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BOOK REVIEW

Giordano Bruno, Philosopher/Heretic

Ingrid Rowland, University of Chicago Press, 2009

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Captured in the end, held in the prisons of the Vatican from 1593 to 1600, when he was burned alive for heresy, Giordano Bruno remains nonetheless strangely uncapturable, and is therefore a mirror onto which we can project ourselves. To scientists, as to the Italian liberals of the 1880s who erected a statue in his honor on the Campo dei Fiori ("here, where the pyre burned"), he is a martyr to free thought. For Frances Yates, he represented the end of the Renaissance, the last and most extraordinary voice of Hermetic magic [1, 2]. For John Bossy, he was simply a spy [3]. But Giordano Bruno was also an "interdisciplinary" thinker of an extraordinary cast, as well as a poet, a playwright, a humorist, a philosopher—like Cyrano, he was all things.

Now, as new English translations of Bruno's works become available, several authors have undertaken to sketch the man's life. Unlike the scholarly work of Yates, which probes specific aspects of Bruno's thought, these books aim to provide a full, comprehensive sketch of both the man and his ideas—an immensely difficult task when the thought is so multi-layered, so difficult to pin down, and when the image of the pyre looms so large. To evoke the horror of his death is not so hard; to depict the complexities of his thought, harder by far.

The first recent writer to attempt this feat for a popular English-speaking audience was Michael White [4], whose *The Pope and the Heretic: The True Story of Giordano Bruno, the Man Who Dared to Defy the Roman Inquisition* appeared in 2003. White portrays Bruno's execution in terms almost pornographic in their horrific detail: you cannot look away. He sketches the life, too, albeit briefly, with nods to the scholarship of both Yates and Bossy. If White's aim is to awaken the reader to the man's existence in all his complexities, he surely succeeds.

In *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher/Heretic* (University of Chicago Press, 2009) Ingrid Rowland aims to do more [5]. Half popular book, half scholarly study, the book follows

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Bruno on his travels from Naples to northern Italy and then to Geneva, Lyon, Toulouse, Paris, London, Wittenberg, and Frankfurt. Rowland introduces us to his work with beautifully selected quotations from his writing, and with recollections of those who knew him, from a friend's remembrance of him as a delightful, Epicurean companion at the dinner table, to a Parisian librarian, who recorded their conversations in his diary.

Born in Nola, near Naples, in 1548, Giordano Bruno studied at a Dominican convent and trained for the priesthood. His independent turn of mind got him into trouble early. He removed all images of Mary from his cell, leaving only a crucifix. He read forbidden books, abandoning a copy of Erasmus in the convent latrine when he fled Naples. He was known for his brilliance and scholarship, and was sent to Rome in 1569 to display his linguistic erudition before the pope. But he was unable to still his mind or his tongue, and disputed with his elders on explosive topics like the personhood, or lack thereof, of the members of the Trinity. This was likely the last straw that, in 1576, led his superiors to request an Inquisitorial investigation. Bruno thought it prudent at this point to decamp, leaving Naples for Rome. When news reached him there that the investigation was proceeding, it became clear that he was no safer in Rome than in Naples, and he headed north, first to Venice and Genoa, and then, around 1578, out of Italy altogether. In the 14 years that followed, he travelled constantly, living in a dozen cities across Europe, and producing what is perhaps the most complex body of work of any late Renaissance philosopher.

Having fled from Catholic orders, Bruno travelled to Geneva, but was left unconvinced by Calvinism. Calvinism's austerity may not have pleased him, but neither did its emphasis on salvation by faith rather than "works", a point he returned to often in his writing [6]. After an imprisonment in Geneva, Bruno traveled to southern France, and finally reached Paris in late 1581. Here, Bruno wrote his only play, a satirical comedy called *Candelaio* (*The Candlemaker*) [7].

