

Guido del Giudice



GIORDANO BRUNO

THE PROPHET OF INFINITE UNIVERSE



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INTRODUCTION



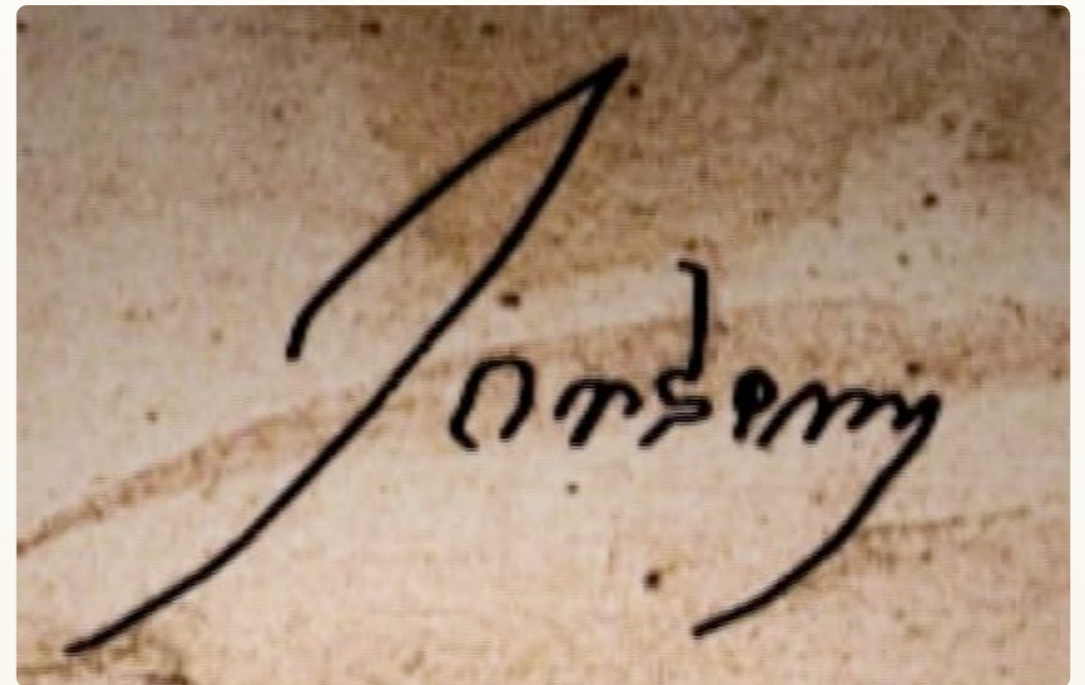
The Prophet

Giordano Bruno was a brilliant thinker, who was also ahead of his time, so that he considered himself one of those “Mercuri”, who were sent on the Earth on specific periods, inspired by a prophetic vision of the humanity and of the universe. As all the human beings of this kind, he was, and will always be, hated by those narrow-minded men, who envy everything that is beyond their understanding, since they are closed in their dull “particolare”, which they fear to see disappearing in the presence of infinity. Bruno was a man who did know his own merit and respected that of the others, the true one though, not the one established by customs and conveniences. He was a man who used to call a spade a spade. He was a man who used to love life in all its aspects and that could see the expression of divinity in all its manifestations. And he was, for sure, the implacable and convinced foe of all “those foolish and ignoble men who do not acknowledge the true nobility unless there is gold shining, silver jingling and people - who look like them – praising and showing their favour.” (*Oratio Valedictoria*). These were the ideals that he pursued during his whole life, till the extreme consequence of the stake in Campo de’ Fiori. Even if that sad epilogue was surely inevitable, for

the way things were going that time, it still remains a warning in order to avoid it happen again. His subverting intuition of the infinity of the universe derived from his knowledge of the ancient hermetic doctrines, both Egyptian and Greek, which already included those still undeveloped generating principles of the infinitist conception. But he was able to instil his peerless intellectual fervor in all of it, and then, when “Copernicus’s light” came to support his theories, the little Dominican friar could finally see the vastness of God, of the Universe, of God in the Universe of which we are the shadow, the negative that can come to see the positive aspect of the Whole only through a process of “intellectual inversion”. It’s the dimensional game in time and space, which is always present in Bruno’s works; it is the universal vicissitude: “if the mutation is true, I wait for the day in the night, and those who are in the day wait for the night: everything that exists can be either here or there, either near or far away, either soon or late”. (*Candelaio*). It is often stressed that his ideas were only based upon intuitions, probably brilliant, but which could not be accepted by the emerging scientific spirit, because they lacked any kind of “mathematization”. But it is here that we can see the

greatness of Bruno, what makes him a real prophet; the charm of his complicated personality, of the natural magic's cult, of the mnemonics, all those activities that can be considered evocative and forerunning of modern developments. When in September 1599, being put with his back against the wall by the Holy Office, which had clearly understood the devastating implications of his philosophy, he decided not to abjure the main points of his philosophy, his spirit couldn't be considered as the one of a martyr, but as the one of an illuminated thinker, who was coherent till the extreme limit. His earthy existence gives us a direction, a method, an advice which constitute the invaluable heritage that Bruno left to all the free thinkers, beyond the contradictions, the distortions or the obscurity of his work. The contemporary reader can find in him the spur to keep enlightening this reality, which, even being "umbra profunda", can be acknowledged by everyone, by studying hard, and that can be overcome with an "heroic" effort, in order to have our interior divine disclosed. Purged from the tailings of theological disputes, that did not interest him, he is still waiting to be read, judged and understood for his philosophy, for his vision of nature and of the universe, beyond

every kind of exploitation. I'll try to relate the story of this great thinker by this point of view.



Bruno's signature

GIORDANO BRUNO WORKS



1582

CANDELAIO
DE UMBRIS IDEARUM
CANTUS CIRCAEUS
DE COMPENDIOSA ARCHITECTURA ET COMPLEMENTO ARTIS LULLI

1583

ARS REMINISCENDI, TRIGINTA SIGILLI ET TRIGINTA SIGILLORUM EPLICATIO

1584

LA CENA DE LE CENERI
DE LA CAUSA PRINCIPIO ET UNO
DE L'INFINITO UNIVERSO E MONDI
SPACCIO DE LA BESTIA TRIONFANTE

1585

DE GL'HEROICI FURORI
CABALA DEL CAVALLO PEGASEO CON L'AGGIUNTA DELL'ASINO CILLENICO

1586

FIGURATIO ARISTOTELICI PHYSICI AUDITUS
MORDENTIUS, DE MORDENTII CIRCINO
IDIOTA TRIUMPHANS, DE SOMNII INTERPRETATIONE
CENTUM ET VIGINTI ARTICULI DE NATURA ET MUNDO ADVERSUS PERIPATETICOS

1587

DE LAMPADE COMBINATORIA LULLIANA
ANIMADVERSIONES CIRCA LAMPADEM LULLIANAM
DE PROGRESSU ET LAMPADE VENATORIA LOGICORUM

ARTIFICIUM PERORANDI
LAMPAS TRIGINTA STATUARUM

1588

ORATIO VALEDICTORIA
CAMORACENSIS ACROTISMUS SEU RATIONES ARTICULORUM PHYSICORUM ADVERSOS PERIPATETICOS
ARTICULI CENTUM ET SEXAGINTA ADVERSUS HUIUS TEMPESTATIS MATHEMATICOS ATQUE PHILOSOPHOS
DE SPECIERUM SCRUTINIO
LIBRI PHYSICORUM ARISTOTELIS EXPLANATI

1589

DE MAGIA
THESES DE MAGIA
DE MAGIA MATHEMATICA
MEDICINA LULLIANA
DE RERUM PRINCIPIIS ET ELEMENTIS ET CAUSIS
DE IMAGINUM.SIGNORUM ET IDEARUM COMPOSITIONE
ORATIO CONSOLATORIA

1591

DE INNUMERABILIBUS, IMMENSO ET INFIGURABILI
DE MONADE, NUMERO ET FIGURA
DE TRIPLICI MINIMO ET MENSURA
DE VINCULIS IN GENERE
PRAELECTIONES GEOMETRICAE. ARS DEFORMATIONUM
1595 SUMMA TERMINORUM METAPHYSICORUM

Chapter 1

“BORN UNDER A BETTER SKY”



“BORN UNDER A BETTER SKY”

The Nolan



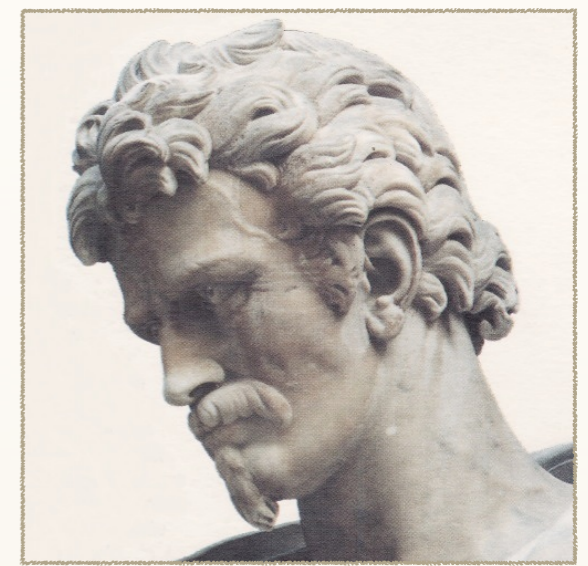
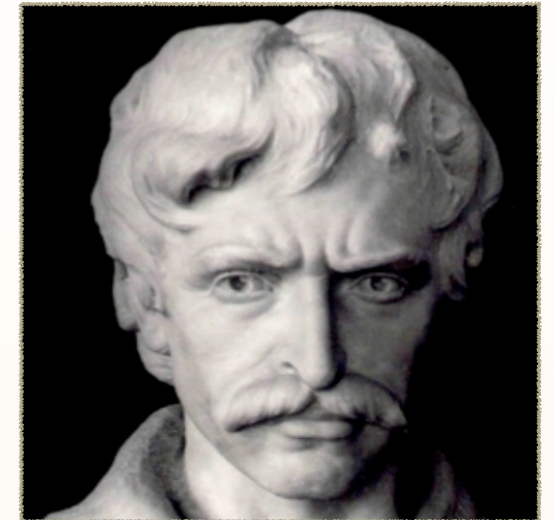
Nola in the XVI century

Giordano Bruno was born in the first months of 1548 in Nola, in the district of S. Giovanni del Ciesco, on the slopes of the mount Cicala, in a family which was not wealthy at all. His mother, Fraulisa Savolino, belonged to a family of small landowners. His father, Giovanni, was a soldier. He was loyal to the king of Spain, that is why he christened his son with the name of the hereditary prince, Filippo. From his native town, the glorious Nola, which had repelled Hannibal and where Augustus had given his last breath, he had inherited the fierce and fighting spirit, so that even if he left Nola at the age of 14 to go studying in Naples, Filippo Bruno always remained the “Nolan”.

- ◆ Nola, with its tradition of untamable and faithful warriors, whose race your father descended from, is a country deserving a Mercury.
- ◆ It is a land with strong tempers and in this I feel myself, also with my faults, his genuine son, proud to be born under that favourable sky. I could never forget the sweet slopes of the Mountain Cicala, where as a young boy I ventured in the ivies and the branches of the olive tree, of the dogberry tree, of the laurel, of the myrtle and of the rosemary. I used to feel the nature animating and informing everything with a powerful dynamism that from inside the seed or the root sends and explicates the dry twig; from inside the twig extracts the branches, from inside the branches the formed claws, from inside these explicates the buds; from inside forms, figures, weaves, as the nerves the foliage, the flowers, the fruits. I used to feel the God’s presence, infinite nature, in all the things for which there is no need to search elsewhere because we have Him near, actually inside ourselves, more than we are in ourselves. So everything animates, everything corresponds to Himself, from the great things to the vile trifles, from the tree to the flower to the blade of grass everything, though very small, is

under the great providence of God, because the great things are composed by the small ones and the small ones by the very small ones. It is the complicated that explicates, God that becomes nature, light that becomes shadow and vice versa.

- ◆ In the suggestive scenario of Cicala the experiences and the early readings stimulated your fantasy, feeding an in-born vocation for the cosmic intuition, for the projection of the imaginative and acquaintance faculty beyond the shapes and the appearances.
- ◆ How many times, sitting under the bulwarks of the castle, under the shadow of a chestnut tree, I have admired from up there that unforgettable sunset painting red the sky, emphasizing on the background of the ample plain, the black shape of Vesuvio. The sun rays, inserting in the loopholes, in between the ruins, used to project on the walls wonderful animated images. Staring at that show I used to feel that I was not alone in that instant, I used to feel the uncountable presences that populate the immensity of the universe and the magic correspondences of the elements, because we too are the sky for those who are in the sky for us. In this, as in the other worlds, the spirit floats from one to another substance, regulated by the same laws, pervaded by the same vital principle.



Giordano Bruno's face



S. Domenico Maggiore

In Naples he attended the advanced studies and he followed the private and public lessons of dialectics, logic and mnemonics given by Teofilo from Vairano, Giovan Vincenzo Colle (known as the “Sarnese”) and Mattia Aquario. In June 1565, when he was slightly old for this kind of choice, he decided to embark the ecclesiastical career, so he joined the religious order of the preachers in the monastery of S. Domenico Maggiore, where he started using the name Giordano. In the seminary his cell was close to the one where S. Thomas Aquinas had once lived. Brother Giordano soon distinguished himself for his subtle mind and the particular ability in the art of memory, but also for his intolerance to the strict rules of the religious order and his insatiable intellectual curiosity. After almost an year, he had already been accused of despising the cult of Mary and the Saints, incurring the first disciplinary measures.

The training years

- ◆ We must say sincerely that your temper, “annoyed, reluctant and bizarre” did not win other people’s sympathy. In the Nola’s childhood and even more in Naples, in a period in which the monachal community of S. Domenico Maggiore was at the apex of an extreme degeneration of the habits, it used to find a vent in the taste for the swearing, for the vulgar joke, in that “procax fescennina iocatio”, which will converge in your *Candelaio* and which emerges from the invectives contained here and there in your works or referred by the witnesses of the trial and by the cell-mates.
- ◆ When I arrived here devoured by my thirsty for knowledge, I was fascinated by this great religion that was able to impose its spiritual might and its organization.
- ◆ Still those were stormy times for the Dominican Order: internal struggles, indiscipline, vices, crimes, punishments characterized the monachal life. The dress was for many of them only an excuse to ascertain a refuge and protection for their dissolute and licentious habits.

