

JOHN JEFFRIES MARTIN, *A BEAUTIFUL ENDING. THE APOCALYPTIC IMAGINATION AND THE MAKING OF MODERNITY*, YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, NEW HAVEN – LONDON 2022, VIII + 324 PP., ISBN: 9780300247329.

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THE APOCALYPSE AND THE SEEDS OF MODERNITY:  
A BRIEF NOTE ON JOHN JEFFRIES MARTIN'S *A BEAUTIFUL ENDING*

When we think of the figure of the German printer Johann Gensfleisch, better known as Johann Gutenberg, and of his revolutionary work concerning the printing press, we usually relate his name to the printing of the Bible in 1453–1454, which is considered to be the first book ever printed in Europe. Thanks to an incident of pure chance, however, which occurred in Mainz in the late nineteenth century and accurately described by John Jeffries Martin in his latest work here at hand, we are bound to rethink our understanding of Gutenberg's process in the development of the printing machine. By virtue of the diligent work of an archivist at the University Archives of Mainz who identified an intriguing fragment written in Gothic letters and to its subsequent analysis and study by several scholars, we are now aware that Johann Gensfleisch had already achieved significant results prior to his work on the Bible. The study of this surviving document in Mainz revealed that Gutenberg's first successful printing endeavour had already taken place a few years earlier and concerned the printing of an apocalyptic poem, namely the fourteenth-century *The Book of Sibyls*.<sup>1</sup> In the narrative constructed by Martin, as it will clearly appear, the importance of Gutenberg's work lies in conveying the emotions of an age that was day by day more convinced that the End of history was imminent. This attitude, which was shared by the three monotheistic faiths, formed what Martin calls an « apocalyptic braid » constituted of hopes and fears. As Martin clearly describes in the opening chapter of the book, hope in a renewal of the world was a common phenomenon in the sixteenth century.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. JOHN JEFFRIES MARTIN, *A Beautiful Ending. The Apocalyptic Imagination and the Making of Modernity*, Yale University Press, New Haven – London 2022, p. 35–55.

In light of the argument that John Martin intends to develop in his work, the printing activity of Gutenberg, referred to as « purveyor of prophecies », <sup>2</sup> represents the vehicle whereby it became possible to convey the emotionality of an age in which hopes and fears for End of Times played a significant role, a moment in which Martin affirms that « the printing press and the prophetic would forevermore be joined ». <sup>3</sup> The intensification that this union had on the reception and the spread of the apocalyptic ideas is also testified by the large number of printings and images circulating in the second half of the fifteenth century which embellish the reading of the text and reverberate considerably the intellectual path designed by Martin. Among these, the *Book of Revelation* and *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* by Albert Dürer assume particular relevance as they fed men and women of the fifteenth century with a cultural luggage that convinced them of the certain coming End of History. To further enlighten the impact that these works and many others had in the period in exam, John Martin rigorously depicts a landscape wherein intellectual threads, historical events, natural occurrences, and political developments are interpreted across different cultural, intellectual, and religious milieus under a predominant lens, that is, the announcement of « A Beautiful Ending ».

In order to better understand, however, the nature and the goals of Martin's work, a question needs to be answered first: why did Gutenberg focus his endeavours on an apocalyptic work in his first attempt to build the printing press? The nature of this question represents exactly what John Jeffries Martin attempts to unveil with his latest work, *A Beautiful Ending. The Apocalyptic Imagination and the Making of Modernity*, published by Yale University Press. As in fact he does with the case of Gutenberg's work, thus shifting our approach to this foundational moment in the making of the modern world, in this volume Martin aims to reconstruct a different path through which it would be possible to counterbalance the widespread interpretation of the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern world predominantly in a secular perspective. The intents driving Martin are clearly exposed by the author in the introduction to the work and find their personification in the intellectual work of Francis Bacon, *alpha* and *omega* of the book. <sup>4</sup>

The centrality of Bacon in the development of the volume appears quite clearly from the very first line that opens the book. From there, the author paints an elegant metaphor in explaining what the purposes of his work are and the role played by Bacon in them. As we have mentioned, the goal that Martin attempts to

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<sup>2</sup> MARTIN, *A Beautiful Ending*, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> MARTIN, *A Beautiful Ending*, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> MARTIN, *A Beautiful Ending*, p. 2. For Bacon, crossing the pillars offered the promise of new and expanding knowledge of the world and of nature. Bacon, that is, signalled a shift to modernity itself.