Despite trying his hand at the theater, Bruno spent much of his first visit to Paris completing major philosophical works on the art of memory, and it was with this work that he came to the attention of the court of Henri III. The art of memory, with origins in ancient Greece and Rome, is described in Frances Yates's revelatory book *The Art of Memory* [2], in which the author succeeds brilliantly at that most elusive of goals, that of writing the biography of an idea. Originally a technique enabling orators to memorize complex speeches, the method taught that one should imprint the image of an idea, preferably expressed by a human or animal figure engaged in some action, on the image of a place, or *memory locus*, such as the entrance to a building. The next idea should be imprinted on another place within the building, and one could then mentally walk through the building in one's mind, recalling the images, and their associated ideas, as one passed them. While some ancient writers, and more modern scholars such as Erasmus and Ramus, decried the method as too complex, and argued for straight memorization, the technique was widely used in ancient Greece and Rome, and later, in the context of religious imagery and the memorization of moral lessons, by Christian scholars of the early Middle Ages such as Thomas Aquinas. The art of memory experienced a resurgence in Bruno's era, and books teaching the art were published frequently. Lest you think this all sounds very antique, glance at the books in the self-improvement section of your local bookstore, touting proven methods for learning 100,000 words in a year. And lest you think this has no basis in what we understand today as science, consider a study of the effect of bizarre imagery on memory [8], the comparison of "bizarreness versus interaction of mental images as determinants of learning" [9], and a recent neuroimaging study of memory loci [10]. In modern terms, this touches on the binding problem.

For Bruno and his contemporaries, the art of memory, however, was more than a mental exercise. Its philosophical connotations were vast, and the proponents of the idea went to immense lengths to create elaborate memory systems to capture not just the sequence of ideas in a bit of oratory, but *the entire world*. Yates vividly describes some of these attempts, including an actual wooden amphitheater built by Giulio Camillo, with graded levels and sections representing different realms of human knowledge [2]. Camillo was one of the few memory artists to construct an actual physical embodiment of his system. For most, like Bruno, the memory locus was in the mind, and that was sufficient. In a series of extraordinary and enigmatic books, beginning with *De Umbris Idearum* (*The Shadows of Ideas*), published in Paris in 1582, Bruno presented a memory system more extraordinary than any constructed before. He combined "classical" memory images with the Cabalistic system of concentric "combinatory" wheels of letters and symbols developed by Ramon Lull. To these, he added layers of zodiacal and planetary images, drawn in part from the works of Hermes Trismegistus and from Cornelius Agrippa's classic work on magic, *De Occulta Philosophia*. On top of all this, Bruno provided an exhaustive list of elements, substances, adjectives and attributes (such as knotty, counterfeit, involved, formless, famous) and a list of inventors, from Rhegima (the inventor of bread from chestnuts) and Ceres (the inventor of yokes for oxen) to Hostanes (the inventor of linking with demons), and Zoroaster (the inventor of magic). Bruno described this torrent of ideas as a series of lists within lists. From this, Yates reconstructed what she concluded to be the secret message of his book, designed to be accessible only to the cleverest of his readers: an immense set of wheels within wheels, circles of images encompassing Bruno's summary of all human knowledge [2].

Does the idea of using a memory system such as Bruno's to capture and "fix" the structure of the world seem outlandish to your modern sensibilities? Look up at the posters of the periodic table and the standard model on the walls of your classroom. The context may have shifted, but our goal is cousin to Bruno's, surely. We think in shape and structure, all the time. We always have. Perhaps we have no choice. As Oliver Sacks pointed out in a recent *New Yorker* article, all human writing systems are composed of shapes that correspond topologically to the range of shapes and contours we encounter in our natural surroundings [11]. Is it any wonder, then, that we scientists, who used to look for circles within circles, now construct phylogenetic trees, or that Stephen Jay Gould compared the structure of evolutionary theory to a piece of branching coral [12]? Does dialectical materialism follow from bilateral symmetry?