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- ◆ The bestial natures recognize each other, even if they wear a religious dress. But the impression remained in me since then of this strong and well organized Church that, mainly after having met the others during my “peregrinatio”, remains, notwithstanding all, the best one, the only possessing a charisma and an organization able to compose under one guide the religious differences. Even if the life of clergymen was not anymore in conformity with that of apostles, the Church still had such power and influence to realize the irenistic project of an ideological peace among the peoples. It was enough to abandon that intransigent dogmatism, to let an enlightened caste of priests worry about the theological and philosophical problems, while the clergy returns to preach the evangelical message to keep the peoples in peace and concord, in an operose calm without taking care of doctrinal disputes, that only originate hatred and division.
 - ◆ This was what you intended when at the trial you claimed you talked as a philosopher, not as a theologian?
 - ◆ I did not care about discussing of a divinity that we can not really know, unless as a shadow, a vestige. My thirsty for

knowledge, the construction of my philosophy passed, during those years, through the study of many authors, heretical or not: I read Erasmus but I admired Aquinate, I interested in the heresy of Ario and I loved the divine Cusano. The religion has never been my main problem and I adapted to all the churches where I asked for a refuge. Catholic or protestant, Calvinist or Lutheran, the concept of Church justified for me only in an optical of peace, of concord among the peoples: it was enough for me to have the chance to continue to cultivate my philosophical ideas. For this reason I resisted while they were content with my formal adhesion to the various religions and they let me cultivate and spread my philosophical ideas.

- ◆ You must admit that your intolerance towards the rule was not suitable for the monk's life. Diplomacy was not definitely your thing.”
- ◆ Once, in one of the rare moments of recreation that at S. Domenico were granted to the novices, we played with the book of fate. We opened a page by chance and we read our destiny. A verse of Ariosto occurred me: “Of every law and faith the enemy”.

“BORN UNDER A BETTER SKY”

Fra' Giordano



Despite the first censures, that he got because of some unwise expressions, Bruno soon got to jump to an important level of the ecclesiastical career, thanks to his incredible qualities of mind: he became subdeacon in 1570 and deacon the following year. In 1572 he was ordained priest, celebrating his first Mass in the church of the monastery of S. Bartolomeo in Campagna, a small town which is 40 miles far from Naples.

- ◆ Of the numerous convents you visited in those years, it was the only one that you remembered at the trial.
- ◆ It is one of the few places where I was serene: there I found, for the last time, the fresh embrace of my native land.
- ◆ When you arrived, climbing on a mule's back through those impervious curves, what impression caused you the little monastery of the preacher fathers laid on the Gerione's hill, with the ruins of the fortress at the top?
- ◆ I could not believe my eyes: it looked like a spell! It was striking the similarity between Gerione and Cicala: two water drops, two twins. It seemed to me I came back home. Who would have ever tell that in that lost place, I would have had the impression to see again my homecountry, that missed me so much, in those years I spent at S. Domenico?
- ◆ The cell assigned to you looked over a narrow path, stone and impervious, that clambers up on the hill to the fortress.
- ◆ Travelling over it I often remembered, with commotion, my mother Fraulisa, when, with the long hair gathered as a plait on the nape, walked lightly at my side, holding my hand. I saw her again ascending in between the high chestnut tree, tram-

pling the hedgehogs, sinking the white ankles in a crackling bed of dead leaves. Panting for the effort and the emotion, I arrived at the top, in a place that must have been a courtyard, surrounded by crumbled walls and keeps. It really seemed that we were at the top of Cicala, in between the ruins of the castle. But here the bright plain was farther, beyond the narrow throat, as if Gerione was escaping, carrying me on his back, to penetrate in the obscurity of the valley, premonition of a dismissal, of a departure, towards an exile with no return.

◆ Towards north, beyond the black prominences of the mountain Romanella and of the Ripalta, the unknown was waiting for you. It was the last occasion that you had of contemplating the world from an higher point, with detachment. Successively, tossed by the events, from a place to another, you will not be able to do it again, unless by fantasy, until the day you will see your body burning far away, while your soul ascended with that smoke to heaven.

◆ I saw under myself the little church with the small steeple, where I had just celebrated the Eucharist and the play of the proportion as usual fascinated me, the sensation of the relativity of everything. I was still feeling in my mouth the taste of the sacrifice wine and bread, but my will to touch the Divinity was not sated. A deep dissatisfaction seized me comparing this with the universal relations that I felt up above, at the presence of the Immense.

◆ That cold winter of loneliness and meditation, was therefore decisive for your successive decisions?

◆ One day, while I was sat in the little stone guardroom, near the door of the drawbridge, dipped in the reading of the beloved Tommaso, it seemed to me that I heard his voice: “Stay with us, brother Giordano, stay in your church. Do not listen to the demon of knowledge, resist the temptations of the heresy. Humble your pride. Make a penitence for these sins of presumption of yours and renounce the insane project of spreading your crazy theories. Your great gifts of genius promise you a glorious future, the possibility to reach the highest ecclesiastical office. The Church will protect you and reward your merits with a facile and glorious life”. Those words, listened on my knees, with my face in my hands, in a sign of reverence for the divine Aquinate, did not do anything else than strengthening my purposes. I did not care about that kind of honours. I felt inside me, powerful, the certainty that I was right, that I could not renounce following the way of the truth, even if it would have brought me to the ruin. Once again I was a prey of the inebriation of the infinite. I stood up, opening my arms under the ample white mantel and I embraced with the look for the last time that spectacle. Goodbye Cicala! Goodbye Gerione! Goodbye to this peace, to the quiet days of study and meditation. My mission of Mercury waits for me: I am ready to face my destiny of humiliation and death.



It's daybreak. A carriage with the papal insignia is waiting on the church courtyard of S. Domenico Maggiore in Naples. A friar, little but elegant in his white frock of the Dominican order, comes out of the side door of the friary and gets on it, dropping half asleep onto the velvet seat. That friar is Giordano Bruno of Nola. Pope Pio V, who heard the rumours of the extraordinary ability of the young representative of the great Dominican tradition in the field of artificial memory, wants to see him at work. In Rome Bruno will recite by heart, in Hebraic, the psalm "Fundamenta", from the first word to the last one and the opposite direction. This will be the first of several performances that, during his life, he will bestow to popes, emperors, academic and ecclesiastic authorities, with the mocking pride of an unappreciated genius. But the Church will soon find out that the wonderful memory of that man is only the exterior manifestation of an incredible intuition ability, of an unrestrainable thirst for knowledge and communicating, and they will have to square things up with his scathing wit, rebel till the boldness.

"BORN UNDER A BETTER SKY"

The flight

In 1575 he graduated in theology, but he kept reading the works of Erasmus of Rotterdam while studying hard and with passion the works of S. Thomas. Some rash statements in favour of the heretic doctrines of Ario caused him a local trial, during which some charges of him having doubts about the Trinitarian dogma were brought. He went to Rome to defend himself from the accusations in front of Sisto Lucca, the solicitor of the order, and he was informed that in his cell they had found the forbidden books of Erasmus. Since the situation

was getting worse, he ran away from Rome, dropping the ecclesiastical suit. Thus, his incredible peregrination started: almost ten kilometres, which will make him visit the main European courts and academies. In the space of two years (1577-1578) he lived in Noli, Savona, Tourin, Venice, Padua, where he earned his living giving lessons of various disciplines (geometry, astronomy, mnemonics, philosophy). After some short stops in Bergamo and Brescia, in the end of 1578 he went to Lyon, Chambery and to Geneva, the capital of Calvinism. There he was put

up by Gian Galeazzo Caracciolo, marquis of Vico, who went away from Italy as an exile and set up the local evangelic community. After an experience as “first proofs-reader” for a printing works, Bruno joined formally the Calvinism and was matriculated as a teacher in the local university (May 1579). By that August, though, having published a booklet in which he pointed out twenty mistakes made by the full professor of philosophy Antoine De la Faye during one single lection, he was almost libelled.

After being arrested and brought to trial, he had the “defence de la cène” inflicted, which means that he wasn’t allowed to take communion, a fact that was the same as being excommunicated. In order to be forgiven, Bruno had to admit to be guilty and leave Geneva. His uneasiness and the intolerance to dogmas made him set up an unbeaten record of excommunications: from the Catholic and the Calvinist one to the Anglican in London e the Lutheran in Helmstedt. His next stop was Toulouse, the balwark of catholic orthodoxy in southern France, where he took the doctor’s degree and was admitted to teach for nearly two years in the local university, in order to comment upon Aristotle’s *De anima*.

Being practically unbeatable in the academic disputes, he became soon highly esteemed and admired by his colleagues, whom he clearly didn’t reciprocate. When the eminent professor Francisco Sanchez dedicated him his own *Quod nihil scitur*, with words full of admiration, Bruno’s comment written on the frontispiece of the book was cruel: “It’s is unbelievable

that this fool might be called doctor!” In 1581 the fresh outbreak of the religious conflict between the catholics and the Huguenots convinced him to move, but he was probably induced by his firm belief that he was ready for more glamorous stages.



John Calvin

Chapter 2

AT THE COURT OF FRANCE



Memory does not only mean remembering...



When he arrived in Paris, Bruno started to live a period of bright luck. He was allowed to give a course of thirty lessons on the divine qualities of Thomas Aquinas, as a n

“extraordinary lecturer”. Unlike

Toulouse, in fact, in Paris the “ordinary” lecturers had to attend masses, which he could not do, for he had been excommunicated. The stir of the incredible skills showed by the little Italian friar got to Henry III, a king with a deep culture, who was also an excellent speaker, and who wanted to meet that wonderful magician of memory. Then Bruno dedicated him an extraordinary work, “De umbris idearum”. The king’s gratitude and admiration were immediate, so that he was designated lecteur royaux in the most prestigious university of the time. A pulpit from which Bruno immediately started spreading his revolutionary theories, heedless of the ostracism of the pedantic men from La Sorbonne, who were shocked by the theories that demolished, step by step, the untouchable Aristotelian dogmas.

- ◆ Your ability in the art of memory is famous all over Europe. Could you prove it, Giordano?.
- ◆ Are you treating me like a jester, a tumbler, aren’t you? Since the time of the novitiate in S. Domenico Maggiore every Pope, sovereign and simple student wants to see me exhibiting, asking me to disclose them my secrets. They see the mnemonics only as an instrument to develop their power, in order to bind other human beings. They do not understand that the seals, the statues, are only mirror-images of the reality. They can direct the astral influence that operate in the universe through our skills, creating a direct connexion between this deep shadow and the light of the divinity. Mnemosyne is my goodness! It is to her that I do address myself, in order to remove the veil of the appearance and to get to melt with the soul of the world! Memory cannot be considered only as remembering, but also as a way to get new knowledge. Because, if my mind is divine, then, with the help of memory, I can get to know the organisation of the universe!

The “agentes” images



Bruno is a great sensitive: dipped in the Universe, he thinks to be able to knock down the barrier between human and divine, even if this knowledge still remains shady. According to Bruno, the Ars memoriae is a way to get over humanity, to the search for the truth and the inexpressible, to create bounds, to get to the universal perceptions starting from the nature of things; it is a technique to get a superior knowledge, using natural, astrological and verbal correspondences.

To the evocative images of ideal and universal concepts he commits the fundamental role of “trait d’union” with the ideal world of Neoplatonic inspiration. Statues, letters, wheels, the signs of the zodiac, they are all related, disclosing correspondences and coincidences, shadows and lights, similitudes and differences, which settle the time wheel and the vicissitude cycle. Their sequential nature and complementarity make up the unifying essence of the universe and of the infinite life-substance. Once those images, that each of us can create in an autonomous way, have been enlivened by the emotions, they do link us automatically to the sphere of the ideas

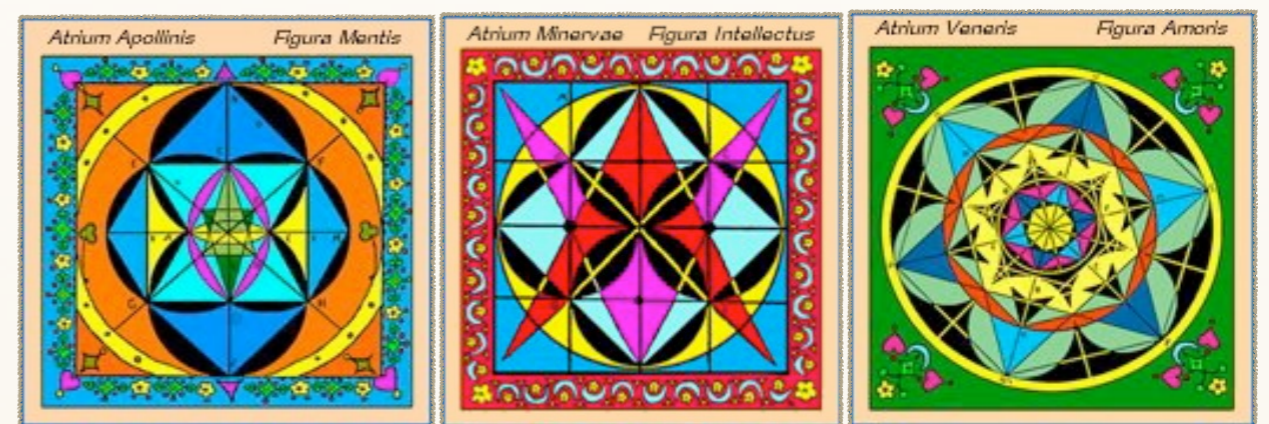
of which we are the shadows, umbra profunda, but to which we fatally tend, just like a flame, and on which we depend in a cycling alternation of ascenso and descenso. This is a process for which the spirits come to contemplate the divine principle and the souls become incarnated, changing and getting to control the substance and the forms. Stars, numbers, figures, they all refer to the basic forces of nature, which do operate in a substance that has the same dignity as the form. Bruno feels all of it and tries to express it using, with self-assurance, all the instruments that his time can offer him: the natural magic, the astrology, mathematics and the art of memory.

He is not satisfied with the stratagems used by the great mnemonics of the past, thus he creates something new, making experiments and changes. He improves and changes the mnemonical wheels of Raimondo Lullo, creating new ones, in which he associates words to images. We can recall, for example, the ones he describes in *De umbris idearum*, which, by exploiting the emotional sphere (sex, fear, etc.) and symbology of the mythological divinities, can be fixed into one's memory, in order to help remembering.

