

The Mastermind and the Fool. Self-Representation and the Shadowy Worlds of Truth in Giordano Bruno's Candelaio (1582)

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ABSTRACT

This article traces one of the main lines of argument in Giordano Bruno's only comedy. I will suggest that even though they occupy opposite places in the kaleidoscope of truth and falsehood, the antagonists Gioanbernardo, the mastermind, and Bonifacio, the fool, are embodiments of two aspects of an homogeneous physical reality that is accessible to human beings only through polyvalent images. I will suggest a specific pictorial representation of these two aspects, namely Christ and St. John the Baptist, as children. I shall also suggest that Bruno in the *Candelaio* uses the persona of this saint to point to his *nolana filosofia*. In such ways, the *Candelaio* is not only expressing philosophical concepts in the form of contemporary comedy, Bruno also developed his philosophy by making use of the representational possibilities that only the stage could offer him.

Se vogliamo mutar stato, cambiamo costumi.
Giordano Bruno, Spaccio della bestia trionfante

INTRODUCTION

Giordano Bruno, arguably one of the most important philosophers of the Renaissance, first published a book in Italian, which purports not to be an erudite treatise on the intricacies of his philosophy of the infinite universe or the primacy of matter over form, but a facetious stage play. The *Candelaio*, the candlebearer (an abusive word for a passive homosexual man) came off a Paris press in 1582, where Bruno had arrived the year before; after his travels through various places in Europe, in which Bruno had been trying to get an appointment as a university tea-

cher.¹ Was Bruno looking for a new opportunity in life? Did he want to become a polygraph, as Pietro Aretino before him? Not quite, although Aretino was certainly a model for Bruno's literary production, and in many ways, the Nolan was trying to launch a new career with the *Candelaio*.

But it would not have been the notoriously impetuous philosopher from Southern Italy, if there was not more

1 See for instance Ciliberto 1990, pp. 7–28 for Bruno's early years. For a summary and analysis of the *Candelaio*, see Moliterno 2000, pp. 9–54; Koder 2013, pp. xi–cviii.

to all this: though reminiscent of other Renaissance comedies,² the hilarious surface of the *Candelaio* conceals philosophical, political and theological topics. With good reason, Nuccio Ordine has described the *Candelaio* as an Overture to the Nolan's philosophical *Dialoghi italiani* in general,³ and the play also contains a wealth of comment on Bruno's intricate art of memory represented in the Nolan's Latin treatises.⁴ Bruno is playing a game of hide-and-seek with his spectators and readers. Drawing its main intellectual energy from being a (tragi-) comedy,⁵ he creates a wealth of inter-textual references in a work that is full of dramatic irony, amidst an already complex structure of plots.

I will sketch only one the main lines of argument: Even though they occupy opposite places in the kaleidoscope of

truth and falsehood, the antagonists Gioanbernardo, the mastermind, and Bonifacio, the fool, are embodiments of two aspects of an homogeneous physical reality that is accessible to human beings only through polyvalent images. I will suggest a specific pictorial representation of these two aspects, namely Christ and St. John the Baptist, as children.

The *Candelaio* is not only expressing philosophical concepts in the form of contemporary comedy, Bruno developed his philosophy by making use of the representational possibilities that only the stage could offer him. He is teaching his attentive readership that thinking inevitably produces images, which are immune to ultimate truths and falsehoods.⁶ I will focus on one set of interrelated ideas in the *Candelaio* which seem to me to be of primary importance not only for Bruno's philosophy: to think about representing one of the main aspects of Bruno's philosophy on the stage, this aspect being the idea that human beings live in an ever changing physical world; hence, they are merely able to grasp the shadows of embodied and therefore mutable physical entities.⁷ I shall argue

2 Most notably perhaps Pietro Aretino's *Cortigiana*.

3 Ordine 2003, p. 45; cf. also Ciliberto 1990, p. 25.

4 On Bruno's art of memory, see Yates 1969, Sturlese 1990, 1992; Bolzoni 2001; Clucas 2001, 2002. For a brilliant and highly readable introduction to the contexts and contents of both Bruno's *Dialoghi italiani* and his mnemonics, see Blum 2013, pp. 25–65.

5 As the title page announces (*Candelaio* [p. 1]). In the following I will quote passages from the *Candelaio* from the 1999 anastatic reprint of the *editio princeps* of the *Candelaio*, Paris 1582. I leave the original orthography and spelling, following the suggestions made by Ciliberto 2002. The English translations of the *Candelaio* are from Moliterno 2000. For Bruno's other Italian dialogues quoted here, (*Cena*, *Della causa*, *Spaccio*, *Cabala*, *Eroici Furori*) I shall refer to Bruno 1958, the edition of Gentile and Aquilecchia (abbreviated as DI).