In her extraordinary book *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* [1], Yates describes the relation between Bruno's thought and the writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, believed in the late Renaissance to be an ancient Egyptian philosopher who foresaw much of modern Christianity, and taught Moses and Plato most of what they knew. (A few decades after Bruno's death, Isaac Casaubon correctly dated the works of Hermes to a much later period.) One of the central ideas of the Hermetic tradition was a connection between the temporal and spiritual world. The spiritual world reached down to the temporal world, expressing itself in the particularities of objects and creatures. Living creatures, attempting to encompass the infinitude of the world in their thoughts, reached upward toward the spiritual world. Bruno's memory system was meant to serve as a ladder for this upward communication, to allow the user of the system to ascend toward "the soul of the soul of the world". "It is by one and the same ladder," he wrote, "that nature descends to the production of things and the intellect ascends to the knowledge of them; and that the one and the other proceeds from unity and returns to unity, passing through the multitude of things in the middle." [2, p. 228]

Yates paints a portrait of a Bruno who longed to bring about a lasting and permanent reformation in which all religious strife would be resolved and all faiths unified by a return the primeval Hermetic religion. Rowland dismisses this, writing in a footnote that "Frances Yates argued that Bruno was trying to resurrect a kind of Egyptian religion, whereas most contemporary Bruno scholars regard the Nolan philosopher as a philosopher rather than a religious reformer." [5, p. 301] Even in a semi-popular book, the reader is owed more than this, especially since a close reading of Bruno's works, especially *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, does not appear to contradict Yates's interpretation. A detailed discussion of those unnamed contemporary scholars and their critiques would be immeasurably more valuable than a simple footnote, and it is regrettable that Rowland does not provide this depth of exploration.

Rowland goes to immense pains, perhaps protesting too much, to paint Bruno as a modern. She writes that Bruno's "ability to treat models of the universe as just that—models—was an ability that modern scientists still recognize as an essential part of their own discipline...he could redraw the geometry of the universe—and did so, as a mature philosopher, in a way that modern scientists find much more valid than the universe of Galileo." [5, p. 69] But this is spin. It is what Stephen Jay Gould might have called *an illegitimate mapping onto known categories*.

It is impossible to read Bruno's own writing without realizing that something more complex is going on here than the dawning of modern science. One of his memory treatises "opens with a terrific incantation to the sun by Circe, mentioning all his names, attributes, animals, birds, metals and so on. From time to time, her assistant, Moeris, has to look out to inspect the line of the sun's rays to see if the incantation is working." [1, p. 288] Is this merely a wild poetic metaphor, with a little humor thrown for good measure, in that image of the assistant peeking outside to check on the sun? But Bruno's magic was not only metaphor. In the second of his major memory treatises, *The Sign of Signs*, he speaks of four guides to the mystery of the universe. Mathematics is nowhere to be found. The guides are love, art, mathesis (the magical use of figures), and magic [1, p. 258]. The ascent toward the soul of the soul of the world is to be made "with magic and divine rites...ascend[ing] to the height of the divinity by that same scale of nature by which the divinity descends to the smallest things by the communication of itself." [1, p. 288]

Whether rooted in the sun-centered pseudo-Egyptian religion of Hermes Trismegistus, or rooted simply in philosophical conviction, Bruno's motivations for championing the heliocentric solar system were far more multifaceted than an admiration for the "mere geometry" of Copernicus. Likewise, his vision of an infinite universe contains more philosophy than cosmology, linked as it was to his idea of the continuity of all things: "Every soul and spirit", he wrote in *On Magic* [13, pp. 112–113] "has some degree of continuity with the universal spirit, which is recognized to be located not only where the individual soul lives and perceives, but also to be spread out everywhere in its essence and substance, as many Platonists and Pythagoreans have taught...Furthermore, the soul, in its power, is present in some way in the entire universe...." This led to even more dangerous ideas: "Death is nothing more than...a disintegration. No spirit and no body ever perishes; rather, there is only a continual change of combinations and actualizations." [13, p. 126] In this way, participating in the universe, humanity is part of a continual chain reaching up to the divine. Needless to say, this was not Church doctrine. It is perhaps for this reason that Bruno's infinite universe so much disturbed Kepler, who wrote in relief to Galileo, "[i]f you had found planets circling one of the fixed stars, there among Bruno's infinities I had already prepared my prison shackles, that is, my exile in infinity." [5, p. 280]

