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In the Company of Demons: Unnatural Beings, Love, and
Identity in the Italian Renaissance (review)

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Renaissance Quarterly, Volume 60, Number 1, Spring 2007, pp. 142-144
(Review)

Published by Renaissance Society of America



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Zürich, ms. F47, fol. 226^{r-v}), Postel indicated that he had translated both the *Zohar* and the *Bahir*, which were still unpublished. Postel had sent both manuscripts to Ioannes Oporinus in Basel, who never published them. He began his translation of the *Zohar* in 1548, commenting that he had received the manuscript “from Venetian blood.” The reference was, in all likelihood, to Daniel Bomberg, the Venetian printer for whom Postel had worked in the 1530s and 1540s. Bomberg had also provided Postel with his copy of the *Bahir*, which Postel had collated with his own copy found in Ferrara, as he notes in his translation of the *Bahir* (Universität Bibliothek, Basel, ms. A. IX. 99, fols. 36^r–98^v. See fol. 70^v for statement about Bomberg.). Postel played an important part in the transmission of Hebrew texts in the Renaissance, and his *Zohar* was with him on the day of his death, 6 September 1581.

Saverio Campanini’s edition of Mithridates’ Latin translation should kindle a rebirth of interest in the *Bahir* and in other important Hebrew texts which were studied so avidly in the Renaissance. Campanini’s edition provides all that a scholar could desire in a text. The introduction is detailed but clearly written, and the foreword by Giulio Busi introduces the reader to the world of the *Bahir* and its transmission. In Campanini’s introduction we find a careful explanation of the manuscript tradition. Flavius’s Latin translation is printed and annotated, as is the Hebrew text. The English translation is accurate and readable, a difficult task to accomplish for a work like the *Bahir*. The printing of this book is beautiful and the type large enough to provide easy reading. One could wish for an index of concepts as well as one of names, although this is a minor fault in comparison with what Campanini has provided for us.

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

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. vii + 232 pp. index. bibl. \$40. ISBN: 0-226-50130-2.

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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Roisin Cossar. *The Transformation of the Laity in Bergamo, 1265–c. 1400.*

The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400–1500, 63. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006. xiv + 228 pp. index. bibl. \$116. ISBN: 90–04–15222–9.

Since its beginnings in the mid-1970s, the study of medieval and early modern confraternities has come a long way. At first, it focused exclusively on statutes. By publishing numerous founding documents and later revisions of them, an ongoing effort, participants in this field of research have made a valuable contribution. Statute history, however, has inherent limitations. Obviously, prescriptive sources can shed no light on who members of lay devotional and charitable organizations were and what they actually did. To discover which social groups joined and led confraternities, whether and to what extent women and clerics participated in them, to what kinds of devotional and charitable activities they devoted themselves, and how these features changed over time, it is necessary to scrutinize other, non-prescriptive sources — as the more sophisticated and perceptive students of confraternities have recently been doing.

With this monograph, Roisin Cossar joins the vanguard of confraternity studies and scholarship on the laity and religion. As her title indicates, she focuses on Bergamo, a city in northwestern Italy, during a “long” fourteenth century. At the beginning of her period, Bergamo was an independent commune; in the middle of it (1332), the Visconti of Milan became its overlords. (Later, in 1428, the city and its hinterland would be annexed by the expanding Venetian Republic.) Making ingenious use of abundant documentary material preserved in Bergamo, above all notarial records, Cossar conducts a socially differentiated, diachronic examination of lay religious activities in this late medieval city.

The *Misericordia Maggiore* (MIA) features prominently in Cossar’s study. Founded in 1265, the MIA almost immediately became Bergamo’s largest and most powerful confraternity. Over the course of the fourteenth century, led by prominent male citizens who served simultaneously as officers of the confraternity and of the commune, the MIA assumed direction over other lay religious groups’ affairs. Its notaries redacted a growing number and proportion of Bergamasque testaments and supervised their execution. In the process, it increasingly wielded social control over testators’ heirs as well as beneficiaries of its own charitable initiatives.

Membership in the MIA and other Bergamasque confraternities was open to men of all social ranks. Some, though not all, confraternities admitted women, but they were never allowed to participate in directing confraternal operations. Until