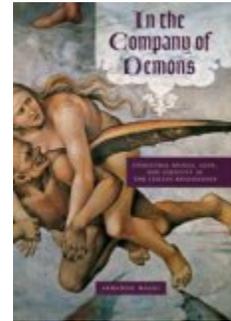


Armando Maggi. *In the Company of Demons: Unnatural Beings, Love, and Identity in the Italian Renaissance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. vii + 232 pp. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-50130-7; \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-226-50131-4.

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Speaking with Spirits

If Armando Maggi has done anything, he has shown us how to enter into conversation with nonhuman entities. Colloquy, he states, lies at the heart of exorcism, when a human being tries to do two things: to calm a nonmaterial being that finds itself trapped in an alien environment, like a fish out of water, and threshes around in such ways as may do harm to the humans who happen to be in its vicinity; and then, having calmed the spirit, to find out who it is and reassure it (and empower the exorcist), by making it reveal its identity, and to remind the spirit of its past history and its destined place of existence so that it can find its way back there and resume the state of being allotted to it by Almighty God. These and similar discourses formed the subject matter of Maggi's earlier monograph, *Satan's Rhetoric* (2001), and it is to this same topic of language and conversation between humans and spirit beings that he returns in this book in an effort to understand not only how but also why these disparate parts of creation engage each other with words.

Once again, Maggi introduces us to writers whose work has either been little studied or has not received the kind of detailed investigation that is a key feature of his work. He begins with a story from Girolamo Menghi's *Compendio* (1576) in which he sets out his themes. Using this story, Maggi examines the complex motives behind demons taking human form and the relationship thus created and developed between human and spirit. He emphasizes the demonic body as a series or cluster of metaphors representing what he calls "a spiritual and cultural hybrid" through which he hopes to open up a chan-

nel of communication between the spirit and a human being (p. 9). Everything the demon does is, therefore, in one form or another, a linguistic act. Moreover—and this is a surprise that appears more than once in Maggi's account—the demon's motives for this intercourse appear to be benevolent.

Chapter 1 focuses on Giovan Francesco Pico della Mirandola's *Strix* (1523), which is usually discussed in relation to witchcraft. Maggi, by contrast, uses the dialogue to analyze Pico's views on pagan myths (which Pico sees as stories told by Satan and which are deeply embedded in the European culture of his time) and on the witch herself who is an embodiment of those same Satanic tales. Her Latin name, *strix*, indicates her hybrid nature and thus dehumanizes her, so to speak, transforming her into a type of abominable discourse. In chapter 2, Maggi introduces Strozzi Cicogna's *Palagio degli incanti* (1624) wherein Cicogna provides a remarkably detailed taxonomy of those nonhuman entities that have pervaded creation since the beginning. Cicogna describes their multifarious biographies in an effort to understand and explain them as messages from the supernatural and preternatural worlds made visible either for our human benefit or to our detriment.

Pompeo della Barba's *Spositione d'un sonetto platonico* (1554), the topic of chapter 3, illustrates a relationship between body and soul in which the soul is conceived as a mixture of flesh and spirit. Maggi examines the part played by the body in the life of the spirits of

the dead who are not of this world any longer, but not entirely separate from it either. "Even when the soul has finally purged itself of its persistent memories (its enduring love feelings), the soul's connection with the body is not over" (p. 133). In chapter 4, the author turns to Sinistrari's *De demonialitate* (not published until 1875) in which the Franciscan drew connections between lust and the state of being a demon, and human contact with demons, a contact which corrupts lust even further and results in "sins against Nature" by both men and women (p. 143). The incubus, therefore, becomes a significant type of spirit that longs for sexual intercourse with human beings, and so protracts and complicates the relationship between these two different orders of being.

Maggi presents new and intriguing insights into demonologies (not to mention other types of literature) of the early modern period, partly by refusing to import

modern casts of mind into the past and partly by trying to reread this type of literature on its own terms, an altogether admirable approach and one worthy of applause and recommendation. My one reservation about Maggi's treatment is that he does not distinguish among the various orders of nonhuman entities. Angels, demons, and spirits of the dead commingle in his interpretations, and I wonder whether that is legitimate. Did these early writers really not make, or at least try to make, a distinction between spirits originating from a good source and those originating from a bad source? Surely that was a core problem faced by confessors and inquisitors when they had to decide on the acceptability or otherwise of visions, messages, or voices claiming to be angelic. Nevertheless, the book is heartily to be recommended as an instructive way of opening up approaches to demonology as a whole and as a mean of engaging us again with questions that used to be at the cutting edge of intellectual endeavor

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