The major philosophical dialogues in which Bruno expounded his views on the Copernican system (*The Ash Wednesday Supper* [14]) and the infinite universe (*Cause, Principle and Unity* [13]) were written during the remarkable few years (1583 to 1585) when he lived in London. Here, he stayed in the household of the French Ambassador to the court of Queen Elizabeth, Michel de Castelnau. Bruno mingled with a wide range of people in Elizabethan London. He became close friends with the scholar John Florio; he knew Sir Philip Sidney; he (probably) visited John Dee. He may even figure in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* as the character Berowne.

Bruno was also, says John Bossy, a spy, passing information from the ambassador's household to Elizabeth's Secretary of State, Sir Francis Walsingham. It is documented, indeed, that there was a spy living in the ambassador's household who, under the pseudonym of Henry Fagot, passed information to Walsingham about the comings and goings at the embassy. Based on the fact that Fagot never mentioned Bruno, Bossy concluded in his provocative little book, *Giordano Bruno and the Embassy Affair*, that they were the same person [4]. This theory, while certainly arresting, rests on tenuous arguments. Fagot served as chaplain in the ambassador's household; there is no evidence that Bruno ever practiced in any formal religious role during his travels. Having long since discarded his Dominican habit, and having moreover been excommunicated and hence forbidden to participate in mass, it is unlikely that he would have been asked to do so by the ambassador of a Catholic king of France, who surely knew Bruno's history. Fagot's handwriting and Bruno's are quite different (see appendices in Bossy for examples of both). Bossy's analysis of Bruno's motivation (a loathing of "popery", and a desire to do anything possible to undermine it) lacks even a pretence of depth: Bruno turned, at various times, to many monarchs, the Catholic Henri III of France, Queen Elizabeth, and Henri of Navarre (later Henri IV of France, a Gascon Huguenot who converted to Catholicism because "Paris is well worth a mass"), in the hope that they might lead the world toward the reformation he hoped for. His *Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* ended with a praise of Henri III, and contained far more vicious criticism of the Protestant idea of the superiority of "faith" over "works" than it did of the Catholic Church. Finally, the very animosity of Bossy's tone renders his motivations, and thus his conclusions, problematic. He sees Bruno as a man who lived in bad faith, having betrayed his host and protector Castelnau. Bossy concludes, with reference to the Campo dei Fiori, that "it served him right". Bossy's hypothesis now appears to be discredited by most scholars, and Rowland dismisses it out of hand in a footnote.

During his time in England, Bruno travelled to Oxford, once with Sidney and a visiting Polish duke, and then a second time to lecture on astronomy. As described by George Abbott, a future Archbishop of Canterbury, Bruno

> ...more boldly then [sic] wisely, got vp into the highest place & most renowned schoole, stripping vp his sleeues like some Iugler [juggler], and telling vs much of *chentrum* & *chirculus* & *circumferenchia* (after the pronunciation of his Country language) he vndertooke among very many other matters to set on foote the opinion of Copernicus, that the earth did goe round, and the heavens did stand still; whereas in truth it was his owne head which rather did run round, & his braines did not stand still. [1, p. 208]

In short, they laughed at him. Bruno had his revenge shortly afterward, publishing perhaps his most famous (and most scientific) dialogue, *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, where, in addition to slamming the rudeness of the Oxford dons and of the English in general, he recounted an unforgettable trip down the Thames in a leaking ferry boat en route to

the "supper" where he disputed astronomy with two pedantic and inept scholars [14]. The bitterness of his tone raised some hackles, understandably, but Castelnau headed off any serious consequences, and Bruno apologized for, or at least toned down, his criticism in his next book, published the same year in London, *Cause, Principle and Unity* [13].

