

MARGINI

GIORNALE DELLA DEDICA E ALTRO

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ANNA LAURA PULIAFITO

Giordano Bruno and the dedication of his Latin poems¹

Giordano Bruno, as it has been stated, is the philosopher of the *variatio*. According to his philosophical system this can be seen as an effect of the circular path of knowledge, meaning in this case that any point of the argument can be reached from any starting point. This is coherent with the image of the infinite universe, where every single point constitutes both the centre and the circumference of the infinite whole.

This general attitude can be also traced in the literary practice of Bruno as a writer. According to him, under the ineffable truth of the One the only reality is that of never-ending transformation and unceasing *vicissitudo*. Deeply persuaded that there is no main road, no 'clear and distinct' way leading to the truth, Bruno's work covers any profitable literary form, springing through the fields of literary genres from Latin to Vernacular eloquence, from comedy to poetry, from dialogue to the treatise. Although he is convinced that only a very restricted number of his readers or listeners will be able to understand his message and be prepared to follow it, he always tries to make use of all forms of communication in order to involve the audience in the most persuasive way.

Thus the man who in 1582 offered his tragicomedy *Candelaio* to 'Lady Morgana B.' can dedicate the Latin poem trilogy of 1591 to Henricus Julius, Duke of Brunswick and Luneburg, Bishop of Helmsted. The works constitute somehow the two opposite poles of Bruno's writing about metamorphosis, one of the central topics in his philosophical thought.

The few considerations which follow are intended as an introductory survey of the dedicatory texts introducing the three poems printed in Frankfurt by Johannes Wechel.

I will first mention the different typologies of dedication introducing the three works, briefly referring to the circumstances of their publication. I will then focus on the peculiarities and the rhetorical trends of the *epistola* introducing the *De monade-De immenso*. To conclude there will be some general considerations about the use of the dedication made by Bruno.

We do not know very much either about the developments of the composition of what one of the modern editors of the trilogy – Felice Tocco – describes in XIX century as the «last philosophical will» of the friar, nor about the chronological sequence of the three texts. What we know is that the *editio princeps* of the *De triplici minimo et mensura, ad trium speculativarum scientiarum et multarum activarum artium principia libri quinque* was put up for sale at the Frankfurt Spring-(Book)Fair of 1591, while the

¹ I am very grateful to Andrew Brown for revising the english version of this paper.

princeps of the single volume containing both *De monade, numero et figura liber consequens quinque de minimo magno* and *De innumerabilibus, immenso et infigurabili, seu de universo et mundis libri octo* was put on the market at the Autumn-(Book)Fair of the same year.²

De minimo is introduced by a quite short *epistula* to the Duke of Brunswick written by Joannes Wechel on behalf of the Author:

ingratitude crimen quam foedum sit, agnovit etiam ethnica vetustas, illustrissime ac reverendissime Princeps.

A debt of gratitude leads to the offer of the work, «maxime dignum» of the renowned authority («illustri celsitudine») of the Duke

inter cetera igitur industriae suae [*i. e.* Brun] monumenta, quorum alia iam affecta erant, alia tantum animo concepta.³

A relevant work for a relevant personality, following the traditional law of correspondence between the dignity of the object to be offered and the dignity of the subject to whom it was to be dedicated.⁴

In fact the Prince and Bishop of Helmstedt had supported Bruno in many ways. Having left Tübingen at the end of 1588, Bruno had been admitted to the ‘Academia Julia’ at the beginning of 1589 (13th January), with the favour of the previous Duke of Brunswick, Julius – the founder of the Academy in 1575. The Duke – «quale era eretico» – died on the 3th of May 1589 and Bruno received from his son and heir Henricus Julius eighty «scudi de quelle parti» as payment for pronouncing the *Oratio consolatoria* in his honour.⁵

Once more during his *peregrinatio* through Europe Bruno must have been given the impression that he had found a secure haven to work out his projects, in particular his magic works. He was to be deceived. A few months afterwards he was excommunicated by the Head of the Lutheran Church (Gilbert Voet) and notwithstanding the still benevolent protection of the Duke he had to leave the town by the end of April 1590. As he personally declared during the Venetian proceedings, he went then to Frankfurt

² See E. CANONE, *Nota alla ristampa*, in G. BRUNO, *Poemi filosofici latini De triplici minimo et mensura, De monade, numero et mensura, De innumerabilibus, immenso et in figurabili*. Ristampa delle cinquecentine, a cura di E. CANONE, La Spezia, Agorà, 2000, pp. XLI-XLVII, in part. p. XLII.