6 Bruno thus neglects the rules of Counter Reformation theologians who prohibited ambiguity in all literary production. Cfr. Cox 1992, chapter 1 for a discussion of the different genres of the dialogue and their assessment through Renaissance censors.

7 See also Spaccio DI, p. 651: "[la verità ...] la quale come non è chi alcunamente la possa toccare, cossí non si trova qua basso chi la possa perfettamente comprendere: perché non è compresa, o veramente non viene apparecchiata se non da quello in cui è per essenza; e questo non è altro che lei medesima. E perciò da

that the Candelaio's main plot Brings Bruno's concept of vicissitudo to the stage, vicissitudo being the concept of constantly changing fortune entailing a cyclical worldview.⁸ In his philosophical dialogues Bruno often says that truth itself is never available to human beings. Truth is reflected in the changing physical shapes, which he conceptualises as "shadows" that are constantly emerging from and vanishing into a divine and creative matter, which is represented with distinctly female traits. To give just one characteristic quote from the Spaccio, where Bruno says:

Therefore you can see how one simple divinity that exists in all things, one fertile nature, [and] mother protecting the universe, manifesting itself in different ways, according to the reverberations in different subjects, and [thus] acquires different names.⁹

fuori non si vede se non in ombra, similitudine, specchio ed in superficie e maniera di faccia, [...].

- 8 Cena DI, pp. 131–2: "[...] verso i chiamati poli ed oppositi punti emisferici, per la rinovazione di secoli e cambiamento del suo volto, a fin che, dove era il mare sii l'arida, ove era torrido sii freddo, ove il tropico sii l'equinoziale; e finalmente sii de tutte cose vicissitudine, come in questo, cossì ne gli altri astri, non senza ragione da gli antichi veri filosofi chiamati mondi." See the entire 5th dialogue of the Cena. Also Theses de magia 48, OM, pp. 358–9. Aristotle, Meteorology I, 14, 351a 18 ff. Physics, 204b 35– 205a 7.
- 9 Spaccio DI, p. 780: "Vedi dunque come una semplice divinità che si trova in tutte le cose, una feconda natura, madre conservatrice de l'universo, secondo che diversamente si comunica, riluce in diversi soggetti, e prende diversi nomi." See also Koderà 2010a.

Such ideas are well known and stated explicitly in Bruno's later works;¹⁰ yet the Candelaio is different: here these topics are enacted by living characters, by moving paintings. And indeed, fine art and pictorial representations have a pivotal role in that play. Here, Bruno adapts not only traditional personae from the 16th century Italian stage, (such as the capitano, the ruffiana or the pedante) but he also introduces a hitherto unknown figure,¹¹ the painter Gioanbernardo, whose name is an acronym for Giordano Bruno. It has often been noted that this visual artist is the mastermind in the Candelaio: Gioanbernardo plots and stage-directs the comedy's main intrigue in the course of which his antagonist Bonifacio, is being punished for being "insipid, sordid and pompous".¹² For the sake of brevity I will call this malefacio (evildoer)¹³ the fool. In the Candelaio we learn that this former gay man at the age of 42 suddenly became straight, married a beautiful young woman, soon got tired of her and

- 10 For a concise discussion of these ideas by Bruno himself, see for instance Theses de magia §20–26 in OM, pp. 339–345.
- 11 With the possible exception of Aretino's Cortigiana: Messer Maco, a painter from Venice was a actually friend of Aretino's. Boccaccio's Decameron (VII, 3 and 6; IX, 3 and 5) of course recounts delightful stories about the beffe played to Calandrino, a simpleton and painter by a certain Bruno and Buffalmaco, clever Florentine artists, that are mentioned in Vasari's Vitae.
- 12 Candelaio, Argumento [p. 6] "goffo, sordido, insipido" (tr. Moliterno 2000, p. 60).
- 13 Candelaio, V, 22, fol. 132v [296] "il malfattore, il Malefacio" (tr. Moliterno 2000, p. 180).