From the allegories of Spaccio to the symbols of Furori, till the concept-statue of the magnificent “Lampas triginta statuarum”, the association word-image changes from being a simple technique of memory to being a thinking mechanism, which makes it possible to create and compare the ideas to get to new truths. The idea is that of creating a mnemonical machine, a sort of creative computer, that can be able to think. If on the one hand the ars memoriae is, for Bruno, a sort of scientific instrument, on the other hand it relates to the beliefs on the astral influences, commonly accepted during the Renaissance. The stars are “big animals”, for they have a “soul” and therefore are able to bind other “souls”.

The astral forecast were commonly requested by kings and emperors; Popes used to officiate astrological rites in their private chapels; various philosophers, such as Tommaso Campanella, and astronomers, such as Tycho Brahe, used to write out fore-

casts and predictions. Just like in the Indian mandalas, Bruno tries to find and reproduce the natural mandalas in nature, which are expressed in flowers, plants, in the movement of stars and planets, in the manifestations of nature, and which, through the interiorization of the scheme, make it possible to intuitively understand its similitudes. Thus, each space of the mnemonic wheel is associated to an image, which, in its turn, is associated to a star. Let's analyse, as an example, the three fundamental figures of his geometry, which are described in *De Minimo*, with the title “Atrio di Apollo, Minerva e Venere”. They represent mythologically his philosophical belief: the hermetic Trinity of Mind, Intellect and Love.





Bruno's mandala

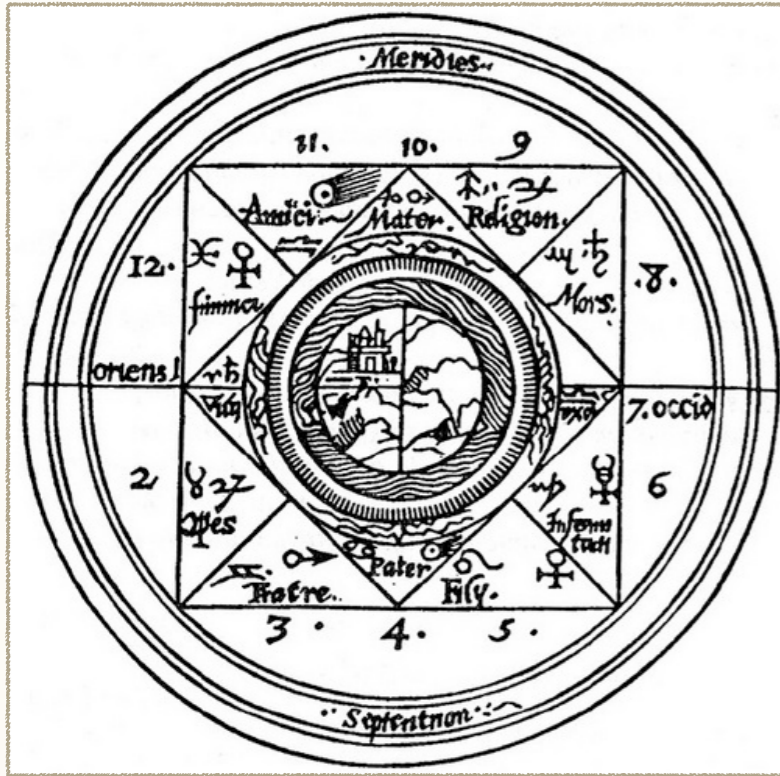
“By looking into the numbers of nature, we have focused our attention of the natural figures, through which the perfect mother, giving shape to all things, distinguishes the respective virtues and properties; it paints, carves, interweaves in their surfaces their respective names. Nature expresses through the numbers of the members and the fibres of all things their own structure. It shows in these same images the beauty, the excellence, the privileges of which it is provided, or their opposite. It puts in the shape of things the laws, the ways of acting and in suffering shows their vicissitudes. By impressing those seals, that perfect parent makes it clear the authority of a God that rules the worl”. (De monade).

Giordano Bruno's Mandala

Showing an incredible affinity to the oriental currents of thought, Bruno identifies within the natural structures some particular figures and seals, which determine the shape of things. These representations express the same effort as the Indian mandalas for getting to understand the natural geometries, in order to reproduce them in diagrams, which, being activated by the intellectual impulse, infused in them during their formulation and creation, may be able to create a link with the essential structures, supersensible of reality.

The word “mandala” in Sanskrit means “circle” but also “centre”. Let's report Bruno's words:

The centre finds expression in a wide circle, as an ordering spirit, after having found expression in the atomic aggregates, coordinates the whole, until, after time has passed and the thread of life has broken, it recompresses itself in the centre, and again spreads in the infinite space: this event is usually identified with the death; since we move towards an unknown light, only few people can feel how our life deeply means death, and how this death means having new life: it's not possible for everybody to



leave the corporeity out of consideration, so that, dragged by their own weight, they precipitate in a deep abyss, which lacks the divine light. (De triplici minimo)

This idea that the Whole derives from a divine source, until it comes back into the variety of the

One, is represented by Bruno by his drawings, in which we can find concentric centres and complicated squares; images that become “cosmograms”, that is geometric projections of the universe formula. By contemplating this cosmogram, the individual identifies himself with the mysterious forces that work out in the universe, in which the numerical ratios and the geometrical figures articulate the inner structure of reality, and he gets to dominate the structures that rule the nature, until he gets to realize in himself the coincidence between macrocosm and microcosm. This impulse towards unity, according to the oriental

philosophies, can lead to the enlightening of those who contemplate the image. Thus, the mandala is a way, a channel through which one can find the unity starting from the variety. At the same time, understanding the properties of all things, and their meaning in the order of the world, means learning how to act on them using the natural magic.



Chapter 3

LIFE IN ENGLAND



From La Sorbonne to Oxford



Michel de Castelnau

After almost one year and a half, at the beginning of the spring of 1583, Bruno leaves Paris to reach, “with the letters of the king himself”, the residence of the ambassador Michel de Castelnau in London. He explained this moving, as the one to Toulouse, with the uproars that were shocking the capital.

The time he spent in England, in the cosy and protective house of the ambassador, gave him the chance to write important works. He published, in a single volume, *Ars reminiscendi*, *Explicatio triginta sigillorum* and *Sigillus sigillorum*, after which he finished most of the Italian works: *Cena de le ceneri*, *De la causa, principio et uno*, *De infinito, universo et mundi* and *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante*. During the following year, still in London, he published *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo* and *Degl’heroici furori*. This last work, just like Spaccio’s, is dedicated to sir Philip Sidney, nephew of the Queen’s favourite, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, whom he esteemed and to whom he was a friend, so that he got into Elizabeth Tudor’s good graces. Bruno clearly shows, during the Dinner, enthusiasm and esteem for the Queen: “There aren’t enough words to talk about that deity of the world, that singular and uncommon Lady, who, from this cold sky, near the ancient parallel, makes a great light in the whole world: Elizabeth, I say, for her title and royal dignity is not inferior to any king in the world”. Even if there aren’t clear confirmations, it is extremely charming to think about a possible meeting between the philosopher and William Shakespeare. There are indubitable influences in some of his works, and even in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* we can easily equate the character of Berowne and Bruno.

Later, Bruno's insatiable ambition brought him to Oxford: it was such a wonderful occasion to express his theories about the infinity of the universe in the stronghold of the academic pedantry! When he went to the famous Oxonian university, lead by the impetuosity of his personality, he gave a hard time to a famous teacher, John Underhill, during a dispute, who became later Oxford's Bishop. This aroused some of his colleagues' indignation, who decided to show their animosity at the first occasion. After some months, he got the job of giving a series of lessons in Latin about cosmology, where he, above all, supported Niccolò Copernicus's theories about the movement of the earth. His courage lead him to being dismissed from Oxford. The mnemonics that had let him quote so faithfully his masters, that he was accused of having plagiarized Marsilio Ficino's *De vita coelitus comparanda*, so that he had to stop his lectures. But besides the personal grudges, there was a conflict between Bruno's basic ideas and the English cultural and religious situation of the time, most of all in the field of cosmology and of his antiaristotelianism. The episode of the Ash Wednesday of 1584 is really important: Bruno had been invited for dinner in the house of the English noble

Sir Fulke Greville to talk about his theories about the universe. Two doctors of Oxford, who were there, gave rise to a heated disputation, instead of opposing their arguments to those used by Bruno, and they used some expressions that Bruno considered so offensive to make him leave the house. This is the episode that made him write the dialogue *Cena de le Ceneri*, which includes some sharp – but not always tactful – remarks on the contemporary English reality, which were then mitigated in the following work called *De la causa, principio et uno*, also because of the reaction of people who had felt unfairly affected by these remarks. In the two Italian dialogues, Bruno's ideas turn out to be in contrast with the geocentric cosmology of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic sort, but he's also able to combine Copernicus's theories with the speculations of the “divine Cusano”. Following the cusanian philosophy Bruno imagines an animated, infinite, immutable universe, in whose interior there are infinite worlds which are similar to ours.

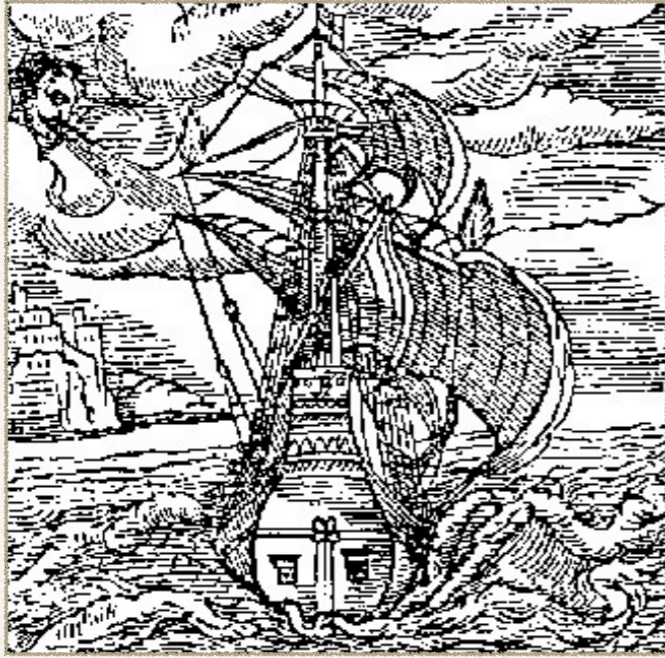


Image from “The Ash Wednesday Supper”

Even in the field of physics Bruno has left marks: it is the case of the well-known experiment of the boat used to explain the relativity of movement. The observation that a stone, which is left falling from the top of a tree of a tower, falls vertically, was considered by the Aristotelian physics as one of the most evident proofs of Earth's immobility.

The Ash Wednesday Supper

If the earth revolved, said Aristotle, it would move during the falling time, so that the spot, in which the stone falls, should move in the opposite direction to the movement of the earth. Bruno was the first thinker who refused this theory, in the third dialogue of *Cena de le Ceneri*: “If someone, who’s inside the ship, throws a stone with a straight movement, that stone will fall down on the same line, whatever the movement on the ship is, unless it bows.”. In other words, the ship, the mast and the stone make up what will later be called the “mechanic system”. “Of whose diversity we cannot give other explanations, except that the things that are fixed or are joined to the ship, do move with it.” “Thus, all the things that are on the earth move with the earth”. (Bruno - Teofilo). The argumentation of those who upheld the steadiness of the Earth was then without foundation. Showing that one cannot consider the motion of a body in absolute way, but only in relative way, Bruno open the way to Galileo’s work, who will take Bruno’s words in *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo*: “And of this whole correspondence of effects the responsible is the fact that the motion of the ship is common to all the things in it, and even to the air”. (Galileo - Salviati)

14 February 1584, Ash Wednesday. A creaking barge glides on the Thames on a cloudy night. On board, besides two old and peevish boatmen, there are Giordano Bruno and two of his friends, sir Giovanni Florio and sir Matteo Gwynn, who came to lead him to sir Fulke Greville's. He has invited the philosopher for dinner to hear him discussing his heliocentric and infinitist theories. Bruno is at the bow and turns his face toward a leaden sky, in which a white moon shines.

BRUNO. My moon, for my endless pain, is never still, and is never full. I always liked in the bright evenings like this, to contemplate it and imagine to be up there. Maybe I could finally find some peace, escape the University that I dislike, the common people whom I hate, the multitude who does not satisfy me.

GWYNN. Come on, cheer up Giordano! Tonight we're having a great dispute! I am looking forward to hearing you support the heliocentric theory of sir Copernicus against those Oxonian pedants, on which you have built your Nova philosophia.

BRUNO. I don't see neither for Tolomeo's eyes nor for Copernicus's ones! I am grateful to those great thinkers, as to many other wise men who, already in the past, had noticed the motion of the earth. It had been noticed by the Pythagoreans: Niceta Siracusano, Ecphantos, Philolaos. Plato talks about it in *Timeo*; the divine Niccolò Cusano gave it cautiously to believe. But it was me, like Tiresias, blind but divinely inspired, who could understand the meaning of their remarks, finding what they couldn't understand.

GWYNN. I used to think that at least you had nothing to say against Copernicus!

BRUNO. What a wonderful astronomer! He had the enormous merit of having given dignity and credibility to the ancient's thesis, but since he used to study more mathematics than nature, even he wasn't able to free himself from the vain chimeras of the common philosophers, in order to get to destroy the walls of the first, eighth, ninth, tenth and other spheres to affirm the infinity of the universe. That infinity that I, since I was a child, had learnt to contemplate in my beloved native land.

Chapter 4

INFINITE WORLDS

PTOLEMAEVS.



COPERNICVS,



The idea of an infinite universe was already known to the Greek philosophers. The Pythagorean Archita from Taranto, around 430, was already asking: “If I were on the extreme limit of the sky, on the sphere of the stationary stars, would it be possible to stretch out a hand or a stick?”. The hypothesis of Earth’s rotation on itself in 24 hours had already been made by Heraclitus in the VI century BC. During the IV century BC, Hicetas of Syracuse used to say that “All in the universe is stationary, except the Earth”. It turns in a circle around its own axis, while Venus and Mercury turn around the Sun (as the Danish Tycho Brahe will later say, during Bruno’s time). In his great latin poem, “De rerum natura”, Lucretius considered the unlimited universe and got to hypothesize the existence of several worlds, which respected the same physical laws and in which other thinking beings used to live.