When Castelnau was recalled as ambassador, Bruno returned with him to Paris. But here the political and religious situation was far more dangerous than it had been a few years before, with the ultra-Catholic Guise family gaining power and influence over Henri III. After a couple of years, Bruno left France, and travelled through Germany, continuing to write. The end of the story is well known. He was invited to Venice by Gioan Mocenigo, a nobleman who claimed to want to learn the art of memory. Knowing the liberal political climate in Venice, and perhaps even hoping that the new pope might take an interest in his work, Bruno returned to Italy in 1592. He talked openly before Mocenigo about his ideas (or so Mocenigo told the Inquisition), but became uncomfortable and suspicious of his host. He had his bags packed to return to Frankfurt when Mocenigo, aided by a bunch of street thugs, locked him in a room and turned him over to the Venetian Inquisition. His interrogation in Venice might have ended with his release, but Rome demanded his extradition. In 1593, he entered the prisons of the Vatican, and only left in February of 1600, turned over to the "secular arm" of government, which inevitably meant a horrific and public execution. He said: "You may feel more fear in passing this sentence on me than I do in accepting it."

Bruno's work remains a breathtaking mixture of the (to our modern sensibilities) strange and occult, intertwined with a ravagingly sharp wit deployed in defense of the human mind against pedantry, asininity, and stupidity. In no less than the dedication of a book to Emperor Rudolf II, he writes, in terms that Diderot or Voltaire would surely have applauded:

> It is immoral to hold an opinion in order to curry another's favor; mercenary, servile, and against the dignity of human liberty to yield and submit; supremely stupid to believe as a matter of habit; irrational to decide according to the majority opinion, as if the number of sages exceeded the number of fools...Endowed with the eyes of sense and intelligence by the bounty of Almighty God, and therefore confirmed as judge and jury in the matter, I would be ungrateful and insane, unworthy of that participation in light, if I were to act as agent and champion for someone else, seeing, perceiving and judging by another's lights. [5, p. 208]

In *De Vinculus in Genere* (*On Bonds in General*), one his last essays, Bruno explored the idea of "bonding", which he defines as analogous to connecting or influencing. There are two types of bonding, "socially or through magic" [13, p. 164]. He says: "Taken universally, bonding agents are God, demons, souls, animals, nature, chance, luck and, finally, fate." [13, p. 145] This is the second time I have quoted Bruno as mentioning demons. Though he considered them to be composed of a much lighter substance than humans and animals, "one can prove that demons are material", he wrote, "and that they are of several different kinds, by the fact that they have emotions, desires, angers, jealousies, and similar feelings found in humans, and in animals composed of observable and more dense matter." [13, p. 128]

For a moment, reading about the demons, you feel at a distance from Bruno, don't you? He seems more Medieval than Renaissance. An infinite gap separates him from your picture

of modern science. But turn a few pages, and here he is, writing like a twenty-first-century psychoanalyst of power relations:

> He who binds experiences joy and a certain sense of glory, and this is greater and stronger insofar as the one who is bound is more noble, more worthy and more excellent. The strength of the bond by which he who binds is himself bound by the one who is bound is located in this sense of joy and glory. [13, p. 152]

Or the handler of a presidential candidate:

> Orators create good will with their art when their listeners and judges find something of themselves in it. [13, p. 157]

> He who desires to bind in a socially effective way must take into account the diverse composition and structure of things, and must consider, evaluate, and decide differently when dealing with heroes, or with ordinary people, or with those who are more like brutes. [13, p. 160]

> He who wishes to bond should be careful to use means which effectively bind the object, that is, he should employ the bonds that already hold it. [13, p. 163]

He writes of how ideas themselves can bind, irrespective of their validity: "even if there were no hell, the thought and imagination of hell without a basis in truth would still really produce a true hell, for fantasy has its own kind of truth." [13, p. 165]

And then the demons and the politicians are left behind, and he is writing at the same time of interactions between people, of chemical bonds, and of the continual transformation of all aspects of nature:

