

Hilary Gatti. *Essays on Giordano Bruno*.

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This new book by Hilary Gatti, the renowned Bruno scholar, is a collection of fifteen essays and an epilogue, some of them translated into English for the first time. The three sections are thematically rather than chronologically arranged (“Bruno and the new science,” “Bruno in Britain,” and “Bruno’s philosophy of nature”); they aim on one hand to investigate and clarify some of the turning points of Bruno’s philosophy, and on the other, to consider Bruno’s positions within his geographical and chronological context, based on a close historical reconstruction. Particular interest is dedicated to the interaction between Bruno and English culture, in his time as well as in terms of his fortune (and misfortune) among the Romantics (Coleridge in particular) and the Victorians.

Gatti focuses on Bruno’s polemic against Aristotle and peripatetic physics, on his articulated position towards Ficino and Neoplatonic metaphysics, as well as on his recourse to ancient atomism. Gatti takes into account the whole Brunian output, from the early Parisian years until his Latin poems and the most recent edition of his later magical works. Taking different points of view, she emphasises the centrality of Copernicanism, the infinity of the universe and the multiplicity of the worlds within Brunian thought, underlining the importance of the first of the Italian dialogues, *The Ash Wednesday Supper* (*La Cena de le Ceneri* [London 1584]) as a key to interpreting Brunian philosophy. From this starting point, Gatti analyzes Bruno’s attempts to establish a new language for knowledge, distinguishing metaphorical and literal senses while appealing to different modes of communication, whether it be in his use of geometry, poetry, or memory. Pythagorean numbers, the possibility of a non-Euclidean geometry, as well as Petrarchan sonnets or Lullian *ars combinatoria* can be then read as parts of the same communicative experience. In this sense the book takes stock of more than a century of Brunian studies, starting with the positive reading of Bruno’s Copernicanism by Felice Tocco at the end of the nineteenth century. It maintains the necessity in our “post-Yatesian era” of overcoming the image of Bruno as “reactionary” magus and proposes a detailed historical reconstruction of a philosophy that sought the laws of nature in order to understand the world and give mankind new rules, on both an ethical and an intellectual level. Throughout the book deep significance is attributed to the image of the nine philosophers recovering from blindness at the end of the fifth dialogue of the *Heroic Frenzies* (*Eroici Furori* [London 1585]). This image clarifies the dialectic interconnection within Bruno’s universe of magically conceived intimate harmonies, methodical inquiry, and a definition of the laws that regulate the natural *vicissitudo*. The nine philosophers must be hosted by Circe in the kingdom of matter and be blinded by her in order later to be put on the road to knowledge where the chief nymph of the river Thames will then be able to heal them, revealing the truth to them. This has to be seen as the principle of unity beyond any polar contraposition. The ultimate good, as Gatti underlines, must be found on earth,

looking for earthly harmony as symbolized in the final song of the nine *illuminati*. Gatti's book is a solid contribution to the detailed historical reconstruction of Bruno as an innovative philosopher and scientist, accompanying Bacon and Galileo toward a new theoretical and practical knowledge of the world.

Gatti's specific attention in giving an account of the different critical interpretations of Bruno's philosophy and of the status quo of current research makes this book a particularly worthwhile read for students and scholars of Bruno and of the sixteenth century in general.

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