achieve consists of delivering an account of the foundations of modernity which can free itself from the popular interpretation of the transition from the Middle Ages to Modernity in a secular sense by shedding considerable light on the role that the apocalyptic imagination played in founding the modern world. Although there is no explicit reference, one cannot help but notice in Martin's remarks an allusion to the so-called 'Cambridge School' interpretation of early modern politics whose representatives have given great contributions to a better understanding of the political forces at play at the handover between the medieval and early modern period.<sup>5</sup> It is not clear, however, to what extent, if any, Martin intends to engage with this tradition of thought since there is no mention at all throughout the whole volume. The only two references to this tradition of thought that can be found in the volume are represented by footnote seventeenth in the fourth chapter, « Conquest and Utopia », concerning Quentin Skinner's research on More and on the political developments of the utopian ideas in early modern Europe, and by footnote forty-fifth in the sixth chapter, « Antichrist and Reformation », concerning Skinner's analysis of Lutheran political principles. Despite not saying anything specific in regards to the main school of thought which has solidified the legal and political perspective of the transition to modernity, in describing the intellectual path designed Martin brings into play several scholars – Jacob Burckhardt, Karl Marx, Max Weber – who, according to him, have interpreted the making of the modern world mainly through the loss of faith as one of its cardinal elements. To this end, Martin builds an intellectual structure whereby it would be possible to showcase that God never really stepped out of the intellectual landscape in the early modern period, but that rather adopted a different configuration which fuelled with his presence the hopes and fears for a new world setting in which the « apocalyptic imagination was especially decisive ».<sup>6</sup>

Besides being the place where Francis Bacon brought Martin – a key element that we learn in the introduction –, the Pillars of Hercules represent a further interesting foundation to the work here at hand. As it is well-known, the Pillars, or the Strait of Gibraltar, had symbolised a boundary beyond which a dangerous world was hidden, a view that witnessed a radical adjustment in the European mindset during the age of explorations which saw the vision of the Pillars become more of a portal rather than a barrier. The cultural interpretation of the Pillars would bear an additional transformation with Bacon's work which would implement a subtle yet significant change in the frontispiece to his *Instauratio Magna*, published in 1620. Notwithstanding the powerful image of the ship crossing the Pillars of Hercules and its intellectual and cultural implications, Martin focuses

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<sup>5</sup> Among many works, see QUENTIN SKINNER, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. II, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1978; JOHN G. A. POCOCK, *Political Thought and History. Essays on Theory and Method*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2008.

<sup>6</sup> MARTIN, *A Beautiful Ending*, p. 9.

the attention on the epigram accompanying the frontispiece, « Multi transibunt et augebitur scientia », <sup>7</sup> which is an extract from the *Book of Daniel*. In contrast to what Martin sees as the current interpretation of Bacon's extract, in which the increase of knowledge and of commerce are viewed from a secular and modern point of view, we are now presented with a different understanding of the frontispiece and of the passage underneath it. According to Martin, the epigram does not refer as much to the commercial benefits that the crossing of the Pillars would provide, but rather to a providential mindset which envisages the growth of commerce and of knowledge provided by the opening of the Pillars as one of the signs of the imminent End of History according to the words of the Archangel Michael in the Book of Daniel. The role of Bacon and of his apocalyptic thinking, therefore, represent the foundation upon which Martin builds his arguments. In this regard, along with the importance dedicated to Bacon in the introduction, Martin also focuses on Bacon in the closing chapter of the volume, « Crossing the Pillars of Hercules », thus elegantly completing the puzzle that he had developed throughout the book. This becomes particularly clear in the connection that the author operates between Bacon's apocalyptic thinking and his work on natural philosophy which together cross the Pillars, that is, open a new possible road for knowledge that would free itself from the shadow of the ancient authors. The latter, in fact, cannot be trusted, because the world is now different from the one the ancients had lived in. Therefore, men and women do not need to stand on the shoulders of giants anymore, as Bernardo of Chartres would have said, but can themselves be giants in a new configuration of the world.<sup>8</sup>

Having come to this point, it is necessary now to delve a bit more into the meaning that Martin gives to the term 'modernity'. Since the work we have at hand intends to open a different and unexplored path to the roots of modernity, the question of the interpretation of 'modern' is at the core of the work and is in fact handled in the first pages of the book. More specifically, on p. 8 Martin writes that « to be sure, what we mean by 'the modern world' depends very much on who and where we are ». <sup>9</sup> Moreover, towards the end of the introduction we find a more detailed explanation of the sense of modernity that Martin intends to convey in the book, namely a 'providential' modernity which proved to be a significant agent for change across Jew, Christian, and Muslim men and women in the early modern period.<sup>10</sup> Even more so, in light of the events of which we are all witnesses these days and thanks to Martin's masterful ability in putting in dialogue different sources with different traditions of thought, *A Beautiful Ending* has the impactful effect of making us reconsider the origins of the modern world and how, then and

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel 12:2-3.

