

nary experience rests on unreal and fuzzy experiences of time and space," Frye writes, "and that myth and metaphor are among other things techniques of mediation, designed to focus our minds on a more real view of both."

**ALBRECHT DÜRER: A Biography.** By Jane Campbell Hutchinson. Princeton. 247 pp. \$25

Early in the 16th century, the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian paid a visit to Albrecht Dürer. Dürer was straining to draw on a high wall, so the Emperor ordered a courtier to let the painter stand on his back. When the nobleman protested, Maximilian snorted that he could easily turn any peasant into a nobleman, but no nobleman could be remade into a Dürer. This legend (possibly apocryphal) suggests how Dürer raised painting in Germany from a manual, often anonymous craft into an intellectual and noble pursuit.



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Hutchinson, an art historian at the University of Wisconsin, narrates Dürer's progress from a goldsmith's son to an artist whose international renown was equaled only by that of Raphael, Michelangelo, and Titian. In 1494, at age 23, Dürer set off for Italy, becoming the first northerner to make the trip that would soon become an indispensable part of an artistic education. Dürer was determined, he said, "to learn the secrets of the [Italian] art of perspective." In Italy he also observed the respect that was accorded to artists there: "Here I am a gentleman," he wrote, "at home only a parasite."

When he returned to Nuremberg a year later, Dürer integrated the modern Renaissance technique—the rationalization of space through mathematical perspective—into the descriptive naturalism of his northern heritage. Immediately he was in great demand for his psychologically penetrating portraits. But the portraits that interested him most were those of himself. In an age of heightened individuality, he forged his artistic identity by painting and drawing more self-portraits than anyone before Rembrandt. As a young man, he drew himself as a

brooding melancholic; after Italy, as a learned, cosmopolitan gentleman in elegant attire; and in his famous self-portrait of 1500, as Christ himself, thus uniting his religious and artistic longings.

Dürer's most important contribution to the history of art is, arguably, not his paintings but his prints and woodcuts. Masterful at religious propaganda, Dürer understood perfectly how to exploit the newly invented printing press to reach a broad audience on the eve of the Reformation. He ardently supported Martin Luther, whose portrait he desired to engrave "for a lasting remembrance of this Christian man who has helped me out of great distress."

Dürer presents a complex, contradictory figure, pointing at once forward and backward: Rationalistic *and* religious, he believed in both Renaissance humanism and old superstitions. These contradictions underscored the argument of Erwin Panofsky's *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* (1943). Panofsky showed a melancholic Dürer suffering from an "interior tension" that could not reconcile the medieval (Gothic Germany, his religious mysticism, his essential naturalism) and the Renaissance (the rationalism and classicism he found in Italy). Panofsky's commanding study has long discouraged other scholars from approaching Dürer, and it must be admitted that Panofsky's Dürer remains a more convincing figure than the good-natured, gregarious painter whom Hutchinson limns. Hutchinson, however, has documented Dürer's life more fully than ever before, and her biography provides the material for the first reevaluation of Dürer in almost half a century.

#### *Contemporary Affairs*

**THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF CHILDREN.** By Robert Coles. Houghton Mifflin. 358 pp. \$22.95

The nature of children's "spirituality" is frequently speculated upon but rarely investigated. Do their ideas about God and religion reflect a genuine impulse, or are children merely parroting their parents?

Coles, a Harvard professor of psychiatry, explores these and other matters in this culmination of 30 years of writing about children. Prac-