fabriano’s *Adoration* in Santa Maria Novella, rather than Santa Trinità.

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Ornella Casazza's informative overview of Masaccio's technique and the conservation of the fresco gives the reader an excellent grasp of the problematic physical condition of the painting. Jane Andrews Aiken methodically describes the origins of the perspectival system, one of its most compelling features. Only Yves Bonnefoy's semiotic discussion of space and time in early Renaissance painting seems out of place in this collection; in jargon and approach it differs considerably from the other essays.

The most enlightened contribution to this collection, and probably the one of greatest interest to readers of this journal, is Park's examination of Renaissance dissection and anatomical knowledge in light of the enigmatic skeleton reclining on a bier under the main scene. Only recovered in 1951, this skeleton with its grim inscription has generated a significant amount of scholarship, which Park lucidly reviews in her introduction. As a representation of Adam, buried at Golgotha, the skeleton both serves as a *memento mori* and as a promise of salvation. Park traces the history of anatomical illustration from the *Fünfbilderserie* type of the fourteenth century, through Masaccio and his contemporaries, to the artists who collaborated with Andreas Vesalius, to

demonstrate the changing relationship between artists and anatomists during the Renaissance. The increasing importance of dissection and the careful employment of the knowledge gained through it becomes clear as she takes the reader through this history and Masaccio's place in it. Park's essay is a fascinating and well-argued cross-disciplinary study that provides a refreshing new view of this very well known painting.

Cambridge should be commended for initiating this sort of examination. But they might have exerted greater care with the illustrations. Some of the black and white images are reproduced too dark or too small to aid the discussion. A diagram of discoveries made during an earlier conservation treatment is almost indecipherable in black and gray, instead of the four colours of the original as discussed in the text. In fact, the only colour reproductions are on the cover, and these are both reproduced backwards. Most egregious is the arbitrary cropping of the fresco below the kneeling patrons, apparently to better fit the text. If the skeleton is important enough to warrant discussion in an essay, shouldn't it be important enough for inclusion on the cover of the book?

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