<sup>8</sup> MARTIN, *A Beautiful Ending*, p. 225-241.

<sup>9</sup> MARTIN, *A Beautiful Ending*, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> MARTIN, *A Beautiful Ending*, p. 9.

today, ideas intertwine among them regardless of cultural and religious boundaries.

Among the many examples brought forward in the volume, the interpretation of 'modern' according to 'who and where we are' stands its ground especially in the third and fourth chapters dedicated to Christopher Columbus, his approach to the encounter with the native populations of the Americas, and its subsequent effect on the European mindset. In referring in fact to this event, which is generally assumed as one of the events that drew the line between the Middle Ages and the modern world, Martin employs the word 'discovery', a term which can have a few controversial implications in the current political and intellectual landscape. Martin's use of the term, however, is quite well-handled and properly conveys its contextualised meaning, namely the historical effect that the Atlantic encounter had on Europe as the latter was slowly exploring a continent and its populations of which had never heard before.

In the intellectual path that Martin builds in the volume, the concept of history itself represents one of the constitutive elements of the overall argument in light of the several developments throughout the centuries according to the different circumstances that were befalling upon Europe, considerations that had already begun a few centuries before with the work of Joachim of Fiore and which would have been widely present among the Franciscan missionaries who travelled to the Americas to preach and convert the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas to the Christian faith.<sup>11</sup> Even though the Franciscan millenarian project is well-investigated in the volume, the spiritual activities pursued by key figures such as Jerónimo de Mendieta concerning the implementation of the *historia salutis* find little to no space in Martin's account, an absence which appears to be odd since their understanding of the unannounced appearance of the American continent clearly prompted the Franciscan friars and theologians to come up with solutions that would enable the implementation of history as a sacred force in Mexico. The Franciscan missionaries who were sent to Mexico City in the early sixteenth century, in fact, were faced with a difficult and unprecedented task in their encounter with the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas: confront a history of which they knew nothing, identify the populations encountered and, more importantly, incorporate them into the universal history of Christianity. In addition to these tasks, the locals also needed to be extirpated of their historical identity so that a new one could be given to them, a historical understanding of themselves that would enable them to comprehend their 'true' identity and the role they played in the economy of the *historia salutis*.

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<sup>11</sup> See JOHN PHEELAN, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World. A Study of the Writings of Gerónimo de Mendieta, 1525-1604*, University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles 1970.

In order to achieve this goal, the Franciscans resorted to the work of Joachim of Fiore which allowed them to keep together both missionary and eschatological ambitions, all within the spectrum of the *historia salutis*. Prompted by this intellectual and theological background, the only means to come to a full understanding and to a full recognition of the populations encountered across the Atlantic consisted of finding references of their appearance in the Scriptures and in the framework established by Joachim. More specifically, the Franciscan historiographical methodology implemented in Mexico City provided the necessary intellectual tools to create a renovated American society ready for the End of History. This eschatological concept of history was present since the first official Franciscan mission to the Americas of 1524, the one of the twelve Apostles led by Martín de Valencia. The name itself chosen for the mission is clearly self-explanatory in its attempt to create a significant parallelism, both on a historical and on a biblical level, between the first twelve Apostles of Christ and the mission of the new twelve Apostles who were set to convert the new pagans encountered just as the first twelve Apostles had done with the rest of the world: upon their arrival in Mexico, the Franciscan missionaries already had a well-defined idea of history in mind.

