

Fabrizio Meroi. *Cabala Parva: La filosofia de Giordano Bruno fra tradizione cristiana e pensiero moderno.*

Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2006. xii + 230 pp. index. €32. ISBN: 88-8498-305-3.

The year 2006 saw the publication of two first books on Bruno that throw a welcome fresh light on some of his major works by adopting a philosophical perspective. In this sense Meroi's book can be taken as an Italian counterpart to Leo Catana's book-length study of Bruno's theory of individuation, *The Concept of Contraction in Giordano Bruno's Philosophy*, published in London by Ashgate (see the review by Arielle Saiber in *RQ* 59, no. 3 [2006]: 833-34). Catana is concerned to bring the instruments of analytical philosophy to a study of Bruno's traditionally recognized Neoplatonic sources, with a special attention dedicated to Plotinus. Meroi, for his part, concentrates on Bruno's philosophical use of religious texts familiar to him from his early theological training. Meroi sees Bruno as proposing a philosophy that opens the way to modernity by methodically questioning the past tradition of European thought, particularly in its Christian manifestations. He recognizes the often disturbing quality of Bruno's frontal attack on traditional Christian forms of thinking and expression, but insists on the necessity of coming to terms with it if the specific characteristics of his groundbreaking contribution to early modern philosophy are to be recognized. This is a challenging and stimulating book that opens up new perspectives in the study of Bruno's thought.

Those who respond to Meroi's title hoping to find pages dedicated to the Jewish Kabbala, to Neoplatonic mysticism, or to a study of the occult, are likely to be disappointed, even if he generously recognizes the contribution by other

scholars to the study of such subjects. Although the text at the center of attention here is Bruno's fifth philosophical dialogue written and published in London, *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo*, the emphasis is definitely on the "parva" of the book's title. In an innovative first chapter, Meroi incorporates recent work done on Bruno's use of biblical sources into an original study of his daring manipulation of Saint Paul's *Epistles*. In a series of further chapters, he goes on to develop an equally original study of Bruno's satirical use of the sermons of the period, many of which would certainly have been familiar to him from his early monastic training and his brief period as a preaching monk. These chapters break new ground in the study of Bruno's rhetorical strategies. From his vehemently critical use of these religious texts, Meroi deduces a reading of Bruno's *Cabala* as a critique of all those forces that, in his opinion, were impeding the advancement of human knowledge, philosophical inquiry, and debate. The last, and certainly not the least interesting, chapter of the book pursues this theme where it is present in the *Cabala* not only as a critique of the Christian tradition, both Catholic and Protestant, but also as a critique of classical philosophical skepticism.

The promise held out in the title of this book of a study of Bruno's relevance to the philosophy of the modern world is less fully honored. For the moment, this theme is limited to some few if stimulating considerations of more modern philosophers in two separate chapters. In chapter 6, entitled "Uomini ed animali," Meroi raises the question of Bruno's well-known celebration of the animal kingdom as substantially equivalent to the human one, comparing it to Hume's similar attitude in *A Treatise of Human Nature*. In chapter 7, entitled "Il pensiero oscuro," Meroi compares Bruno's attacks on the abstruse logical and linguistic intricacies of the Aristotelian and scholastic philosophical traditions to John Locke's and Schopenhauer's similar objections to the Aristotelians. There is still much more to be done on Bruno's contribution to the philosophy of the modern world. Nevertheless, after a long season of Bruno studies at times obsessively concerned with his sources, Meroi sets the right example in accentuating the fracture that Bruno's philosophy opens with the thought of the past. This is a book that throws important new light on Bruno's works, and particularly on that brilliantly enigmatic *Cabala* "microcosmica" that has proved such a stumbling block to readers, both contemporary and modern.

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