³ G. BRUNO, *De triplici minimo et mensura*, now in BRUNO, *Poemi filosofici latini cit.*, pp. [1]-[252], in part. p. [3].

⁴ About the different tipologies of the dedication between 16th and 18th century see *Strategie del testo. Preliminari. Partizioni. Pause*. Atti del XVI e XVII Convegno Interuniversitario (Bressanone, 1988 e 1989), a cura di G. PERON, premessa di G. FOLENA, Padova, Esedra, 1995; *I margini del libro. Indagine teorica e storica sui testi di dedica*. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Basilea, 21-23 novembre 2002, a cura di M. A. TERZOLI, Roma-Padova, Antenore, 2004; *I dintorni del testo: approcci alle periferie del libro*, a cura di M. SANTORO e M. G. TAVONI, Roma, Edizione dell’Ateneo, 2005, 2 vols; M. PAOLI, *La dedica: storia di una strategia editoriale: Italia, secoli XVI-XIX*, Lucca, Pacini Fazzi, 2009.

⁵ *Documenti veneti*, IX, in V. SPAMPANATO, *Documenti della vita di Giordano Bruno*, Firenze, Olschki, 1933, p. 86; see also *Giordano Bruno, gli anni napoletani e la “peregrinatio” europea*, a cura di E. CANONE, Cassino, Università degli Studi, 1992, pp. 129-30. The *Oratio* was published 1589 by Jacobus Lucius.

where he worked on the printing of the poems. Wechel himself describes in the already cited dedication how closely involved Bruno was in the printing:

non schemata solum ipse sua manu sculpsit, sed etiam operarum se in eodem correctorem praebuit.⁶

As scholars have pointed out in recent years, thereby making a significant contribution to the philological reconstruction of the brunian printed texts, Giordano followed his works until the very end.⁷ He introduced last-minute changes and carried out typographical tasks, in this case preparing the woodcuts for the tables, for example. New problems with the Senate of the town forced him to flee to Switzerland however; he stayed for some months with Hainzel at Elgg, close to Zürich, in contact with Raphael Egli. The case was mentioned by Wechel himself:

Tandem cum ultimum dumtaxat superesset operis folium, casu repentino a nobis avulsus extremam ei, ut ceteris, manum imponere non potuit. Per literas igitur rogavit ut quod sibi per fortunam non liceret, nos pro se suo nomine praestaremus.

Forced by unexpected circumstances the author formally invests the editor with the responsibility of presenting the book and acquiring for it the required protection:

librum ab illo R[egiae] C[elsitudini] T[uae] destinatum, operaque nostra excultum, *dicamus, offerimus, commendamus.*

The three terms («dicamus, offerimus, commendamus») belonging to the traditional dedicational practice are immediately correlated to the rhetorical rules of dedicating:

Humiliter precantes ut et auctoris *gratitudinem*, et nostra studia *benigne clementerque* accipias, literasque ac literarum propagatores quo coepisti *favore* prosequi pergas.⁸

May the «gratitude» of the «humble» requesters be «kindly» accepted by the Duke and may his «favour» endure, for the safe of the letters and indeed of its propagators.

The peculiar relevance gained by this favour and protection within the brunian intellectual reform can be better traced in the *epistula* introducing the second volume of the trilogy.

We do not know exactly which of the poems had been completed first. The relevant text introducing the *De monade* was considered by Bruno to be the introduction to the entire trilogy. Hence the third of the works – *De immenso* – only alludes to the act of dedicating in the title-page, underneath the title, underlining nevertheless the dignity of the receiver by referring to him as «hero» (IORDANUS / BRUNUS NOLANUS, /DE IMMENSO ET INNUMERA- /BILIBUS etc.../ AD ILLUSTRIS. ET REVEREN / diss. Heroem HENRICUM IULIUM / Brunsvicensium etc.).