INFINITE WORLDS

Prisoners of the fixed stars

The belief that a material heavenly vault delimited the world just like a nutshell is lost in the mists of time, but one has to wait until the IV century BC, when Aristotle, with his treatise *De coelo*, made a complete description of a theory that could explain, in the most precise way, the apparent motion of the stars in comparison with the celestial bodies. Aristotle considered the idea of an infinite world unconceivable, as most of the ancient philosophers did. His geocentric vision asserted that our little globe was stationary in the middle of the universe, and he thought that the

world’s periphery, just like a vast sphere, took 24 hours to turn around its axis, bringing with it the stars. This was the sky of the stationary stars, which were so called because the human eye sees them at a fixed distance one from the other. Its rotation explained the apparent nightly motion around the celestial pole of the stars, which would then be at the same distance from the earth. According to Aristotle, the sphere of the stationary stars wasn’t made up of the four elements (earth, water, air, fire), which were thought to make up the world, but of a fifth essence that he used to

call “ether”. According to his physics, there is a distinction between a central region, or sub-lunar world (under the moon’s orbit), which is the world where things are born, grow up and die, that is the globe, and a region that surrounds it, the super-lunar world, where there are the Moon, the Sun and the planets with their ethereal spheres: immutable bodies, that can never be changed.

Not created, eternal and perfect celestial bodies, animated by a kind of movement which is considered perfect too: the uniform circular motion. In order to explain this rotation motions and their perfection, Aristotle suggests that they might be generated by the intervention of some intelligences, whose spirits would then be moved by a First Mover, which he calls God. Thus, Aristotle’s cosmology and physics stray in metaphysics. In spite of the critics made by different ancient philosophical schools, Aristotle’s cosmology became popular in the end. All the following Greek astronomers, in particular Ptolemy in the II century AD, drew on the general theories described by Aristotle. The debates among the pure Aristote-



S. Thomas Aquinas between Aristotle and Plato

lians astronomers and Ptolemy's supporters were only based upon the secondary elements, such as the number of the spheres (eight, nine or more), the distance between the earth and the stationary stars, and, most of all, the exact motion of the planets within the spheres. During the first centuries of the Middle Age, the West forgot almost completely Aristotle's ideas. The cosmology suggested by the Christian West was essentially based upon the biblical verses about the creation of the world, which described the celestial vault as a firmament, that is a solid vault (from *firmus*, which means stationary), where the stars were fixed. At the beginning of the XIII century, when the first Latin translations of Aristotle's lost works started to spread, the Church, just like the Muslim theology had done before, understood that the treatise *De coelo* ignored the idea of the creation of the world and of the soul's immortality, even if it admitted the existence of God as First Mover. Thus, in 1210, the religious authorities forbid people from reading Aristotle's works. It was one of Bruno's teachers, the Dominican Thomas Aquinas, who found the solution to this crisis.

The "Divine Aquinate", as Bruno used to call him, realized, in *Summa Theologica* a real Christianization of the architecture of the universe described in *De coelo*. The world is unique and well delimited, closed in the sphere of the stationary stars. He adheres to the idea suggested by the Greek philosophers of a quintessence: the celestial bodies have a different nature in comparison with the four elements and are incorruptible because of their nature. At the same time, he reinterprets, from a Christian point of view, the metaphysics of the First Mover, identifying him basically with the God creator of the Revelation, and he compares the angels to the intelligences that push the planets towards their orbits or spheres. In 1323, half century after his death, Thomas Aquinas becomes canonized, and his philosophy, the "Thomism" becomes the official doctrine of the Church. The Aristotelian thought becomes the only philosophy taught in the universities all over Europe, becoming stiff together with the medieval scholastic philosophy. Aristotle is considered infallible, and he becomes popular in several branches of knowledge basically without opponents. No one dares denying that the concentric celestial

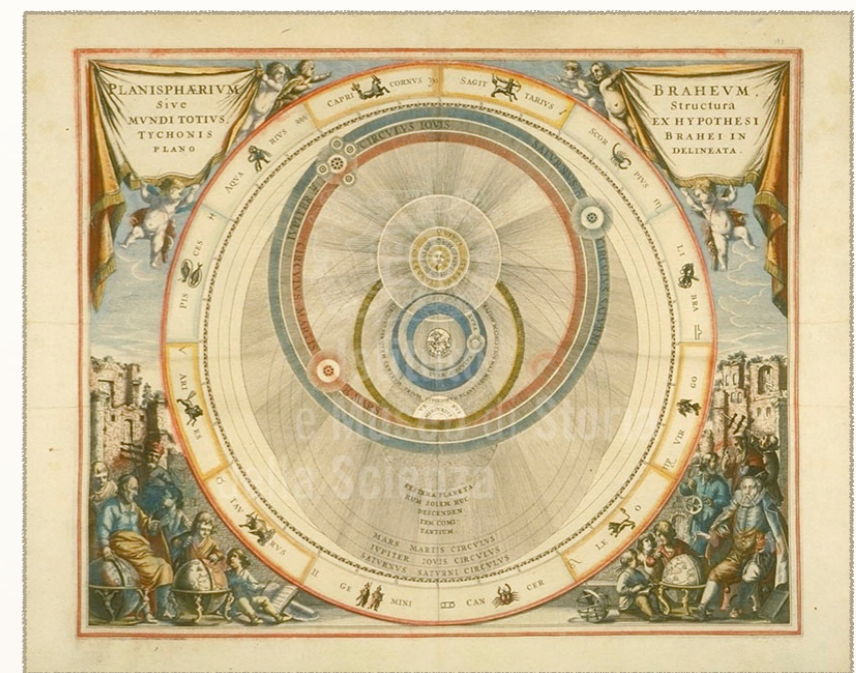
spheres move constantly around the earth. The sphere of the stationary stars, this strange thing that no human being has ever saw, becomes a celestial entity whose existence cannot be denied! The cultural revolution of the Renaissance could not ignore this integralist Aristotelianism. The studies on the Pythagoreans, on Plato, on the Stoics, the intensification of the search for the truth in different fields, from medicine to physics, to mathematics, influences all the fields of knowledge, but the universities, on which the religious control in the XVI century was basically total, represent an impregnable fortress. During the XVI century (and above), the medieval cosmologic scheme was still the one universally accepted, and Thomas Aquinas' works were the mostly printed. When in 1543 Copernicus publishes his work *De revolutionibus orbis celestis* there is a break. The Earth, far from being the centre of the world, turns on itself. Around the Sun, now stationary at the centre of the system, the "celestial orbis" turn, bringing the planets, among which there is the earth, which is situated between Venus and Mars. The Earth is a planet like the others: this is the gist, which nowadays may seem granted, but it was an incredible piece of news for Copernicus' contemporaries.

Nevertheless, the world described by Copernicus isn't exactly the same as the one we now know. On the one hand, he still describes the existence of a centre, where God put the Sun to enlighten the world, as on a royal siege; on the other hand, he still keeps an external limit. In fact, in order to explain the apparent motion of the stars in the nightly sky, even Copernicus has to resort to the sphere of the stationary stars, which he has to make stationary too, as an immense shell (*immensus* means that it cannot be measured), that surrounds the turning earth. At the beginning, the Copernican theory was relegated to the level of a simple hypothesis, which was suitable for calculations, but which did not correspond to the real structure of the world. It was considered just an effort to redefine the positions and the motions of the planets within our solar system, in the unified version of an infinite universe. It is incredible how Copernicus' works were ignored, not only when published, but also in the following decades. It is necessary to wait twenty-three years to see a second edition of *De revolutionibus*. At the beginning of 1580, almost 40 years after the first edition, when Giordano Bruno advances his revolutionary theories, the scientific world in general

was still professing the same conceptions for almost twenty centuries. If he was not the first who supported and spread the Copernican theory, Giordano Bruno was surely the first who deduced, with courage and determination, even the most extreme and dangerous consequences for the time he lived, saying that the world is not finite at all, which means that it is not closed by a sphere that surrounds it, as Copernicus and Kepler used to say. When in 1584 he writes *Cena de le Generi*, his first dialogue in Italian, Bruno has already developed the idea that our globe is uninterruptedly turning around the Sun, just like the other planets. The moment for leaving forever the undefendable theory of the Earth's centrality has finally come. Bruno's cosmology uses sources that can be traced back to the ancient philosophers, such as Aristarcus of Samos (who had already supported the heliocentric theory in the III century BC, according to which the Earth and the planets turn on circular orbits around a stationary sun), Pythagoras and Lucretius, and it is strictly connected to his metaphysics. In the third part of the venetian trial he declares: "I have an infinite universe, which is an effect of the infinite divine power, because I used to consider unworthy for the divine

goodness and power that, being able to create infinite other worlds, he created a finite world. So that I declared that there are infinite specific worlds which are similar to our Earth, which, like Pythagoras, I consider a celestial body, like the Moon, the other planets and stars, which are infinite, and that all these bodies are worlds and without number, which constitute then the infinite universality of an infinite space; and this has to be called infinite universe, in which there are uncountable worlds. Of a kind which is double the infinitude of the universe's vastness and the worlds' multitude, where indirectly there is an effort to deny the truth in the name of faith".

The sphere of the stationary stars provokes his sarcasm: "How can we believe that stars are closed in a dome, as if they were stuck to this tribune and celestial surface with some good glue or nailed with some solid nail?".



The astronomical systems: a) Ptolemaic b) Copernican c) Tychonic



The mooncrater "Giordano Bruno"

"It was the Sunday before S. John the Baptist Day, in the summer of 1178. Five monks of Canterbury's cathedral in London, after their last prayers of the day, and before going back to their cells, stopped and looked in silence at the sky. The crescent moon was shining with its hump on the west side. Suddenly they saw the upper part of the moon cracking and an incredible burst of flame coming from that crack, which spread all around some flushing substance. The monks looked amazed at each other and ran immediately to tell what happened to Canterbury's historian, Brother Gervasio, who reported it faithfully in his "Chronica". At that time, as we have seen, the sky was considered immutable, and the Moon, the stars and the planets were considered ethereal bodies. Those strange events were thought to be jinxes, because only the devil could be able to throw into confusion the stationary imperturbability of the stars. The recent spaceflights have physically confirmed that report made by the Canterbury's monk in XII century, reporting that the Moon has a slight fluctuation, as if it had been hit by an asteroid less than one thousand years ago. Exactly in the region described by brother Gervasio, the asteroid that stroke the moon in that June evening, left on the surface an enormous crater. Eight centuries later the scientists and the astronomers, who numerous admire your intuitions on the relativity and on the infinity of the universe, wanted to pay you homage. At the edge between visible and invisible face of the satellite, between light and shadow like your destiny, inclined to cross the limits of unknowable, that big, luminous crater now is named "Giordano Bruno".

INFINITE WORLDS

Magician or scientist?

Be it praised for its boldness, Bruno's philosophy gives frequently rise to the accusation of precariousness for the approximation of his mathematical theories, the hate for trigonometry, the references to the Pythagorism and to the pre-Socratics, as well as to Epicurus' and Lucretius' atomism, which are full of magical and hermetic contaminations. Even admitting that his monadology hangs together with Niccolò Cusano's thoughts, that is that magic and astrology were universally cultivated by the most important Renaissance thinkers, from Pico to Ficino, from Della Porta to Campanella, in the effort to refute, or at least

re-evaluate Bruno's greatness, his interest for the magic and the Hermetism is considered "witchlike". One has to consider that the hermetic works were actually important in drawing on the idea of the Earth's motion, and they were studied carefully even by Newton, according to whom "the motions that the planets are now making could not be born from natural cause, but they were impressed by an intelligent being", which he identified with God's will. In a period like that of Renaissance, during which the Earth and, as a consequence, man were the centre of the universe, thinking that other galaxies might exist,

and that they might be filled with other being, wasn't even considered as science fiction, but as pure madness. What has really fascinated Bruno is the coherence in developing one's own ideas without worrying about the consequences. No doubt that he was considered a visionary, or even a charlatan by the arrogant pedantic of his time. Tycho Brahe, with fierce scorn, returned his admiration by calling him "Nullanus". George Abbot, future archbishop of Canterbury, condemned the fact that "that little Italian nobody had tried to support Copernicus' theory according to which the Earth turns and the skies are stationary; while the truth is that it was his head the one that turned, and



Tycho Brahe

his brain couldn't be stationary". Nevertheless, Bruno's ideas could directly or indirectly influence the "new science". William Gilbert, Bruno's contemporary, exposing his ideas about magnetism, in *De Mundo*, uses the cosmological theories described by Bruno in *De immenso*. Galileo shows a good knowledge of Bruno's works, even if he does not mention them. Even if Kepler was bewildered by the infinite universe described by Bruno, he blames Galileo in this way: "Aren't you, my Galileo, jealous of the praise that one has to do to those who predicted long time ago what you have now seen with your own eyes? Your glory is that of having emended the doctrine that one of our acquaintances, Edmund Bruce, borrowed from Bruno". Bruno's and Galileo's



Giovan Battista Della Porta

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paths were different at the beginning, but then they crossed, when Galileo went to Padua to hold the chair of mathematics, left by the Sicilian Giuseppe Moleti. This event brought him directly into the mortal trap that was waiting for him in Venice. It is notorious how much Galileo loved the worldly success. The paternity of the geometrical compass and of the spyglass



Johannes Kepler

was contested. Besides, the optics' laws which technically explain how they work were formulated by Kepler, who analyzed them in his *Dioptrice* in 1611, acknowledging, in his turn, to be in debt to Giovan Battista Della Porta's *De refractione*. Surely it is a rash consideration to draw up Bruno to Galileo's mathematical

experimentalism, but one does not have to think about it the opposite way, trying to forget his contribution to the scientific ideas, even if describing him in the terms of a prophecy just vaguely understood and still undefined. Bruno was not an astronomer, according to the modern meaning of the word, for his cosmological vision was mostly based on his classical studies. Nevertheless, as his contemporary "scientists", he elaborated that conception of the world born from the scientific revolution: that of an infinite universe, without a centre or hierarchical principles. In order to interpret its greatness, it is necessary to change our point of view: from Bruno's point of view, one has to consider the scientific practice for his theory