The Franciscans started this process by dividing the period before and after their arrival. According to them, the history of the Americas started in 1524. When they arrived in the Americas, they have already developed the idea that they are part of a pre-announced history in which everyone has a precise role and duty to fulfil, even those who are not fully aware yet of their 'true' historical identity. In order to make this happen, the local history antecedent to the missionaries' arrival in Mexico City had to be purified and set in accordance with the one and only version of history that is acceptable, the biblical one. This element is rather evident, for instance, if we take a look at the work of Jerónimo de Mendieta, who, in his *Historia eclesiástica Indiana* written in Mexico City in the second half of the sixteenth century, envisages the creation of a new Church in the new conquered land and develops a theology of history filled with historical events that are revealed as an expression of divine will. The narration of history is based upon the rhythm of the history of the Church, which comes to be one with the historical identity of the Mexican population. In describing the activities and the role played by the Spaniards and by the Franciscans in Mexico, Mendieta draws several analogies between events narrated in the Scriptures and events that occur in the Americas. More specifically, Mendieta identifies the American populations and their conversion to Christianity with the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt.<sup>12</sup> By adopting this theological interpretation of history, clearly

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<sup>12</sup> JERÓNIMO DE MENDIETA, *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana*, ed. JOAQUÍN GARCÍA ICAZBALCETA, Mexico 1870, p. 173: « De cómo en la conquista que D. Fernando Cortés hizo de la Nueva España, parece fué enviado de Dios como otro Moises para librar los naturales de ella de la servidumbre de Egipto ».

inherited from Joachim, the indigenous inhabitants of Mexico become the new elected people who will guide mankind towards salvation. This was their one and real identity. This was the role that they were set to play in the universal Christian history of salvation.

In this process, Hernan Cortés played a significant part. In his use of the analogy between biblical passages and historical events, Mendieta proceeded in assigning to the conquistador Cortés the role of the Second Moses who would guide the elected people towards salvation and prepare them for the imminent End of History, thus testifying to the juxtaposition of the Christian biblical history upon the local one.<sup>13</sup> According to Mendieta, God himself chose Cortés to go to the New World, conquer the populations inhabiting the continent, and bring them within Christendom so that the path towards salvation can be initiated. By adopting this methodology of interpreting history through theological lenses, Mendieta was able to identify the newly encountered populations with their 'true' identity. In this regard, Martin does not engage with the line of research developed by Serge Gruzinski who has recently outlined the existing relationship between the development of the Christian biblical history of salvation in relation to the multiple encounters with an Other previously unknown.<sup>14</sup> Undoubtedly, Martin's and Gruzinski's work pursue different lines of research, but, nonetheless, a more in-depth investigation on the role that the *historia salutis* had on the development of the apocalyptic ideas and in relation to the Atlantic encounter could have given a more insightful perspective on the intellectual and cultural implications of Europe's encounter with an Other of which had never heard before. The European reaction to the encounter is fairly investigated in chapter nine and ten, « The Spiritual Globe » and « Cannibals », in which Montaigne assumes the role of spokesman of Europe's reaction to the astonishing encounter with the American populations. This is still indebted, however, to a Eurocentric point of view whereby the Other is perceived as non-European, hence as an incomplete construction of a European model. In this regard, therefore, the feeling is that of a missed opportunity to conduct a more in depth investigation on the effects that the increasing knowledge of the Other had on the development of the European consciousness. This transpires quite vividly when we think of the great encounter that Europe had in the thirteenth century with the Mongol Tartars, an encounter which fuelled the first strong spread of the apocalyptic imagination as the

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<sup>13</sup> JERÓNIMO DE MENDIETA, *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana*, p. 157: « Mirad si el clamor de tantas almas y sangre humana derramada en injuria de su Criador seria bastante para que Dios dijese: Vi la afliccion de este miserable pueblo; y tambien para enviar en su nombre quien tanto mal remediase, como á otro Moisen á Egipto ».

<sup>14</sup> SERGE GRUZINSKI, *La machine à remonter le temps. Quand l'Europe s'est mise à écrire l'histoire du monde*, Fayard, Paris 2015.

research of Davide Bigalli has shown.<sup>15</sup> One cannot help but think, then, that there is a strong link between the encounter with an Other and its interpretation as one of the signs that pre-announce the End of Time, a link that perhaps should be more pursued in the current literature so as to shed more light on the role that different perceptions of the Other and their respective implications had in building a European historical identity.