The character and the great relevance of the *epistula dedicatoria* introducing the *De monade* become clear at first, looking at the current titles on the top of the page, which claim «EPISTOLA DEDICATORIA ET CLAVIS». In one of his last dedications Bruno

⁶ Bruno, *De minimo* cit., p. [3].

⁷ See R. STURLESE, *Bibliografia, censimento e storia delle antiche stampe di Giordano Bruno*, Firenze, Olschki, 1987, pp. IX-X.

⁸ BRUNO, *De minimo* cit., p. [4].

explicitly states, in fact, the role he has always ascribed to these kinds of introductory text, from the *De umbris* (Paris 1582) down to the Italian dialogues (London 1584-85) and the following Latin works. The dedication must be read as an integral part of the work, because it points out the most relevant content of the writing and simultaneously defines the context surrounding it. It is therefore also a sort of descriptive list of contents, an ‘argument’, as Bruno titles the *epistula* introducing the *Eroici furori*.⁹

The first and probably most relevant indication given us is that we are facing an ‘encyclopedic’ project («Sic omnia encyclopaedia quadam eruuntur, diriguntur, applicantur», p. [237]), which covers the whole extent of theoretical sciences, namely metaphysics, mathematics, and physics. This paper will not cover the delicate interpretation of Bruno’s philosophical statements. What I think will be of some interest in our case is to consider how the text embodies the 16th century rules of dedicating, giving particular interest to the offerer-receiver relationship, or more properly speaking the author-patron (author-dedicatee) relationship.

The text is built on the significance of the triad. It refers at the very beginning to the triple-majesty of Hermes, the King, the Philosopher and the Priest by the old Egyptians:

Apud Aegyptios primum, successu vero temporum apud Persas, atque Romanos (Princeps optime) usu venit ut de sapientibus fierent Reges, et de Regibus essent Sacerdotes; unde scientia, potestate, et autoritate insignes merito dicerentur Trismegisti.¹⁰

A strong polemic underlies the stated praise of the antiquity, resuming some of the main points of Bruno’s critics of his time and the predominant Peripatetical culture. During the Golden Age in which religion directly derived from nature and politics guided the society of men as a part of it, the concentration of political, religious and cultural power prevented the corruption of each one of those. The philosopher did not need to turn a deaf ear to the voice of nature nor adulterate the truth for fear of political or religious authorities – nor did the king yield to the flattery of intriguers (or sycophants), longing to heaven or fearing eternal damnation without considering the real benefit of the State:

Ne philosophus sordide egenus naturae sensus, et rationis lucem potentiorum formidine supprimeret, et ignobiliter hypocrita veritatem pro sacrariorum applausu adulteraret. Ne rex ad unius insolentis et insulsissimi sycophantae vocem, caelos sperans et Tartaros expavescens, ignobilitatis, stultitiae, atque malitiae ad statuum confusionem, regnorum dissipationem, et proprium decus fieret idolum, brachium, et instrumentum.

⁹ See, e.g., G. FRATTA, *Della dedicatione de’ libri*, In Venetia, Appresso Giorgio Angelieri, 1590, c. 22v: «V’è un’arena nobilissima, doue ponno spatiare [*i.e.* dedicators], dietro à molti huomini per scientia immortali; si come si comprende da Cicerone, il quale con Epistola, ch’è spetie d’argomento, manda la sua Topica a Trebatio, e l’Oratore a Marco Bruto». About Fratta’s work (now reproduced in M. SANTORO, *Uso e abuso delle dediche: a proposito del ‘Della dedicatione de’ libri’ di Giovanni Fratta*, Roma, Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 2006) see C. LUCAS, *Vers une nouvelle image de l’écrivain: ‘Della dedicatione de’ libri’ de Giovanni Fratta*, in *L’Ecrivain face à son public en France et en Italie à la renaissance*. Actes du Colloque International de Tours (4-6 Décembre 1986). Études réunies et présentées par Ch. A. FIORATO et J. C. MARGOLIN, Paris, Vrin, 1989, pp. 85-104; A. L. PULIAFITO, *A proposito di alcune dediche di Giordano Bruno*, in *I margini del libro cit.*, pp. 117-39, in part. p. 129; M. SANTORO, *Contro l’abuso delle dediche. ‘Della dedicatione de’ libri’ di Giovanni Fratta*, «Paratesto», 1, 2004, pp. 99-120.

