In *Reading the Renaissance: Ideas and Idioms from Shakespeare to Milton* Marc Berley has gathered an engaging and readable collection of essays on a wide range of Renaissance topics. The book is dedicated to Edward W. Tayler, whose influence pervades the volume and whose own contribution, “Bugwords,” serves as its epilogue. As the blurb on the dust jacket observes, Berley’s book not only presents interpretations of Renaissance literature but also addresses problems with recent critical theory as it suggests the direction for future literary studies. The essays are thus concerned with reading the Renaissance and with mis-readings of it.

Three of the essays focus on Shakespeare. Frank Kermode in “On Certain Verses of Shakespeare” argues for the importance of understanding the language of a given text and the resonances of that language. Like the volume as a whole, his essay is dedicated to Tayler, whose critical work has manifested his belief in the importance of such a philological approach. For Kermode, determining what words meant is the “primary task of literary scholarship” (26) and he concludes with the salvo “‘Back to the Language!’” (26). Marc Berley focuses on *King Lear*. Arguing that Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry* is a crucial source for Shakespeare’s tragedy, Berley demonstrates Shakespeare’s play is designed to humble humankind through a series of brutal teachers: Cordelia, Kent, Lear’s Fool, and Lear. In “The Consolation of Art in the *Aenael* and *The Tempest*” Michael Mack turns to a Shakespearean comedy. While Shakespeare’s reworking of Virgilian material in *The Tempest* has been previously explored, Mack takes on a new perspective as he examines ways in which Virgil’s epic and Shakespeare’s play call attention to themselves as works of art. In the process, he illuminates the comparison between the duty bound Aeneas and Prospero as well as the lovers Aeneas/Dido and Ferdinand/Miranda. Mack ultimately reveals the varying ways Virgil’s epic and Shakespeare’s
comedy treat the consolation of art as a response to human loss and suffering.

Four essays are on Donne. Influenced by Tayler’s book on Donne’s *Anniversaries*, a book he considers “the most important study of Donne’s poetry to appear to in the past decade” (78) and an important corrective to Lewalski’s reading of the poems, Louis Martz reworks his previous attempts to structure Donne’s poems. Martz’s death in December 2002 makes his Donnean closing, “Here therefore be the end” (89), especially poignant. These are, indeed, his final words on Donne’s *Anniversaries*. With its unique amalgam of Donne, Thomism, and contemporary experience, “The Donna Angelicata of Donne’s ‘Aire and Angels’” is an essay only Al Labriola could write. Whether leading us into a reading of a Donne poem by taking us through the experience of purchasing a gift of perfume as he does here or by reminding us of the lyrics of The Penguins’ “Earth Angel” as he has previously done in addressing this poem, Labriola wonderfully links Donne’s world to ours while eruditely exploring the differences. Labriola prefaches his reading of “Aire and Angels” with an investigation of Neoplatonic and Paraclesian views on herbal and floral essences and an examination of lyrics from *Hesperides* which celebrate perfumes. In “Male Lesbian Voices: Ronsard, Tyard and Donne Play Sappho” Anne Lake Prescott gives us a literary and cultural context for Donne’s “Sapho to Philaenis.” Reminding us Donne was not the only male poet to imagine love from a lesbian perspective, she explores three elegies—two by Pierre de Ronsard and one by Pontus de Tyard. As she demonstrated in *French Poets and the English Renaissance*, Prescott also illustrates here that English poetry can be better understood when we consider French as well as British models. In his essay Stanley Stewart does not focus on a specific poem by Donne but instead cites readings and mis-readings of the poet as he excoriates postmodern criticism in his “Reading Donne: Old and New His- and Her-storicisms.” Contrasting “Old” historicists with the New, Stewart exemplifies the former through Tayler’s book on Donne’s *Anniversaries* and the latter principally through Ronald Corthell’s *Ideology and Desire in Renaissance Poetry*. Stewart pre-
sents Tayler as a critic who “posits a contextual claim of relevance for the various literary and cultural practices encompassed by his argument” (135). In contrast, he denounces New Historicists like Corthell, referring to them as New Empsonians who focus on close readings of texts but provide no supporting evidence. Instead of focusing on Donne, Corthell’s real subject, Stewart asserts, is himself; New Historicists in general present us not with critical analysis but “thinly disguised forms of social preachments” (147).

In the three remaining essays, Ernest B. Gilman treats Jonson’s “On My First Sonne”; Martin Elsky explores the work of Eric Auerbach, the seventeenth century, and the history of feelings; and Anthony Low examines the fall into subjectivity in Paradise Lost. Gilman’s essay is perceptive and richly suggestive, sensitively treating Jonson’s oft-anthologized poem as a plague text then further urging we re-evaluate all literary works written during plague times within that context. Elsky’s topic is clearly the most expansive of the volume. He focuses not on Mimesis but on some of Auerbach’s untranslated essays, many of which deal with seventeenth-century literature. For Elsky these works are important because Auerbach provides through them a history of emotions, “a history of what it means to have feelings in the European west” (178). In his essay Low explores not the paradise but the hell within, the way in which the journey inward can be abysmal. Low illustrates how Milton anticipates the modern usage of “alienation” as the fall into subjectivity brings with it isolation and loneliness.

“Bugswords,” a brief epilogue by Edward W. Tayler, provides a fitting conclusion to a book dedicated to him and determined to suggest directions for the study of Renaissance literature. Tayler concisely manages to span the practice of criticism from the “old” historicism through new criticism, deconstruction, and all the isms of postmodern theories. As he catalogs the many bugswords of criticism, Tayler makes clear how we impede rather than facilitate understanding. His conclusion calls for a return to one concern: intention—a need to understand authors on their terms, not ours, if we are to understand and learn from the past.
Those disaffected with postmodern critical practices will appreciate the stance of many writers in this collection. *Reading the Renaissance* suggests no new methodology for approaching literature; rather, in statement and practice these gracefully written and insightful essays recommend and model a reversion to an earlier approach. Both adherents and detractors of postmodernism should appreciate the contribution this volume makes to an understanding of early modern literature.


*Literate Experience* offers to demonstrate an early modern paradigm shift, coinciding with the rise of modern science, involving changes in the interrelated conceptions of knowledge and legitimate authority. The authors remark that “to the thinkers and writers of the seventeenth century, knowledge was more properly a social issue than a purely philosophical one” (xi). In support of this contention, the five central chapters of this book are intended to demonstrate changing attitudes toward epistemology and challenge traditional readings of selected works by Bacon, Shakespeare, Lanyer, Marvell, and Behn. Each author is portrayed as progressively more estranged from the Elizabethan world picture than the next. New perspectives on established figures sometimes generate new insights, and in that regard, this book is a partial success. Although many of the ideas proposed provoke serious objections and reservations, the last chapter was genuinely exciting, and left the reader with the feeling of learning something significant.