The author's merits, however, far exceed the few critical points. In regards, for instance, to the issue of history as a sacred forced in which there are certain roles to be played by certain actors, Martin fully demonstrates his abilities both as an historian and as a writer. More specifically, Martin's merits can be appreciated in the depiction of this widespread idea of history among Islam and Jewish authors as well as among Christians, an element that attests once more to the author's knowledge and skills in holding together primary sources and literature so as to convey a more comprehensive picture of different intellectual milieus in the early modern period. The Franciscan endeavours in the Americas and their apocalyptic inheritance, in fact, have been usually isolated and not put in dialogue with their contemporary intellectual milieus, a lack in the literature that Martin intends to fill with his work. This aspiration is also successfully achieved thanks to a conceptualised structure of twelve chapters which draws the reader first into the historical context and, from there, in the 'bottega of the ideas', a structure then that fully enables the reader to immerse himself in the intellectual arena of the time. This structure acquires considerable strength in the fifth chapter of the book focused on the political developments of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, a chapter which represents a key point in the volume as it constitutes the watershed between the first part of the book and the subsequent two. In the first part of the book, which encompasses the first four chapters, the author describes the development of the apocalyptic imagination and how hopes and fears for a beautiful ending across different threads of thought influenced Christian, Muslim, and Jewish thinkers. In this regard, Martin resorts to a large number of primary sources which enriches considerably the argument. In the second part, on the other hand, which includes the subsequent four chapters, from five to eight, Martin focuses on the political and social effects that the circulations of books, images, and printings had at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries on historical events such as the Reformation, the Atlantic Encounter, and the French wars of religions. In the last part, from chapter nine to twelve, then Martin successfully composes the puzzle by bringing together the results of his

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<sup>15</sup> DAVIDE BIGALLI, *I Tartari e l'Apocalisse. Ricerche sull'escatologia in Adamo Marsh e Ruggero Bacone*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1971. The work of James Muldoon has shed significant light on the relationship between Europe and the non-Christian Other, especially on a political and ecclesiological level. More specifically, see JAMES MULDOON, *Popes, Lawyers, and Infidels: The Church and the Non-Christian World, 1250-1550*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1979.



investigations and depicts the impact that the spread of the apocalyptic imagination had in building the foundations for a global reconfiguration of the world in the aftermath of the events of the sixteenth century.

Having built, therefore, in the first four chapters the infrastructure whereby hopes and fears for an imminent End of History constituted a moving force and were very much protagonists across early modern Europe, Martin brings into play the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empires and their development according to their respective political theology. To this end, the author refers to different sources which attest to the reading of history through signs that would reveal the imminent coming of a beautiful ending with one last Emperor reigning in the new established order. The author's writing abilities stand out by being able to distinctly portray the two empires as a mirror of the other in their attempt to establish the ultimate ruler of the world. In this regard, the accurate description of the intellectual work of the fourteenth-century writer Ibn Khaldūn – whose writings and concept of history would exercise considerable influence in the courts of the Ottoman sultan in the sixteenth century – represents a key point in the book as it brings together what the author had described in the previous chapters. In the prior pages, in fact, the author had delved into the importance that astrology had in developing apocalyptic imagination and millenarian ideas in the early modern period. To this end, Martin draws the reader's attention on how the practice and science of reading the stars as means to predict the future was a phenomenon that overcome cultural and religious boundaries. If in fact we are mostly brought to the astrological work of the French theologian Pierre d'Ailly and to the well-known influence that his *Imago Mundi* exercised in shaping Christopher Columbus' mindset in a providential sense, not only does Martin remember us that Columbus was also deeply impacted by d'Ailly in his Renaissance quest to understand his own role in the world, but, most importantly, he paves a similar path through which he enlightens a parallel tradition in the making of modernity.<sup>16</sup>

In the same years in fact in which Pierre d'Ailly was developing his work, the Ottoman scholar whom we have already mentioned above, Ibn Khaldūn, was elaborating his own intellectual endeavours and his own approach to interpret the signs of his time. In the attempt of unveiling the reasons behind the events occurring across the Mediterranean in the fourteenth century, Ibn Khaldūn offered an analysis of the concept of history different to the one developed by the Christian and Jewish traditions. If the latter two in fact view history in a teleological sense, the Ottoman scholar conceptualises history as a cycle through which the world would witness a succession of Bedouin tribes which would piously rule the world, an idea that would have enjoyed rather fortune at the court of the

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. MARTIN, *A Beautiful Ending*, p. 92–111.