> No bonds are eternal. Rather, things alternate between bondage and freedom, between being bonded and escaping from a bond, or they transfer from one type of bond to another. This is a natural occurrence, and it precedes, accompanies and follows the eternal condition of all things. Thus, nature binds with its variety and motion, and art, which emulates nature, multiplies, varies, diversifies, orders and arranges bonds in a successive series. But complete stability is opposed to the nature of things, just as we are sometimes more inclined to condemn it, and yet at other times we rather desire it, for it is quite natural to desire to break from bonds, while just a little while ago we were open to being tied to them by our own voluntary and spontaneous interactions. [13, p. 159]

The occult proponent of an arcane art of memory and a poetic defender of the Copernican system, set within an infinite universe beyond Copernicus's wildest dreams, Bruno was also human, and he had a vicious sense of humor. *The Ash Wednesday Supper* begins with a pun on the idea of "two witnesses" that, like the fable of the lion and the ass in *Candelaio* (see [5, p. 85]), I will leave you to read for yourselves. Here is his supremely irreverent description of passing the communion cup at the Ash Wednesday supper:

> Usually the goblet or chalice passes from hand to hand all around the table, from top to bottom, from left to right, and in all directions with no order but that dictated by rough politeness and courtesy. After the leader of this dance has detached his lips, leaving a layer of grease which could easily be used as glue, another drinks and leaves you a crumb of bread, another drinks and leaves a bit of meat on the rim, still another drinks and deposits a hair of his beard and, in this way, with a great mess, no one

> is so ill-mannered, tasting the drink, as to omit leaving you some favor of the relics stuck to his moustache. If one does not want to drink, either because he has not the stomach or because he considers himself above it, he need merely touch the cup to his mouth so that he too can imprint on it the morsels of his lips. The meaning of all this is that... by applying each one his mouth to the selfsame tankard, they come to form themselves into one selfsame leech...one heart, one stomach, one gullet and one mouth. [14, pp. 126–127]

Bruno was an equal-opportunity satirist. Here, from *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, is his riff on predestination (which, as Rowland points out, recalls childhood memories of his family in Nola [5, pp. 17–18]):

> Jove has ordained that today, at noon, two melons, among the others found in Franzino's melon patch, be fully ripened, but that they not be picked until three days later, at which time they will not be considered fit for eating. He wishes that, at the same time, thirty jujubes, perfectly ripe, be picked form the jujube tree which stands at the foot of Mount Cicala on the property of Gioan Bruno; thirty of them should be picked perfectly ripe, seventeen should fall to the ground unripe, and fifteen should be worm-eaten.
>
> He decreed that Vasta, the wife of Albenzio, while she tries to curl the hair on her temples, shall burn fifty-seven of them because she overheated her iron, but that she will not burn her head, that she will not swear this time upon smelling the stench, but rather bear it with patience.
>
> He decreed that two hundred fifty-two maggots be born out of the dung of Albenzio's ox; that of these, fourteen be trampled upon and killed by Albenzio's foot; that twenty-six of them die from being turned upside down; that twenty-two live in a cavern; that eighty wander about the courtyard; that forty-two go to live under the tree stump near the door; that sixteen turn their feelers wherever they see fit; and that the rest go in search of their fortune....
>
> He decreed that at fifteen minutes of the same hour, the old woman of Fiurulo, by the motion of her tongue moving about in her palate, will succeed with the fourth movement in causing the third molar in her right lower jaw to fall out. Its loss will be bloodless and painless, because the said molar has come to the end of its state of trepidation that has lasted exactly seventeen annual revolutions of the moon. [6, pp. 132–133]

He was human, and in the collection of extant Venetian and Vatican documents related to his trial, published by Les Belles Lettres [15, pp. 230–231], you can find, in a list of the expenses spent on prisoners in the month of November, 1596, that 0.1 écus were spent on a barber sent to give him a haircut and a shave ("al barbiero tosato e lavato"), and another 0.1 écus on mending a pair of his hose ("per haverli fatto raconciar un par de calzetti").