¹⁰ G. BRUNO, *De monade numero et Figura [...] Item De innumerabilibus, immenso, et infigurabili*, now in BRUNO, *Poemi filosofici latini cit.*, pp. [229]-[907], in part. p. [231].

The charges levelled at the Churches, as the institutional embodiment of any form of creed – whether Catholic, Calvinist or Lutheran – are even stronger. «Impostors» have cancelled any civic impact of religious cult and laws simply in order to increase the hate between nations and people: the Golden Age committed the power into the hands of the three-time-great

ne leges, Relligiones, atque Cultus qui ad Rerumpublicarum statum, augmentum, et defensionem sunt, pro cuiusque gentis captu, commodo et defensione aut ficti, aut inventi, aut revelati; mox diversi generis impostorum praetextibus evaderent materia fallaciae, fomes abusus, et ignis enormitatis universae.

The Golden Age did so. Not so the clashing Cinquecento, where the sapient is forced to lie «ex mercenaria avaritia»; the priest exercises his power urged by ambition, the king gives up his task of representing the living image of God on Earth spreading the light of truth, the fervour of the faith, the valour of noble-mindedness:

Sapientior ille, rerum potens, vel contemptor, ex mercenaria non mentiebatur avaritia; Sacerdos ille honore illustris, ex perditissima non imponebat ambitione; Rex ille idem et ad sapientiam, et ad bonitatem in pectore hominum consequenter propagandam, tum veritatis lumine, tum sanctimoniae fervore, tum nobilitatis valore praeditus, veram inter mortales divinitatis imaginem (non ulli ulla in re inferior) testabatur.¹¹

An implicit and paradoxical opposition underlines the insurmountable distance between that fabulous time and the world experienced by Bruno and his contemporaries

Cui nempe de ignobili rusticorum armento magister morum; De insolenti captiunculatorum, vel grammaticorum academia institutor doctrinae; De somnolento et prestigioso melancholiae antro revelator arcanus et maximi altitonantis pauper emissarius, ad consummatissimam usque temulentiam inurbanitatis, ignorantiae, et impietatis pocula ab ineunte aetate propinarunt.¹²

After this quite impressive introduction the Author comes back to the dedication itself («Iam quod ad propositum attinet»)¹³

The rhetorical acknowledgement of the insufficiency of his own «ingenium» to describe the high excellence of the Duke¹⁴ turns out in an hyperbolic praise of his court, standing out above any other for the ‘dignity’ and the ‘*prudencia*’ of his members.

The Duke fits the rule of Trismegistus unexpectedly well, so far as the darkness of the times allows. As prince and bishop he concentrates in his hands both temporal and religious authority. His presumed virtue and intellectual excellence are a guarantee of his being a sapient and a philosopher:

Nec non ita ut in illustrissima Celsit[udine] tua convenere Natura, Ingenium et Fortuna ut fortunata natura populorum, ingeniosa fortuna sacerdotum, et naturali ingenio academiaram princeps iure (quam hoc seculo possibile est optimo) fies.¹⁵

As he had already done in the letter to Lady Morgana introducing *Candelaio* for example, or in a less imaginative but still metaphorically heavily biased contest in the

¹¹ BRUNO, *De monade – De immenso* cit., p. [232].

¹² Ivi, pp. [232]-[233].

¹³ Ivi, p. [233].

¹⁴ «Mihi simplicius est ingenium quam ut Rhetoricorum more eloqui coner ut Illustrissimae Celsitudini tuae non minus ingenitae [...] quam aliunde partae sint virtutes gratiae et ornamenta», ivi, p. [233].

¹⁵ Ivi, p. [234].

Proemiale epistola to Michel de Castelnau (the one which opens the dialogues *De la causa, principio et uno*),¹⁶ Bruno compares the uncertainty of the times («hac fluctuanti tempestate») and of his destiny of exile to the quietness found on German territory, «tamquam pacatiorem Europae regionem».

