

Armando Maggi. *In the Company of Demons: Unnatural Beings, Love, and Identity in the Italian Renaissance*.

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Following *Satan's Rhetoric*, Maggi surveys a new interesting reading of Renaissance demonology. His previous essays revealed an outstanding cultural sensibility, linked with a deep critical analysis. So the importance of the demonic presence in Renaissance thought is underlined by mentioning Machiavelli's *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Livio* (1.1.56): the Italian philosopher observed the common relationship between the ancients and the moderns and demons, who might announce events and warn men because of their compassion. The author's aim is to interrogate the sources with questions that for too long were neglected by scholars. Italian Renaissance philosophers "brought back the spirits that populated Latin and Greek culture" (xi), in a vivid cultural framework. Through four well-chosen steps — Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, Strozzi Cicogna,

Pompeo della Barba, and Ludovico Sinistrari — along two centuries, Maggi shows how demons play the role of messengers of the future: Carlo Ginzburg, in *Storia notturna*, outlined how witches represented the relationship with the dead. Now Maggi reveals another feature of Renaissance demonology: demons would appear in order to warn the living and sometimes to drive them to salvation; even the much-debated issue of the demonic body should be read in another perspective, a metaphoric one, because this essay does not want “to be a historical survey of the different philosophical and theological interpretation concerning a demon’s body” (7), but rather to put light on rhetorical mayhem and linguistic nature. So Renaissance demonologists examined spirits “come from the past to address us with some burning request” (24). Demons, as Augustine and Aquinas pointed out, represent the materialization of memories. Maggi analyzes familiar spirits as well, about whom the ancients talked (*Lares* and *Penates*), as, for instance, in earlier times, Socrates’ demon, who is reflected in Girolamo Cardano’s *My Life*, but is still mentioned by Jean Bodin, Johann Wier, and also by Andrea Vittorelli, author of a treaty on the guardian angels, *Dei ministerii ed operazioni angeliche* (1611). The spirits’ complete dedication to men is attested also by Girolamo Menghi, the well-known author of exorcistic treaties. In this way we see the loving relation between human and demon, a theme Maggi examines thoroughly.

Gianfrancesco Pico’s *Strix* (1522), for which Alfredo Perifano is preparing a new edition, is the beginning of Maggi’s analysis of the fundamental issue on the relationship between pagan myths and Christian truth. In other works, too, Pico decries the classic heritage in order to replace it with Christian messages and teachings. Theological references supported his claim for the pious scholar to be able to discern true from false: thanks to a strong contrast, he opposes in *De Venere et cupidine*, Venus, who represents sexual love, to the Virgin Mary, who represents human salvation.

In 1605 Strozzi Cicogna published *Palagio degli Incanti*, a Thomistic treatise. In this work, the author affirms that to “defeat” demons we should look for their past, be it angelic or demonic. It is an attempt to reconstruct the demons’ biography in order to find out its connections with human beings.

With the *Spositione d’un sonetto platonico* and *I due primi dialoghi* (1558), Pompeo della Barba expressed the Renaissance syncretism in its main form, the philosophy of love. Physician and Neoplatonic philosopher, borrowing Leo Hebreo’s theory, della Barba shows the physical relationship between the lover and beloved, between “shadows” and their beloved bodies, to turn upside down the Platonic statement and to assert that the spirit is the tomb of the body. At the end of this path for the relationships between humans and the spirits, Maggi chooses *De demonialitate*, written by the Franciscan Ludovico Maria Sinistrari, and published only in 1875: according to him, demoniality is a part of lust and sins against nature derive from an unnatural contamination with demoniality. Those themes were developed in *De delictis et poenis* (1700, and then, after censorship, 1753). Sinistrari focused on sodomy practiced, according to his opinion, by women too, and on the difference between incubi and succubi.

Maggi gives us an original and penetrating interpretation of Renaissance demonology, with a brilliant analysis and with a challenge to the reader for deeper thoughts on a theme that attracts scholars, but has still some new views.

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