Rowland's book vividly recounts the story of Bruno's wanderings and summarizes his works. The familiar scenes are all here—he is mocked at Oxford for his accent, he slogs through the (perhaps symbolic) London mud en route to the Ash Wednesday supper, he is trapped in Venice by Mocenigo just hours before he is about to escape to Frankfurt. Rowland makes some remarkable discoveries as well, new at least to an English-speaking audience for works on Bruno, as far as this reviewer is aware, such as a uniquely detailed exploration of the influences on Bruno in his early days in Naples, including a discussion of his teacher Teofilo da Vairano (who later became the namesake of many characters in

Bruno's dialogues)—and a description of the Neapolitan libraries where he probably first read Marsilio Ficino's translation of Hermes Trismegistus.

Reading *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher/Heretic*, the reader often hungers for more information, clearer writing, or better editing than Rowland delivers. The referencing is frustratingly capricious (Rowland's *The Scarith of Scornello: a Tale of Renaissance Forgery* [16] is much more carefully annotated). While Rowland often discusses the images used in Bruno's work and their relation to his life, particularly his early life in Nola and Naples, some quotations leave the reader starving for attribution. On page 63, describing Bruno's first trip to Rome, "what he most remembered about the trip was the number of corpses lying along the Appian Way, victims of banditry and malaria." A striking image, but where did he write about it? Likewise, on pages 84 and 85, certain facts receive citation while others, seemingly selected at random, do not. Rowland cites the *Ash Wednesday Supper* as a source for "seashells in the soil of Monte Cicala", near his childhood home, but simply states, after a discussion of Neapolitan commedia dell'arte, that Bruno "would eventually encounter Punch and Judy in London." Did he describe this somewhere? Or is Rowland stating, as fact, an inference from her knowledge of London in the 1580s, and Bruno's presence there?

There are also moments where one wishes the editor had been more caffeinated. It immediately strikes the reader's eye when the same idea, and even the same phrase, appear on consecutive pages. Naples "turned Giordano Bruno into a thinker" (page 25) and "was...the crucible...in which this young man...began to forge the life of a philosopher" (page 24), "*precisely because of its hugeness*" (identical phrase, both pages!). Rowland also enters into digressions whose purpose is never fully made clear. Thus, a long discussion of picaresque novels on page 83 meanders into a brief mention of the picaresque characters in *Candelaio*. The reader is waiting for a point, which never comes. On pages 90–91, a discussion of the printing of almanacs (because Bruno's lost work *On the Signs of the Times* "sounds like an almanac or a book of astrological predictions") includes a lengthy description of a work by Cardano, never clearly placed in juxtaposition to Bruno's work. The reader is left unsure what insight about Bruno to draw from this discussion, or from the brief paragraph which follows (p. 91):

> Other printers published full-fledged works of natural philosophy like Tycho Brahe's opinion on the new star of 1572, written in Latin, the only language with real international authority, and Copernicus's On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres, whose groundbreaking theory lies among page after page of mathematical tables.

One suspects, sadly, that this paragraph exists only in order to name-check Brahe and Copernicus. Equally arbitrary, it seems, is Rowland's extensive discussion of the influence of Cabala on Bruno's thought, which does not contain even a mention of Yates's detailed scholarship, according to which Bruno's study of Cabala was, by far, secondary to his interest in Hermes Trismegistus.

There are some missteps, and moments where the reader wishes the author had dug deeper, and written a closely annotated scholarly tour de force of seven hundred pages, instead of this slim volume of 284. Yet Ingrid D. Rowland does her level best to capture this uncapturable man, and, to some extent, she succeeds. But one also feels that, though Rowland has opened the door to a labyrinth, she has not stepped very far inside. She holds up a plate of polished steel to a hall of mirrors. It is a cursory glance at a subject of infinite depth, and Rowland's polished steel captures what light it can. Now, about those mirrors: follow me into the labyrinth, and see for yourself.

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