He is following the rules of gratitude in offering to Henricus Julius, «trismegistus» and «Divinitatis simulachrum» – a suitable gift:

Triplex igitur ex area *exiguita[t]is* meae depromptum munus (tibi termaxime Princeps) *offero*. Primum quod ad eruditum et Sapientem, Secundum quod ad Episcopum et sacrorum antistitem, tertium quo ad principem pastoremque populorum spectat.¹⁷

The poems, provided with commentary and annotations, achieve the highest form of communicating – poetry indeed – to explore the reality following three different paths which run parallel one to each other.

De minimo, De monade, De immenso reveal what Bruno «studiose cupit», «incertus quaerit», «clarissime invenit». The trilogy constitutes a real *summa* of Bruno's philosophy, extending itself from the principles of things to the fundament of faith, imagination, opinion and experience, down to the demonstration of the order of Nature and of the order of the human society.

If there is no further place in the world for the inaccessible freedom of the antique Trismegisti, the new philosopher must elect from time to time the most suitable patron, as distinguished reader and «defensor» toward everyone and everything threatening the 'explication' of the truth:

Quae an ita se habeant, Illustris[simam] Celsit[udinem] tuam rogo ut tamquam apprime sapiens scienter examinet, tamquam Episcopus sincere iudicet et tamquam princeps potenter ab ignorantum, malignorum, et ignobilium contemptu, calumniis, et violentia defendat. Quando ego ipse tenebras ipsas ausu, voce, et calamo oppugnavi, expugnavi, sustuli. Rationis adsistente Lumine, Naturae ipsius stipulante Sole, Dei optimi predestinante gratia: quem rogo ut mentem nostram magis atque magis ad veritatem illuminet, Cor ultro ad bonitatem accendat, et Illustrissimae Celsitudinis tuae brachium amplius exaltet atque amplius. Vale.¹⁸

As usual, in evaluating his time with disenchanted eyes, the patron to whom the dedication is addressed becomes a key figure in the achievement of the new Nolan philosophy. Looking at himself as new Mercury and announcer of a new image of the universe, Bruno needs the concrete support and protection of the mighty. In Bruno's eyes there is in fact an unbroken chain linking celestial inspiration and earthly protection: the philosopher stands in the middle, elaborating his thought as 'explication' of the divine breath and establishing it as an effect of the social and political protection of the patron. This kind of mutual relationship had been very well stated in the title-page of the *Spaccio della bestia trionfante*, the well-known moral dialogue of 1584,

¹⁶ *Candelaio comedia del BRUNO NOLANO* [...], In Parigi, Appresso Guglielmo Giuliano. Al segno dell'Amicizia, M.D.LXXXII, now in G. BRUNO, *Opere italiane: Ristampa anastatica delle cinquecentine*, a cura di E. CANONE, Firenze, Olschki, 1999, I, pp. [3]-[5]; G. BRUNO NOLANO, *De la causa, principio et Vno. A l'Illustrissimo Signor di Mauuissiero*, Stampato in Venetia Anno M.D.LXXXIII, now in Bruno, *Opere italiane* cit., II, pp. [469]-[636], in part. pp. [471]-[486].

¹⁷ BRUNO, *De monade – De immenso* cit., p. [234].

¹⁸ BRUNO, *De monade – De immenso* cit., pp. [238]-[239].

where the same syntactic structure allowed the descent from divine inspiration to earthly commendation and print:

Spaccio / de la bestia trionfante / *Proposto* da Giove, / *Effettuato* dal consiglio, / *Revelato* da Mercurio, / *Recitato* da Sophia, / *Udito* da Saulino, / *Registrato* dal Nolano; / *Diviso* in tre dialogi, / *subdivisi* in tre parti; / *Consacrato* / al molto illustre / et eccellente Cavalliero / Signor Filippo Sidneo. / *Stampato* in Parigi / MDLXXXIII.¹⁹

Bruno applies his typical oppositional pattern simultaneously to affirm and deny the autonomy of the sapient.

Looking at the complete list of Bruno's dedications we can clearly see the figure of the patron being reabsorbed within the framework of the brunian reform as an instrument to guarantee the accomplishment of a project whose speculative and moral responsibility belong only to the philosopher, himself an integral part and instrument of the cosmic whole.

A. L. P.



I margini del libro

¹⁹ Now also in BRUNO, *Opere italiane* cit., III, p. [849].