



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice
Department of
Philosophy and
Cultural Heritage



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h. 3.00-4.00 p.m.
Sala Berengo
Malcanton Marcorà
Palace, Aula Valent,
Dorsoduro 3484/D
30123, Venice

Guest hosted by
the ERC endeavor
EarlyModernCosmology
GA 725883

Image: Monstrous whale attacking a ship" in Conrad Gessner, *Historiae animalium* (1558:138), Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München, Rar. 2234.

Workshop ERC EarlyModernCosmology presents
**Giordano Bruno's metaphor
of the Spanish conquest as
a "swallowing whale"**

Silvina Paula Vidal

National Council of Scientific and Technological Research /
Universidad Nacional de San Martín (Argentina)

Introduction by prof. **Pietro Omodeo**

Between 1584 and 1591, Giordano Bruno developed a harsh criticism to Spanish colonization in America. Although there are a few explicit references in his work, they play a major role in connecting cosmological, anthropological and religious aspects of his universal reform. Bruno's anthropological defense of pre-adamic polygenism (natural, plural and independent generation of different human groups in diverse countries) runs, at a cosmological level, parallel with the existence of infinite homogeneous and autonomous planetary systems. Spanish domination in America could not be justified by religious, cultural or economic superiority of any kind, but it was associated with piracy, deceit, depredation and brutal violence. In this occasion I will address the third dialogue of *Spaccio della Bestia Trionfante*, where *Argo Navis* symbolizes European colonization in its Spanish version. Saverio Ricci has related this Brunian

motif with Sebastian Brant's *stultifera navis*, Erasmus' *Folly* and the reflection on the tragic effects of European wars of religion and the conquest of the New World. Without underestimating his interesting study, but trying to enrich and expand it, I would like to focus on the transformation that operates on the same passage of *Argo Navis* into a whale that swallows and vomits naked bodies, with the purpose of tracing the literary and iconographical sources of this metaphor. In addition, I will argue that despite the fact that Bruno, in his attempt to invert this Biblical metaphor, relates whales to monsters following an old cultural tradition (present in the *Physiologus* and *Medieval Bestiaries*), he was also aware of natural histories and cosmographies, which impelled by Renaissance maritime discoveries and new modes of observation and description of nature, pretended to give updated and accurate information on cetaceans.



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