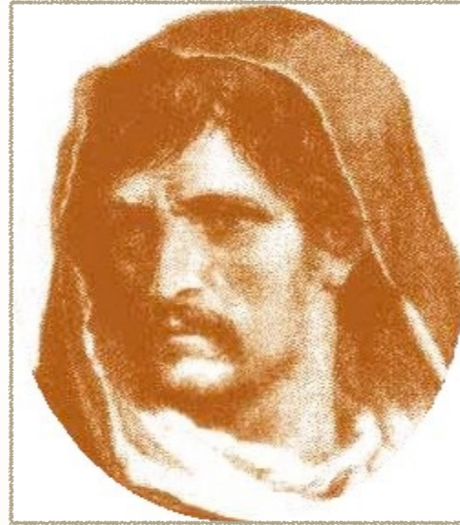
Nicolaus Copernicus

about the infinite universe, and not vice versa. Bruno's proceeding is coherent with an essentially intuitive and prophetic vision of the phenomenal reality, which allows him to predict, without any "scientific" demonstration, those theories that will be later confirmed by the modern science's progresses. This way of acting was consciously confirmed and followed by him since his first observations on the native mount Cicala, through the mythologization of his "mercurial" destiny. No wonder if he writes his philosophy's summa in the form of a poem instead of a scientific treatise. The "Nolan philosophy" is a non-scientific effect of the scientific revolution, but that doesn't mean it is secondary, for its purpose is that of changing the relationship between man and world. Besides, the irrational has been and will always be part of the scientific ideas' development, and the modern science has often turned out to be way more illusory than that of the VI and VII centuries. If one challenges Bruno for not knowing what Galileo, in the famous extract of *Il Saggiatore*, defines the mathematical language in which the big book of the universe is written, even if he was able to understand or to guess many mechanisms, then it

becomes clear that there is more than one language that expresses the universal functioning. Alexandre Koyré, in his fundamental *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, declares: "I'm sorry for saying that, but Giordano Bruno (...) is a second-rate scientist, who does not understand mathematics (...) the brunian conception of the world is vitalistic and magical (...) Bruno is not a modern spirit at all. Yet, his conception is so powerful and prophetic, so sensible and poetic, that one can not avoid admiring it, together with its Creator. And it has influenced so deeply – at least in its formal aspects – the modern science and philosophy, that we can not avoid giving Bruno an important place in the history of the human spirit". We can say everything about him, except that he was not a great thinker who has an extraordinary mental force. The non-corresponded admirer for Tycho Brahe, as well as the embarrassing enthusiasm for Fabrizio Mordente's differential compass, show his interest in having precise measurements, and the following necessity for developing new observation's instruments. In *De triplici minimo et mensura* he focuses on this concept of measurement, in particular referring to the smallest particles, or atoms,

which are the basis of the sensible bodies and, surprisingly, Bruno raises some problems which are still unresolved nowadays in the field of mathematics and quantum physics. The awareness of reality's indefinableness made him feel the relativity of this method, whenever he tried to penetrate "experimentally" into the mathematical and geometrical problems, pointing out the awareness of the problems which, as Hilary Gatti says, are linked to "the atomist and cosmological theories, which are based on entities whose minimum and maximum dimensions make it except the perceptive and intellectual faculties of the human mind". Surprisingly, his doubts anticipate the problems that are still being analysed in quantum physics. I'm referring to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, which, according to Harold J. Morowitz, pointed out that "nature's laws had nothing to do with the elementary particles, but they were connected to the knowledge that we have of these particles, that is our mind's content". According to Bruno, mathematics and geometry are methods of evaluation which are applied to a phenomenal reality, which is only a "shadow", and not to its true essence. Since it is impossible to contemplate what stands behind

the anima mundi, only the mythology, at an intuitive-prophetic level, can penetrate the deep elements that rule the universe's behaviour. Bruno had understood, thanks to a "mercurial" inspiration and through a direct communication with nature, the existence of fundamental principles, such as the coincidence of the opposites, the cycle of the vicissitude and the idea of "umbra divinitatis". These elements make up the basis of his whole philosophical speculation, including the whole mathematical and astronomical system, to which they were connected. His refusal to abjure, unlike Galileo, those cosmological theories that he had strongly supported at the highest levels of the European culture, in a period in which it was still hard to pronounce the name of Copernicus, can be considered an incredible merit in the history of science. Bertolt Brecht makes his Galileo end like this: "I don't think that science can be separated from the courage. [...] If men of science do not react to the threats of those who have power, and just keep "amassing" knowledge, then science will be weakened. [...] I have betrayed my profession."



Giordano Bruno's declaration to the inquisitors on the 21 December 1599

"I don't have to neither want to repent, there is nothing I have to repent of or any matter to repent of, and I don't know of what I should repent".



Galileo Galilei's abjuration, read on the 22 June 1633

"... I have been vehemently judged as suspected for heresy, because I said and thought that the Sun is the centre of the world and stationary, and the Earth is not the centre but moves. Thus, with all my heart and true faith I abjure, curse and hate those aforesaid mistakes and heresies."

Chapter 5

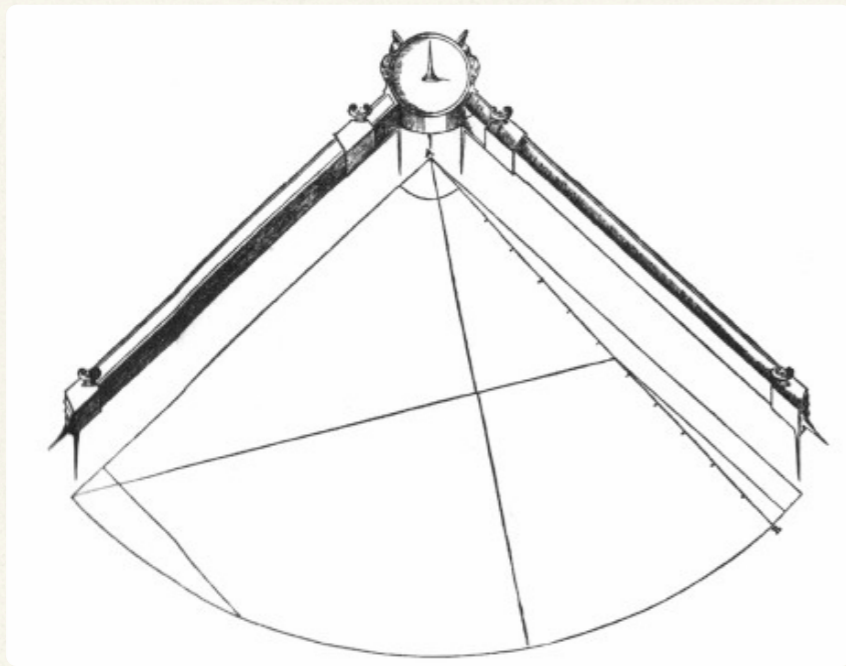
ADIEU PARIS!



Vue en Perspective et au moment du jour

ADIEU PARIS!

L'affaire Mordente



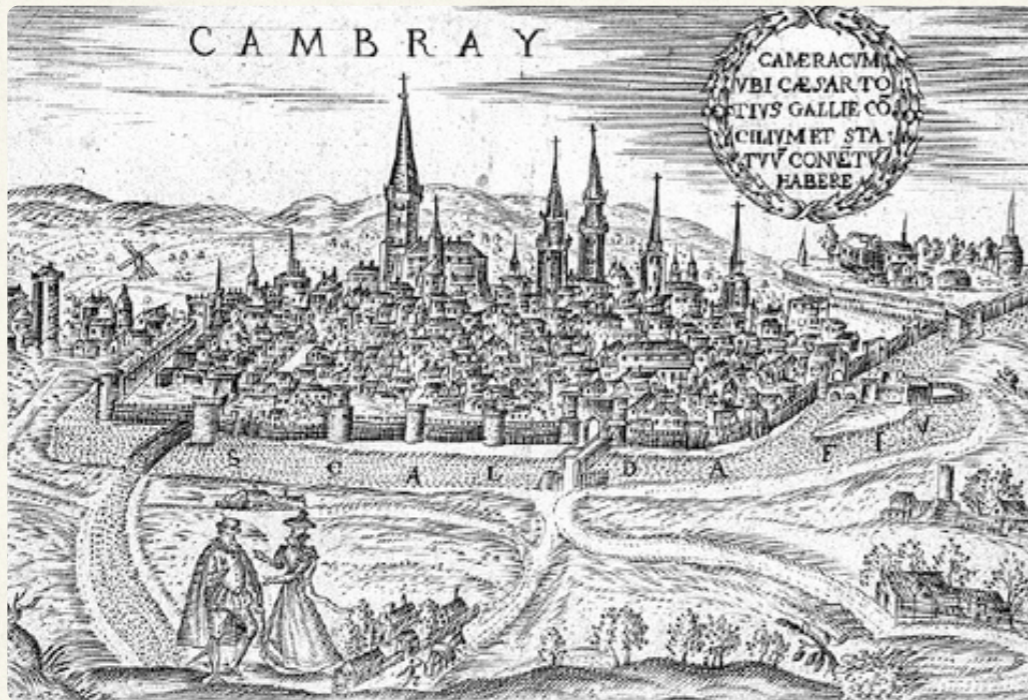
Mordente's compass

At the beginning of November 1585, Giordano Bruno came back in Paris, after he was recalled by the ambassador. The situation had completely changed. The disgrace of Michel de Castelnau and the political vicissitudes of Henry III, who was engaged in fighting the pushiness of the Catholic League, which was supported by Spain, did not grant him the protection he once had had. Thus, he had to look for the help of the so-called “italiennes”, that is the pro-Navarre intellectuals, who were lead by Jacopo Corbinelli, who was protected by the queen mother Catherine de' Medici.

One night Corbinelli invited him to the presentation of a recent discovery made by the surveyor from Salerno, Fabrizio Mordente: the proportional compass with eight points. Being invited by the inventor, who could not speak Latin, Bruno translated that presentation for him, adding two explanatory dialogues. There, even if he acknowledged that the invention had been made by Corbinelli, and even if he rose his ability as surveyor, he also showed his incapacity for understanding its real potentiality. Bruno praised, in particular, the tool's applications that could strengthen his philosophical thesis on the physical limit of divisibility. Feeling belittled as a simple “mechanic”, Mordente immediately bought all the available copies of the dialogues and he destroyed them. Bruno rekindled the controversy by publishing another dialogue, with sarcastic title and tone *Idiota triumphans seu de Mordentio inter geometras deo*, in which he ridicules Fabrizio, assimilating him to those beings, which often lack of intellectual value, chosen by the divinity to show themselves. The end of the episode was when the mathematician addressed to his patron, the duke of Guise, seething with rage and asking for revenge towards Bruno, who, instead, sided with the politiqués loyal to Henry III. He didn't have to wait long for an event that made him leave Paris.

ADIEU PARIS!

The dispute in Cambrai



On the 28 May 1586, the Wednesday in the Pentecost week, Bruno invited the actual readers and all the others to hear him declaiming in the College of Cambrai against several mistakes made by Aristotle. The thesis that he wanted to describe will be published two years later, in Wittenberg, with the title of Camoeracensis Acrotismus.

Before leaving Paris forever, Bruno decided to leave another indelible memory of him and his thesis in the academic field. He had two options: the lesson of leaving (which he will later use in Wittenberg) and the dispute. He chose the latter and, with his usual love for theatricality, he chose to interpret the role of “president” of the meeting, leaving to his brilliant and loyal student Jean Hennequin the duty of expounding the strongly anti-Aristotelian thesis written in the booklet *Centum et viginti articuli de natura et mundo adversos peripateticos*, which he had published for the occasion. It was a wonderful occasion for his opponents, who made an ambush. At the end of Hennequin’s speech, Bruno invited to speak whoever wanted to intervene. Since nobody wanted to speak, he stepped on the podium and spoke for long against Aristotle’s finite world. Then a young lawyer, Rodolfo Callier, decided to speak, provoking Bruno with injuries, calling him “Giordano Bruto”, and giving some vague argumentations in defence of Aristotle, inciting the students. Since Bruno did not get the chance to answer, it all ended in tumult. The poor philosopher was pulled and threatened by the students, so that he had to promise to come back the day after to answer the objections. Since he took the hint, he obviously did not come back and left Paris in a hurry.

Chapter 6

ASSES AND PEDANTS



“Achademico di nulla achademia”

Bruno kept looking for a teaching position. Probably if he had not left the Catholic Church, he would have climbed the highest ecclesiastical hierarchies. Nevertheless, it is not a paradox to say that his misfortunes, strictly connected to a proud and rebel disposition, had a positive influence on his thought's development, for they saved him from the inevitable conditionings of the religious and academic power, which would have fatally limited its revolutionary value. In fact, the obstacles and the prejudices that he had to face incited even more his indomitable pride and his spirit of independence. In the prologue of *Candelaio*, Bruno defines himself as an “academic belonging to no academy”. According to him, those old fossils that sentenced from their university chairs were only “pedantic”. What he could not bear was the “consuetudo credendi”, that is the “habit of believing”, which was typical of the Aristotelians, who just kept repeating the theories of their teacher. The problems that Bruno had to face during his long “peregrinatio” are basically linked to the persecution made both by the churches and by the academic world. This can be understood by the fact that he appeals, in an almost obsessive way, to the principle of tolerance and of “libertas philosophandi”, which constitute the

basis of his whole speculation. He could see over the tales on which he had been educated. He could understand their vacuity, but he did not care. They could preach whatever they wanted, for, as he had learned at his expense, all the religions and churches acted in the same way. For the same reason, even if he was ready to pretend, for his own sake, on what concerned the fundamental elements of his philosophy, he wasn't ready for compromising even in the face of death, even knowing that no God would have ever judged him for eventual lies. Bruno's thought is deeply anti-religious, anti-Christian, anti-reformed, anti-Aristotelian. Bruno is completely “anti”: not only for his rebel spirit, but also for his proud and polemic disposition. One does not have to change the effects with the causes. Bruno is “anti” because he deeply needs freedom of thinking and because he cannot stand any kind of dogmatic imposition. Because the “nova” philosophy can be spread only if there are no superstitions and false principles. He has an aristocratic view of knowledge, just like the Egyptian and hermetic initiatory cults, which were characterized by a clear difference between esoteric and exoteric. The research and the discovery of truth are wise man's prerogatives, so that the approval of common peop-

le does not speak in favour of the truth of an idea. The fact that he could not be understood made him feel frustrated and defeated, more because of his interlocutor's dullness than because of his failures. That is why he kept asking to speak personally with the Pope until he could: he was convinced that Clement VIII agreed with him about the idea of the "double truth". About a truth of faith that could keep the "rough and disgraceful common people" peacefully busy (here we can see much of Machiavelli), and about an esoteric truth that could allow for natural magic, new cosmology and universal animism.