sultan in the sixteenth century. Just as in fact Christians were waiting for the second coming of Christ and Jews were waiting for the Messiah, Muslims – Martin’s account concerns particularly the Ottoman rulers – were also living in the expectation that the End of History was imminent. In this regard, Ibn Khaldūn’s writings with their astrological elements, as Martin eloquently conveys, gained particular momentum in the sixteenth century in the attempt to solidify the role of the sultan in the sacred drama of history. To this end, the conjunctions of Saturn and Jupiter had significant importance in their foundation of the title of the sultan as *ṣāhib-qirān*, that is, « Master of the Auspicious Conjunction ». Ibn Khaldūn had not developed this idea, however, in reference to an Ottoman ruler, but rather to a Mongul leader, Timur. In light of the latter’s great achievements and based on astrological calculations, Ibn Khaldūn had come to the conclusion that Timur was in fact the « Master of the Auspicious Conjunction », a title that enjoyed a considerable fortune in the Muslim world as means to further solidify the ruling of the sovereign. Martin’s excellent abilities both as a historian and as a narrator gently bring the reader to comprehend the inheritance process that this concept endured, its utilise at the court of Bayezid II almost two centuries later, and its role in envisioning the sultan as the Last Emperor who would prepare the world for the End of Times. In the description of the process, Martin gives an impressive account of his knowledge of the primary sources which inherited and adapted the title *ṣāhib-qirān*, such as the *qadi* Mevlānā ‘Isa and the courtly man Haydar-ī Remmal.

In describing the considerable impact that apocalyptic and millenarian considerations had on Christian and Muslim traditions, Martin does not leave behind the Jewish tradition. With a great demonstration of narrative skills, in fact, the author manages to develop a history that advances flawless and without bumps along the way regardless of the large number of primary and secondary sources at play. In this regard, Martin’s exposition clearly conveys how ideas circulated in early modern period and how the investigation of these ideas cannot be limited and investigated through boundaries, labels, or walls, an attitude that at times fails historians and to which Martin has dedicated a good amount of his scholarship.<sup>17</sup> Proof of this, among others, is represented by the influence that the battle between Christian and Ottoman empires exercised on Jewish messianism, as testified by the work of David Ha-Reuveni who envisioned that the victory of the Christian forces led by Charles V over the Ottomans would prepare the terrain for the coming of the Messiah. The main chapter wherein Martin develops his argument on the Jewish tradition in regards to the messianic imagination as one of the threads of thought and forces that worked together in the making of

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<sup>17</sup> Among other works, see JOHN JEFFRIES MARTIN, « Crossing Religious Boundaries in the Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean », in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 41 (2011), p. 459–462. The third issue of the *Journal* is devoted to « Identity and Religion in the Early Modern Mediterranean », and edited by Martin himself.

modernity is the eleventh one, « The Restitution of All Things ».<sup>18</sup> To this end, Martin sets the reader's attention on the Kabbalah, on the various transformations it underwent through the centuries, and its role in interpreting the signs announcing the End of History. More specifically, Martin's exposition manages to enlighten quite clearly the transformation that the reading of the Kabbalah underwent from Maimonides, who approached the text through an overly rationalistic reading, to Isaac Luria and Moses Cordovero, who attempted to restore the symbolic reading of the text.

The specific attention accorded to these two chapters is due to the fact that they both function within the volume as junctures between different traditions, which also exemplify accurately, as we have mentioned many times, Martin's ability in holding together different threads of scholarship and in delivering a rich and comprehensive picture of the forces at work in the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern world, thus overcoming walls and boundaries that more than often are artificial and hinder a comprehensive understanding of the forces at play. *A Beautiful Ending* achieves its goal in depicting an intellectual and cultural landscape in which ideas, images, and emotions travel and are connected across different contexts and different settings.

Martin opens his work by affirming that Francis Bacon brought him to the Pillars of Hercules. Having come to the end of the volume, we are now the ones who are brought to the Pillars by John Jeffries Martin, who invites us to go beyond them and to reconsider what we believe are the foundations of the modern world. By accompanying us through an uncommon and unexplored path, it is safe to say that Martin has achieved his goal of painting the early modern world in a more nuanced way whereby political and secular forces are co-protagonists in an intellectual and cultural panorama profoundly affected by the apocalyptic imagination and the widespread expectation for the impending End of History.

As in every chapter, at the beginning of chapter ten, « Cannibals », Martin sets an epigraph with a quote from Montaigne which reads: « Our very image of the world glides away whilst we live upon it ».<sup>19</sup> In an age when we can actually sense the world slipping away, works like the one pursued by John Martin in his *A Beautiful Ending* force us to come to grips with what we mean by the term 'modernity' and to investigate its origins, a necessity that could not have come at a better time.

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<sup>18</sup> MARTIN, *A Beautiful Ending*, p. 206–224.

<sup>19</sup> MARTIN, *A Beautiful Ending*, p. 187.