- ◆ What would you like to say to your enemies, to those who, during these centuries and your existence, opposed you, considering you mad, charging you with plagiarism, with being a non-original thinker?
- ◆ Find at least one of them who was a really original thinker. These charges do not show anything else than the spite of these pedants towards the one who brought in the history of thought a new attitude and made it with conviction and spirit of independence. Everyone of us needs to compare

his own ideas. The variety, the communication are the fundamental values of the real culture.

- ◆ You welcomed in your philosophical system, catching them intuitively, the ideas of many great thinkers: from Anassagora to Lucretius, from Cusano to Erasmus. But you were the only one who knew how to unite them, harmonize them, in a unique powerful thought, through attempts, sometimes even confused, because unceasingly revisited, to express your concepts outside and often against the culture of the time. You developed their theories in a direction that they did not even imagine to conceive or that they did not have the courage to undertake, going beyond where everyone of them stopped before the convention and the difficulties. Actually, everything they reproach you does not cause anything else than increasing your greatness, yet they continued for centuries to mistake in a premeditated way the sources for the contents, the suggestions for the substance of your thought.
- ◆ I have always compared myself both with my models, with my masters and with those whom I antagonized, starting

with Aristotele. My coherence is shown by my knowledge of him and the right for this reason to criticize him. So because of this desire of mine to verify, to find collations, I searched for a confirmation to my intuitions, to the theories I was elaborating, in the doctrine of the philosophers and of the scientists, whom I knew and studied. My great mnemonic-technical gifts allowed me to compare and assimilate all the ideas that could help me to support and develop my doctrine.

- ◆ At Oxford, the pedants took advantage of this to charge you of copying the works of Ficino because, during your lessons, you used to quote entire passages from them by heart.
- ◆ Miserable grammarians who did not dare to part from the words of Aristotele, they had the courage to charge me with plagiarism! Mathematicians and astronomer, manservant of the court, unable to get rid of their fixed stars, of the false walls that they construct by themselves alone, and who, some centuries after my decease, still saw the earth unmoving at the centre of the universe, they arrogate to

themselves the right to treat with contempt my thought and call me a magician, a wizard! They said my head was turning, not the earth, because they were afraid of the giddiness that my thought caused them.



Bruno in Oxford

- ◆ I remind that Tycho Brahe, the great astronomer of that period, admired by you and so praised that you dedicated to him with enthusiasm a copy of your *Acrotismus*, called you contemptuously “Nullanus”.

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- ◆ I have always recognized and exalted in my works, sometimes even with an exaggerated enthusiasm, the merits and the value of the thought's conquests. So I wanted and I would still like today, that the others recognize mine! This man had at his disposal the most sophisticated instruments of the period, an entire island was outfitted for his observations. He scouted the skies, saw and studied the motion of the comets, elaborated many good theories. I thought: he surely perceived by intuition the possibilities that these discoveries open. Nothing! Like the others. They persisted in their stupid, presumptuous vision of the world, unable to feel, lacking in courage and intuition to go beyond and in humbleness of listening. Formulating theorems or mathematical calculations do not belong to the philosophe. I am the one who, with no need of astronomical observatories and experiments, shattered the sphere of the fixed stars to furrow bravely the infinite, discovering realities that until then nobody was able to perceive by intuition.
 - ◆ You became the paladin of the heliocentrism, shooting down every limit, at Oxford, in the heart of the official culture of the period, where the theories of Copernico were

considered at the most a bizarre experiment. You announced the necessity of a renovatio mundi in a period of wild religious and civil struggles and you always did it going personally to the courts, in the lair of Lutherans, Calvinists, protestants and finally Catholics, and not theorizing it from the remote ivory tower of the solitary sage, with the vain purpose to discuss it right with the Pope. A very unusual dynamism that of yours, if we consider the means of the period.

- ◆ It is not enough to amuse oneself with one's ideas, as vain dreamers, withdrawn with one's studies. The philosopher has the obligation to challenge, armed only with his own ideas, the hatred for the pedants and the contempt for the common people by whom it is the same to say philosopher or tumbler, charlatan good to serve as a scarecrow at the countryside. I would have liked to stop, to have a fixed and tranquil professorship, from which I could teach and spread my thought. They never let me do it. In London, in the French ambassador de Castelneau's house, protected and revered, estimated by excellent minds and by the queen Elizabeth herself, I felt how sweet and prolific the quiet-

ness and the safety are for the scholar, and in that period I produced important works. But it lasted a little, there, too: the wandering destiny pressed me. It is better this way! Maybe I could become a pedant, too! My vicissitude was this: wandering through Europe, claiming ideas that in those times, in those places, in those ways sounded like a provocation, a challenge.

- ◆ It is the fate, Giordano, of all the great out-of-date's, the men in advance on their times. Considering the reactions to some claims of yours, a question always originated inside me: did he really claim these things in the second half of the XVI century? If, still centuries after your decease, the intellectuals spoke about you as a demon for having said truths recognized, today, even by the modern science, we should wonder why they did not burn you before! I do not know if it was craziness or heroism, but only an indomitable, stubborn personality, intolerant to the dogma like yours could have given voice to such intuitions at that time.
- ◆ They called me mad, but, as the duct Erasmus teaches, the men are all a little mad. The wise is aware about that and

keeps himself anchored to the reality, accepting it with irony; the pedants, the common people do not realize it and become characters for a comedy, ridiculous in their presumption and blindness. What if not the madness drives the grammarians frowned and high-thundering from their cathedras, to feel so important, or the theologians with their fine thinness, and the head stuffed with thousand ridiculous trifles, to consider themselves the depositaries of the truth?

- ◆ And while the fanaticism of the religion wars, of the schisms, stained with blood Europe, was it not mad to demand the people to accept your ideas in the centres of the pedantry and of the religious intolerance?
- ◆ Yes, but you ought to know what a satisfaction was to see them wavering before the strength and the suggestion of the truth, struggling as chicks in the tow to defend their own mistakes!

Chapter 7

AMONG THE HERETICS



AMONG THE HERETICS

The House of wisdom



The Wittenberg Academy

Wandering again all over Europe, Bruno gets to Wittenberg, in Germany, in June 1586, in whose university he matriculated as “doctor italicus”. Thanks to the help of the eminent jurist Alberico Gentili, he was allowed to give a lesson of Aristotle’s Organon, before publicly and then privately.

In Wittenberg Bruno lived an uncommonly happy period, during which he had the chance to create his magical works and to set up the basis of the great Frankfurt poems. After almost two years, when the Calvinists got the better of the Lutherans, he took leave of the university with his *Oratio valedictoria*, in which he thanked the university for having accepted him without religious prejudices. The oration includes a hearty praise of Luther, for the courage he had had in facing the Roman Church’s excessive power, which has a great value as a defence of religious freedom. Even if he had strongly criticized the Lutherans’ doctrine in other works (mostly in *Cabala* and *Spaccio*), they were those who treated him best and with the most consideration. In Wittenberg he left several loyal and grateful followers, and then he went to Prague, to the court of the emperor Rudolph II,



Martin Luther



Rudolph II

and conceited simpleton, who is always cheated and mocked by Neapolitan scoundrels, so well described in the comedy. But one has to remark that it would not have been strange if he had been interested in alchemy: it was the chemistry of the time, which was practiced by everybody, humanists, astronomers, popes. Even S. Thomas had showed such an interest in the “Big Work” that made him write some alchemical treatises. There was even a medieval legend, according to which he had received, thanks to his teacher Albert the Great, the “secretum secretorum”, that is the philosopher’s stone, which had even been discovered by anot-

to whom he dedicated his *Articuli adversos mathematicos*, for which he only received an una tantum reward of three hundred thalers. Bruno did not feel at his ease in the astrological-alchemical atmosphere which was then predominating the court of Rudolph II, so that it had become a paradise for charlatans and would-be magicians, such as John Dee and Edward Kelley. Bruno had already met Dee in England, in June 1583, when he had been in Oxford with Earl Laski to face the famous dispute with the pedantic Oxonians. Dee was then in his estate in Mortlake, and their common friend Philip Sidney organized the meeting. Now their paths crossed again, but it took him a while to find out that he wasn’t suitable for the role of court’s magician. Bruno had never liked alchemy, which he describes in a parodistic way in his works. For example we can recall one of his first works, *Candelaio*, in which the alchemist Boniface represents the prototype of the ignorant



John Dee

her Doctor of the Church: S. Dominic! When he realized that the emperor wasn't interested in mathematics, but in the research for the philosopher's stone, Bruno decided to leave. In Tübingen things got even worse: this time he was given a charity of only four guilders, in order to make him leave soon. In the end of 1588 he came to Helmstedt, where he spent almost a year and a half, consoled by the presence of his beloved pupil of Wittemberg, Hieronimus Besler, who helped him writing a series of works about magical and esoteric themes, including *De Magia*, *Theses de magia*, *Magia mathematica* and the sketch of *De rerum principiis et elementis et causis* and *Medicina Iuliana*. All these works are collected in a codex, dedicated to Abraham Norov, who found it in Paris in an antique dealer's shop. But, in spite of the patronage of Duke Heinrich Julius from Braunschweig, after the umpteenth excommunication, this time inflicted by the Lutheran minister Heinrich Boethius, for unclear reasons, which Bruno thought to be a private matter, he had to leave Helmstedt too. He went to Frankfurt then, in order to edit his thought's summa: the three Latin poems (*De triplici minimo*, *De monade* and *De immenso*). On 2 June 1590 Bruno came to Frankfurt, where he asked for the leave to stay at Andres Wechel's,

his works' pressman, but he did not get it, so he had to live in a precarious way in the Carmelite's convent. His stay was interrupted for six months, during which he went to Switzerland, first to Zurich and then to the Elgg's Castle, as a guest of the noble Heinrich Hainzel, where he gave lectures to a group of Paracelsian and proto-Rosicrucian alchemists.



Academia "Julia", Helmstedt



Raphael Egli

The main character in the story of the connections between Bruno and the Rosicrucians is the Swiss theologian Raphael Egli. A controversial and debatable person, who was interested in theology, poetry, alchemy and several other fields. After the period during which he gave hospitality to Bruno in Elgg, in the castle of his patron Heinrich Hainzel, he suffered from a sensational financial crack, because of his love for alchemy. He had to fly from Zurich and he went to the court of the Landgrave Maurice of Hesse, where he started to teach theology, while keeping studying alchemy. But Egli was, mainly, a fervent Rosicrucian, one of the first who spread the famous manifestos “Fama” and “Confessio fraternitatis”. Probably he was also the author of “Consideratio brevis”, which was published in 1616, the year after the second manifesto.

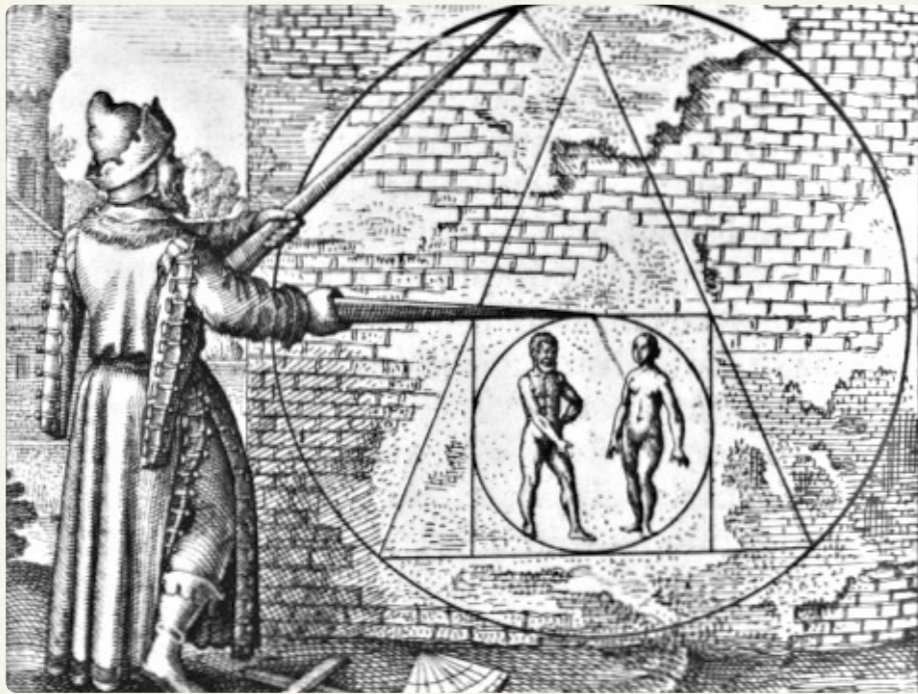
AMONG THE HERETICS

Meeting the Rosicrucians

What did Bruno and Egli have in common, except the *Summa terminorum metaphysicorum*, that Bruno dictated him? He was a great follower of Paracelsus, on whose teachings he bases his alchemy. In his *Oratio Valedictoria*, recited in 1588 when he left the University of Wittenberg, Bruno had praised the german “house of wisdom” containing a solemn encomium of Paracelsus, called “doctor until the miracle”. Thus, the Paracelsian sympathies are one of the basic contacts between Bruno at the Rosicrucian world. Moreover, many positions of the Elgg’s confraternity, both the political ones (connected to an irenistic project of universal peace) and those of hermetic authority in the field of micro and macrocosm, were largely shared by the philosopher. Nonetheless, there are some important differences. Bruno agreed only partly with the naturalistic assumptions which were the basis of Paracelsus’ theories. Furthermore, he refused to accept the “magical” use of alchemy, as he had showed in Prague, and the ideas of John Dee, most of all those of *Monas Hyeroglifica*. Bruno believes firmly in the classical canons of the prisca theologia and in the oriental wisdom of the Chaldaic-Egyptian Magi, which are very different from the millenarian Christianity of Rosicrucian kind.

HERMETISM AND MAGIC

Macrocosm and microcosm



The Emerald Tablet, which is commonly attributable to Hermes Trismegistus, stated: "What is above is like what is below. It ascends from earth to heaven and again it descends to earth". The ancient correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm, for which what is infinitely big and what is infinitely small come to coincide, is common to the eastern tradition and to the pre-Socratic one, and it covers all the history of the human thought. Bruno describes it in "De Monade": "One is the centre of the Microcosm, one is the heart from which the vital spirits spread all over the animal, in which the universal tree of life is rooted and fixed, and the same vital spirits flow back to it to preserve themselves".

The rhythmic succession for which men try to ascend to divinity and the divinity descends to the natural world is a transcendent structural concept, which, in Bruno's philosophy, is the same as the cyclic alternation of "ascenso" and "descenso". The main intuition of this theory, whose fortune was enormous in the Middle Age and during the Renaissance, equals the Macrocosm and the image of the Universe, of the World, of the locus in which God resides, the Creating Light that travels in all directions, being able to disperse the darkness and to provide the ac-

tive principle that generated everything. On the other hand, the Microcosm is a smaller version of the macrocosm, in which the divinity is reflected in its creation, the Man. Thus, Macrocosm and Microcosm are made of the same substance consisting of two opposing principles: the Infinite Light and the Obscure Darkness. The opposing principles Light and Darkness used to have, in the hermetic-chemical tradition, the meaning of Sulphur and Mercury, Day and Night, Sun and Moon, Male and Feminine.



Natural Magic

The key word of Bruno's esotericism is "natural magic". This is the only magic in which Bruno believed: looking for the "principles loudly dictated by nature", as he says in the dedication to Henry III in *Camoeracensis Acrotismus*. In *De magia* he differentiates the various kinds of magic and he clearly keeps aloof from occultism and necromancy. He chooses the third kind of what he calls natural magic, that is being on the same wavelength as the mechanisms that enliven this reality and that rule, in the same identical way, the working of all things, from the smallest things to man, from thoughts to the historical cycle of the events. On their knowledge it is based also the art of binding, since the binding and the bound must have the same requirements in order to have a bond created. As we can see, these operations do not depict the evidence of an occult kind of esotericism. Giving dignity to this field, even with the distinction between shadow and light, does not include an atheistic interpretation, that might get its inexistence from the unknowableness and indefinableness of divinity. So we are shadow, but inside this shadow we are alive and active, since substance and spirit, even if shady, are both manifestation of divinity. This di-

stinction allows him to distinguish clearly the competences of the "faithful theologian" and of the "true philosopher", and to confute the Christian habit of making the human experience pointless on a painful path of endurance, waiting for the afterlife which, for their same definition, is unknowable. Bruno's philosophical system is the most powerful effort of asserting reason's supremacy, for a person who has been educated by the catholic church, and who is still surrounded by it, exiling the divinity in an unreachable after-world and, therefore, irrelevant for the reality which is only its shadow. During his "peregrinatio" in churches and universities, both physically and through the imaginative excursus in the fields of Hermeticism and the East, and the consultations with the ancient philosophers, Bruno looked for the transcendental structures of thought and religion. And in all he found the common monist afflatus, the vicissitudinal system of a reality which is based upon the coincidence of opposites, among which we can recall couples such as minimum-maxim and single-infinite. These elements are the indivisible ingredients of that "natural alchemy" which magically pervades the meaning of things, in the East as

in the West, in Krishna as in Christ, in Buddha as in Pythagoras, in Roma as in Egypt. Giordano Bruno was born with a skill, a particular ability, a special instinct for research and the identification of these fundamental ingredients of the reality's



Hermes Trismegistus

composition. His life and works are based upon the effort of finding the genes of it in the DNA of the various philosophies and theologies, with which, directly or indirectly, he gets to know. This is what makes him a real “homo novus”, open, tolerant, curious, willing to know and to have a confrontation, with no prejudices or limitations, ready to admit his own mistakes and to point out those made by the others, to reformulate his own theories and to spread them again to verify them, to test them, with no inhibitions or censures.

- ◆ Hermetical doctrine had a deep influence on your thought.
- ◆ I found in it correspondences with my instinctive vision of the world and of the divine. It gave me the consciousness of the possibility of human being, incapable in his life to contemplate anything else than the shadow of divinity, to be able to arrive to “in-God himself”. “Make yourself big till you will be without measure, getting rid of your body, so the *Corpus Hermeticum* goes, exalt above all times, become eternity: then you will comprehend God”.

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- ◆ These words seemed to anticipate the Renaissance tendency of the spirit to exalt, in a “vertical” effort to keep in touch with God. From the awareness of the man’s dignity, that thinkers like Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino were asserting, an extraordinary yearning to arrive to divinity originated, canalising the spirit through the stars, the statues, the talismans. The man takes conscience of his own possibilities and sees exterminate fields of speculation and investigation open before him, but he can not escape yet the vision of a ending universe, of which the earth is the centre, and the reassuring need to have some intermediaries with the otherworldly world.
 - ◆ The only mean of which I felt the necessity was that of the means to communicate these new ideas and I searched for it continuously in what the period in which I lived could offer me. My admiration for the Egyptian tradition originated right from the research of a “divine” original language, that, through hieroglyphics, was comprehensible for everyone.

- ◆ Yet the magic at that time was a part of the knowledge patrimony of the philosopher. The magic, the hermetical doctrines, at those times were widespread in the cultural environments, and were appreciated by kings and emperors. I think about John Dee, the “magician of court”, whom you met in London and Prague. Even Popes had been attracted by it, if Urban VIII lingered with Campanella in magic sessions and let in the Quirinal rooms paint some frescos with hermetical planetary images, which they retained to be able to influence the mood and the health. In the atmosphere of the period, in a cultural environment permeated by hermetism and magic, it is comprehensible that you felt as a prophet or a magician like Christ and Moses!
- ◆ Magic for me has always been the natural one. The witchcrafts, the philosophical stones, I leave them to Cencio and Bonifacio, the characters of my *Candelaio*. The real magic is the one that springs out of ourselves, from the nature that is in ourselves and that can be captured, perfected with technics to bind, “direct” the divine flow through its faculties.

Chapter 8

THE WISE AND THE FURIOUS



P. Masulli, *Giordano Bruno* [1973]
Napoli, Cortile del Salvatore

Between East and West



The exaltation of nature's value and of the substance in all its shapes links Bruno to a wise tradition which proposes typically eastern suggestions. These influenced Bruno through the pre-Socratic philosophers, in particular Parmenides, Pythagoras and Heraclitus. He was al-

so influenced by two other people that he well knew, that is Apollonius of Tyana and Hermes Trismegistus, through whom

he got closer to the Egyptian and hermetic wisdom. The theory of the coincidence of opposites, which was the basis of the eastern view of the world, was already clear in the pre-Socratic tradition. It was Niccolò Cusano, with his thought, the one who made it the basis of Bruno's philosophy, together with the idea of the difference between an immanent God and an unattainable God (the "hidden God"), which is the basic requirement for that "wise ignorance" that in Bruno develops into the concept of "umbra divinitatis". In the case of Copernicus, Bruno was less cautious about his theories than the German Cardinal, openly declaring the divine immanentism. Like the Brahmins and the Zen Buddhists, Bruno tries to conciliate the single with the absolute. Thus, one does not have to look for the divinity "outside the infinite world and the infinite things, but inside it and them". The philosophy, in its maximum expression, materializes in this research for the One, in this contemplation of Nature's divinity ("Natura est Deus in rebus"), in this effort

to find the invisible in the visible, the unity in the multitude. The eastern traditions constantly refer to an ultimate, indivisible reality, which reveals itself in all things and which all things are part of. It is called “Brahman” in Hinduism, “Dharma-kaya” in Buddhism, “Tao” in Taoism: “What the soul feels as the absolute essence is the singleness of the entirety of all things, the big whole that includes everything”. Becoming aware that all the opposites are polar, and so make up an unity, is considered one of the most important aims of man by the eastern spiritual traditions. This is never a stationary identity, but always a dynamic interaction between two ends, as for the chinese symbolism of the archetypal poles yin and yang. The theory about the opposites that don’t have to be conceived as irreducible and completely separated, but as changing one into the other in order to create a perfect harmony, goes back to the Pythagorean doctrines. The long recurring stream of opposites, that we can find in Bruno’s works, shows his conceiving of

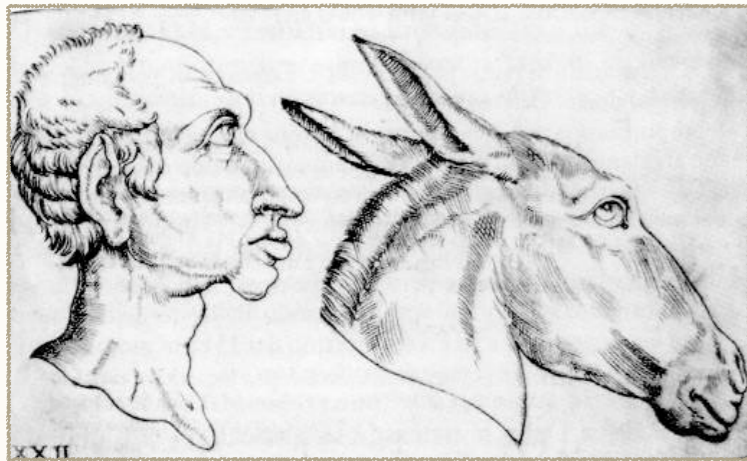
reality as “coincidentia oppositorum”, the necessity to go over the chaotic samsara of the appearance to recover the unity in the opposites, the basic unity of the whole: “it is a great magic to derive the opposite after having found the juncture”. Only in the infinite cosmos the hierarchies crumble; the maximum and the minimum, as all the opposites, converge into one single being, the multitude falls into the divine unity. “You can then jump to the idea, I’m not saying of the highest and perfect principle, which is out of our consideration, but of the world’s soul, as it is act of everything and power of everything, and it is all in all: so that in the end (considering uncountable individuals) each thing is one; and knowing that this unity is the aim and the end of all the natural philosophies and contemplations: leaving in its terms the highest contemplation, which goes over nature, which is impossible and nothing to those who do not believe”. (*De la Causa*).



“Only the true men, those that do have truly human souls, can get to see the truth! Oh charitable Circe, help me to unmask the fool common people, who, looking like human beings, mask their beastly souls! For what reason, if very few human hearts have been created, there have been created so many bodies with the shape of the humans? The true philosophy does not make any distinctions because of the appearance, the social condition or status, but, if they are not elevated by study, contemplation or the practice of virtue, what happens? They show in their features, voices, gestures, affections and inclinations their past or future mutation: some are asinine..., others piggish..., aquiline..., bovine”.

Physiognomy and metempsychosis

If everything has a cyclical trend, which is based on the opposites’ antinomy, this is true also for the “souls”, for which through the metempsychosis what we do in this life has an effect in the following one. The idea of the soul presiding different shapes and compounds, “sicut nauta in navi”, as a pilot in a ship, is for Bruno the basis of mutation. The spirit joins one or another body through the intervention of fate or Providence, order or fortune, and it comes to perform the suitable intelligence and skills for the constitution and the characteristic of that body. Thus, as the claws give a specificity to the soul that has assumed the shape of a spider, as the hand is, the wonderful instrument in which Bruno finds the specificity of the human being, because it gives him that power and that superiority of all the other beings. Bruno links this concept to the physiognomy of his fellow-countryman Giovan Battista Della Porta, that is a sort of bond between the appearances and the characters. In the features of the face and in the complexity of the bodies one can already feel the “karma” of the individual which will affect the next mutation. “As in the human species we see a lot of different people because of their head, face, gestures, feelings and inclina-

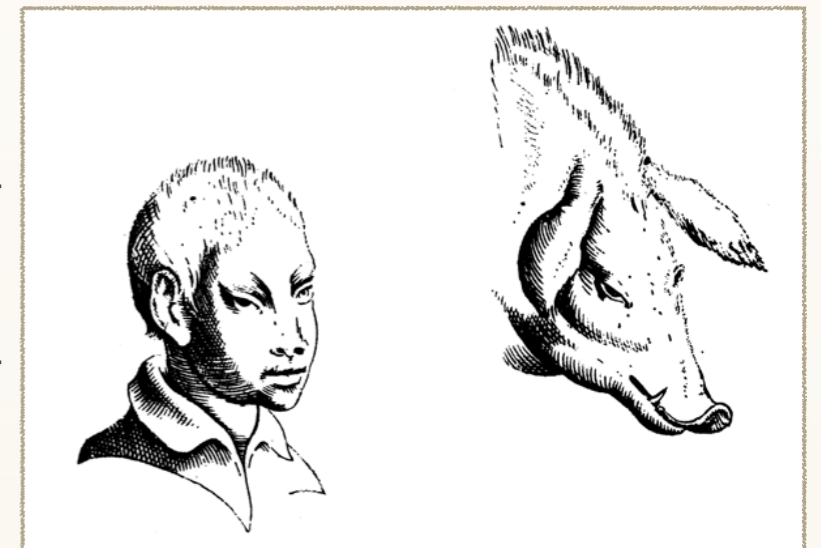


will be pigs, horses, donkeys, eagles or whatever they show". In comparison with the uncountable species of animated beings that the earth has generated, few of them have a human shape, and very few of them are true men, deserving to aim to the august nature of gods. According to Bruno, men aren't equal at all, as a twisted iconography of the martyr of the free thought has tried to show; not all the human bodies are animated by truly human souls. The knowledge of the truth is open to everybody, with no distinctions of social class, caste, or blood (Bruno himself is the proof); but one has to consider the nobility of the spirit, according to the phase of one's vicissitudal cycle. The individual value, with no

tions, but also horsy, asinine, aquiline, bovine; so one has to think that there is a vital principle in them, for which, in virtue of a past or future body mutation, they were or

prejudices at all, depends on the quality of the soul that operates in that body and, besides that, "thanks to moderation, studies, contemplation and other virtues" it is always possible to raise one's level of knowledge till the contemplation of the divine. In fact, this is what defines men's supremacy: the ability of going over the humanity, "always over what one's owes", overcoming that animal instinct of sticking to one's own species, so that "the pig doesn't want to die in order not to be pig, the horse

is scared by the idea of behaving like a horse. Jove supremely fears of not being Jove". The correspondence that Bruno finds between the aspect's features and the behaviour



of human beings is perfectly connected to the idea that the soul brings in itself, during the mutation cycle, the positive or

negative heritage of its precedent incarnation. So it gives the substance that it embodies the characteristics of the species, on the basis of the inclinations derived from the past life. In fact, The scale of the human feelings has as many different and large grades as the number of different lives that the soul has lived in different bodies. The soul also makes the two progressions of “ascenso” and “descenso” according to the fate, to the cure it gives to itself, and to its own trend to the good. In comparison with the precedent behaviour in a body, in the following incarnations some souls become incarnated in common human beings, others in heroes, others have demeaning shapes. The eventual punishment is immediately atoned by the soul, because the high justice that rules everything provides that “one does not have to wait for the government or the administration of another better station, when it has been bad guided in another regiment. ”Those who lived, for example, in a horsy or piggy way, will have “an adequate prison for that offence”: a body with organs and instruments of that kind. So, because of the fate of mutation, it will eternally have worse or better kinds of life and fortune, according to the better or worse behaviour one had in the precedent condi-

tion and situation. Of course there is an incredible resemblance to the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation, which, just like Hinduism, considers man’s life on earth as a migration from one existence to another. Each human being becomes only a chain of passing phenomena, which do constantly change and pass by one after the other. The body, life, pleasures, pains, they are all a sort of effect of “karma”, so that what one has sowed in the previous lives is then collected in the fol-





Tiziano Vecellio, "The death of Actaeon"

According to Bruno, the myth of Diana and Actaeon represents the perfect synthesis of his gnoseology. At the height of his research, in "De gli eroici furori", he utters: "This is my Diana, the one that is the same thing, that thing which is the same truth, that truth which is the understandable nature, on which the sun and the brightness of superior nature have an influence, since the unity is divided into generated and generating, or producing and produced." This is how he describes the double presence of an unreachable and ineffable divinity and of a divinity that shows itself in nature as a shadow. The latter is the only one that a man can get to contemplate with hard study and diligence. On the conceptual point of view, the faith, seen in this double aspect of immanence and transcendence of the divine principle, gets close to the Brahman-Atman of the Indian culture.

THE WISE AND THE FURIOUS

Heroic frenzy

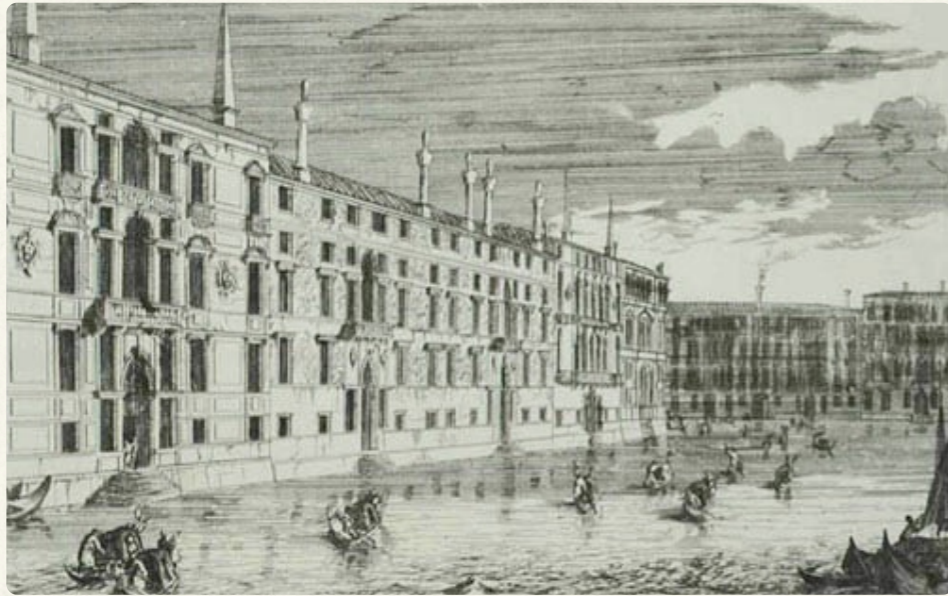
Bruno entrusts the effort of trying to knock down the bound between the absolute and the communicated to the experience of the heroic fury. It represents a real leap of energetic level, which allows to break the rebirth cycle, as in the eastern tradition, with an extraordinary act, that he calls the "dequartering of oneself". The parable of the furious is an essentially autobiographical parable of the journey towards knowledge. Bruno represents himself in the character of the furious, as the one who looks for divinity, not hoping to be pervaded like Balaam's donkey, but looking for it with studies and diligence.

"Actaeon – it is Bruno who's talking – means a mind fixed on the hunting for the divine wisdom, for the knowledge of the divine beauty". "I say, there are very few Actaeons who are allowed, by the destiny, to look at the naked Diana". Thus, Actaeon represents the philosopher who looks for the "naked Diana", that is Nature revealed in its true essence. Once Bruno came by the limit of the forest over which he could have looked at Amphitrite, thanks to the understanding of the opposites' polarity and the cyclicity and the darkness of reality, he only had to do the last experience, that is the death. The stake of the fearless philosopher did not mark the end of the free thinking's martyr, but the sublimation of the furious hero.

Chapter 9

TRIAL AND STAKE





Venezia, Palazzo Mocenigo

In the spring of 1591, Bruno came back to Frankfurt, where he was reached by two letters of the noble venetian Giovanni Mocenigo, who invited him in Venice to teach him the art of memory. Being attired in Italy by the double utopia of struggling with Galileo for the chair of mathematics in Padua and of being forgiven by the Pope binding him to his ideas, the philosopher accepted the invitation-trap of the noble venetian, which will be fatal for him. This sad man, who was disappointed because he did not get the magical teaching he expected, made Bruno shut up by his servants, and handed him over to the Inquisition.

TRIAL AND STAKE

The arrest

This “Mercury on earth” ended in a dark cell, from which he will never come out. Actually, in Venice things seemed to be going quite well for Bruno, who defended himself saying that he had advanced only philosophical – not theological – hypothesis, and that, for what concerned the field of faith, he relied completely on the Church’s doctrine. He was also supported by favourable, or at least not hostile, witnesses, by some famous representatives of the Venetian patriciate. But as soon as Bruno thought he could get it off, repudiating his verbal excesses and promising to keep his mind in check, he was removed to a higher office of the public prosecutor of the Roman Holy Office, which had never stopped controlling him. Venice tried to hold out, in the name of its own legislative autonomy, but then, since Bruno was not a Venetian citizen and the trial had started before he came to the lagoon city (the trial was about what had happened in 1575), they yielded to the requests made by the Vatican, and, in February 1593, Bruno’s wandering ended in a cell of the new palace of the Holy Office, which Pius V had had built in Borgo, near S. Peter.



Ippolito Beccaria

Bruno stood up to his accusers for seven long years, during which one has to recall the inflexible General of the Dominican order Ippolito Beccaria, who used a strategy made of partial admissions and proud demands. But the trial had a sharp acceleration in 1597, when Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino entered in the panel of judges. Bruno's defence, based on the distinction between the philosophical truth and the theological one started to waver. Being obliged to abjure eight propositions, which were considered heretical, he said he could do that for those which has a theological nature, but, when it came to the philosophical truths, which were the gist of his thought, he stuck to his position and cried that he had nothing to be repented of.

TRIAL AND STAKE

Philosopher, not theologian

- ◆ September, the 16th, in the 1599 they presented you 8 “surely heretical” propositions to abjure. The 21st of December you answered that you did not have to and did not want to repent: what happened, what did you think in that short lapse of time?
- ◆ The roman trial was a long attempt for a compromise, to exchange the abjuration of my “theological” critics with the defence of the “philosophical” nucleus of my thought. I would have also been disposed to abjure, as I already did it in Venice. I would have freed myself with no problems from the ballast of my blasphemy claims, present in some of my works or the oaths referred by Mocenigo and by my cell-mates, said in moments of inebriation or of distress. This I used to grant them: I tried not to fall in their trap. That Christ was a wicked, a prophet or a magician, that they hanged him or crucified him, I did not care about it. It was not the substance of my thought, what I preached and announced around Europe. They knew it well and played with me like the cat with the mouse⁵. They tried to tire out my resistance, alternating tortures with signs of clemency, offers of comprehension and requests of submis-



Roberto Bellarmino

sion and repentance. But what they really wanted was a complete, authentic renunciation to all my ideas.

◆ They deluded themselves of being able to imprison also your extraordinary imagination in the fictitious jail, among the adamantine walls of their celestial spheres.

◆ Do not think that in seven years of jail I have spent all my time elaborating my defensive strategies. My body was in prison but my mind continued bravely to furrow with the wings the immensity of the space. I deluded myself that I could hold my own with them, but when their champion,

the Cardinal Bellarmino, entered the field I understood that the mastiff would not have let it go anymore. I realized that, there inside, the possibility to let me be listened to failed me definitively: the censure did not allow me anymore the possibility to write, nor the word had still a sense, without an audience. I understood that the only thing left was the last great instrument of communication, that I could only express myself in one way, with my choices, the witness of the last actions, hoping that at least these would have won the oblivion of the time and the fury of my persecutors. Bound from my head to my toes, with my torn articulations, my body was becoming a magic symbol on the wheel of memory, and the death appeared me as the extreme sublimation of my thought, the extreme attempt to transmit through time and space my message, as the most perfect magic that a man could perform.

◆ You always felt impending on you the destiny, resounding in your ears the hermetical prophecy: and, believe me, that the one who will devote oneself to the religion of mind, will be charged with the death penalty. The stake impend-

ed on You in the unconscious wish for the transformation: this one, as a citizen and inhabitant of the world, son of the father Sun and of the mother Earth, because he loves too much the world, we see how he must be hated, blamed, persecuted and pushed by that. But in this while he must not be idle, nor had occupied waiting for his death, for his transmigration, for his changing.

- ◆ The Nova philosophia is the awareness of the human vicissitude, is joy in the feeling of being immersed in the divinity of the nature, is a bit of heroic fury to reach contemplating it; it is absence of resignation, because everything changes and after the night there is always the day, it is absence of exaltation because it happens the opposite thing; it is fullness of life, absence of compulsions, of barriers to the knowledge, thirsty for the infinite. For all this I could not abjure. When I realized that they aimed to this, to the essence of my thought, for which I fought, around the world, for all my life, I understood that the cycle of my vicissitude was at a turn. Now that is enough! I have nothing of which repenting! Only Clemente VIII himself could

comprehend, and maybe accept the existence of this “double truth”, philosophical and theological, but he did not want to listen to me, until the end.

- ◆ And so they emitted their verdict.
- ◆ I already pronounced my verdict seven years before in the presence of the Venetian Inquisitors: I have an infinite universe, that is an effect of the infinite, divine power, because I considered an unworthy thing for the divine Goodness and Power, that it produced only a finished world, having the power to produce except this another and infinite other worlds. This is the verdict they feared, more than I feared theirs.
- ◆ So you were not afraid to die?
- ◆ Death is nothing else than a dissolution of ties, that is why the sage must not fear it. The only real death is not thinking anymore, if your thought is annihilated, erased as they tried to do with mine. This does not mean that I was not sorry for breaking that bond of love that exists between body and soul, because even if we are waiting for another

life or way to be ourselves, it will not be like ours, as we are in the present, so this one passes by eternally, and we do not hope a return absolutely.

- ◆ “A nice mate, an epicurean for the life”, that is how your friend Corbinelli described you. You liked women and you always considered the flesh sin as a light and venial sin, because it is a natural thing and a very great merit to observe the God’s commandment.
- ◆ I loved with all my heart’s strength, with all the impetus a man of the south is capable: violent loves like my emotions. But, as a philosopher, I could not forget that every thing changes, nothing annihilates, and in the cycles of the vicissitude one is the immortal, eternal soul that lives and enjoys to inquire about every thing. No spirit and no body perishes: there is only a continuous varying of combinations. As the snake would not be anything else than a man if from his body gemmed the arms and the head and the legs, so I already felt from my body gemming new shapes and my intellect joining the divine in a moment of furious final tear.

As in the myth of Atteone, when they realized that I managed to contemplate the truth, the greyhounds of intolerance and of obtuseness dashed on me to tear me to pieces.

- ◆ But killing you, they let you sublimate your philosophy beyond the limits imposed by the body, by the compulsions.
- ◆ Trismegistos had said: “Imagine to be equally in every place, on earth, on the sea, in the sky, imagine to be not yet born, to be in your mother’s womb, to be young, old, to be dead, to be what you will be after death. If you comprehend all these things together, you will be able to comprehend God”. Fastened naked to that pole in that fresh February morning, I could finally fly with the spirit from a place to another in a moment, as if I should not travel anymore to go to Paris at Henry III’s court or to London at the Diva Elizabeth’s presence or to Wittenberg, to Helmstedt, to Naples, to Nola, or to the farthest celestial corpus beyond the borders of the universe, but as if I was already there.

TRIAL AND STAKE

Campo de' fiori



Today, at the centre of Campo de' Fiori square, there is the monument which, three centuries after the stake, was built in the name of the freedom of thinking. The scaffold for his execution had been put at the bottom of the square, at the corner with Via dei Balestrari, on the opposite side of the house of the French ambassador. He had required the executions to happen at that hour: of that man, that some years before his king had admired and protected, he now despised even the smell of his burnt flesh.

The 20 January 1600, Clement VIII, considering the charges proved, and refusing the request of further torture made by the cardinals, orders the “unrepentant heretic, pertinacious and obstinate” accused to be given over to the secular arm. This means, despite the presence of the usual hypocrite words in the sentence that appeal to the clemency of the Governor of Rome, death by stake. The 8 February the conviction is read in the house of cardinal Madruzzo in Navona Square. “We say, pronounce, sentence and declare that you, Giordano Bruno, are an unrepentant, pertinacious and obstinate heretic, and so incur in all the ecclesiastical censures, punishments of the sacred canons, laws and constitutions, both general and specific, inflicted to all those unrepentant, pertinacious and obstinate heretics”. Bruno’s last words, before he was put the gag-bit to nail his tongue, are scornful: *You are more scared in pronouncing this sentence than I in listening to it!* On Tuesday 17 February 1600, naked and tied to a post in Campo de' fiori square, the philosopher of the infinite worlds is burnt alive.



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Guido del Giudice has become popular in the last years as one of the most important expert of Giordano Bruno's life and works. He has devoted to him decades of deep and keen studies, following the same itinerary of his "peregrinatio", visiting all the places where he lived, looking for fresh information and news. This has made him find, on a copy of *Camoeracensis Acrotismus* kept by the Klementinum Library in Prague, a new sign in Bruno's own hands. He has also identified, in *Oratio Valedictoria* a quote from *Gargantua et Pantagruel*, which makes it possible to consider François Rabelais one Bruno's preferred sources. His researches in Switzerland, for the creation of the first Italian translation of *Summa terminorum metaphysicorum*, have made him enlighten one of the most unknown periods of the philosopher's life, proving the important relationships he had with the movement of Rosicrucian. In 2008 he won the first edition of the International Award Giordano Bruno with the book *La disputa di Cambrai*. Since 1998 he has been the editor of the website www.giordanobruno.com, which has become a point of reference for all the fans and scholars all over the world.

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