is presently madly in love with the Signora Vittoria, a prostitute (I, 3). In order to avoid paying for her services, the fool hires a charlatan who promises to cast a powerful love spell over the object of Bonifacio's desire. In the course of the play, the fool will be caught in flagrante by his own faithful wife, the dazzling Madonna Karubina who (disguised as the desired Signora), receives her would-be adulterer husband in a dark room in the brothel where she mistreats the fool physically (IV, 12).¹⁴ The turbulent action on stage is part of the ruse arranged by Gioanbernardo, whose own sentimental goal is to seduce the honest and beautiful Madonna Karubina. It is also part of Gioanbernardo's plan that the fool disguises himself as the painter in order to be able to visit the prostitute, allegedly in order not to be recognized by the neighbours. Masked with an artificial beard (*una barba negra posticcia*) and an overcoat (*biscappa*),¹⁵ Bonifacio becomes a look-alike of Gioanbernardo. As the fool leaves the prostitutes' house for the night-time Neapolitan streets, accompanied by his still enraged wife, the painter lies in wait for his double.¹⁶

14 This is a plot of ancient Indian origins, which was well known in Italy at least since Boccaccio's *Decameron*, cfr. Doninger 2000. Kodera 2013, pp. lxiii-lxviii argues that this scene can be read as an enactment of Brunos's doctrine of shadows and a parody of the Platonic myth of the Cave; see also Kodera 2010b. This so-called bedtrick also figures prominently in Italian Renaissance comedies, for instance in Cardinal Bibbiena's (1470–1520) *Calandria* (1513).

15 Candelaio, IV, 6, fol. 61r [p. 173].

16 This can be read as a highly ironical allusion to the Platonic allegory of Eros,

Gioanbernardo: Hey there, master Black-Beard, tell me, who of the two of us is me, you or me? You're not answering?

Bonifacio: You're you and I'm me.

Gioanbernardo: What do you mean I'm me. Thief, haven't you robbed me of my person, and in this guise and under my appearance committed all sorts of crimes?¹⁷

The master-mind and the fool have become twins; Corcovizzo, one of the petty criminals that had been lying in wait, disguised as police officers, exclaims in amazement: "Captain, Sir, you see there's not a jot of difference between them."¹⁸ Gioanbernardo accuses the fool of causing a lot of mischief in his own guise; he has Bonifacio arrested by the bogus policemen for the crimes the latter could have committed in this costume. In the following sequences, the fool is punished for just one transgression, namely that he had assumed the

who is described the Symposium and in Ficino's commentary on that work as a *liar-in-wait*, a *sophist*, a *magician*. De amore 6, 9, p. 213: "[...] *sagaxque venator*, nova *machinamenta* sempre *contextens* [...] *per omnem vitam incantator*, *fascinatorque*, *potens veneficus atque sophista*."

17 Candelaio, V, 9 fol 98r [p. 227]: "Gioanbernardo: Olà Messer de la negra barba: dimmi chi di noi dui è io; io ò tu? Non rispondi. Bonifacio: Voi sete voi, et io sono io. Gioanbernardo: Come, io sono io? non hai tu ladro rubbata la mia persona; et sotto questo habito et apparenzia vai commettendo di ribalderie?" (tr. Moliterno 2000, p. 154).

18 Candelaio, V, 10, fol 100r [p. 231]: "Signor Capitano, vedete che non mostra differenza l'uno dall' altro." (Moliterno 2000, pp. 155–6).

likeness of someone else, for becoming a look-alike of the mastermind.

The action on stage, the encounter between the doppelgangers enacts an important theorem of Bruno's natural philosophy, namely there is no thing in nature that can be absolutely identical to any other thing.¹⁹ Bruno makes it quite clear that the real offence perpetrated by Bonifacio is not his former sexual orientation,²⁰ or his wantonness.²¹ The fool errs because he tries to become identical with someone else: and this is a real offence, Bruno tells us, this is truly counter-natural. On stage, Bonifacio is punished for his wrong (and therefore unnatural) ideas about the world: bogus policemen arrest the arrogant fool. After his false beard has been removed, the difference between the painter and the fool becomes obvious.²² Bonifacio

is verbally and physically bullied: the threat to be imprisoned in the dungeons of the Neapolitan Viceroy and the fear to be exposed to public shame reduces the fool to the natural form appropriate to him, into a terrified creature, whining for his life.²³ But this is not all; while Bonifacio is going through this ordeal, Gioanbernardo puts the horns on the fool's head by sleeping with Madonna Karubina. In the *Argumento* of the play, Bruno explains the allegorical meaning of this turbulent stage action:

Consider, then, yourselves, how [Bonifacio's] falling in love with Vittoria prepared the way for his being cuckolded (*esser cornuto*) and just when he thought he had reached his prize, he was, in fact, being cuckolded himself, all of which is truly imagined in the figure of Actaeon, who, in hunting was but searching for his own horns and just when he thought he could enjoy his Diana, became himself a stag. Hardly surprising then, that this fellow should be dismembered and ripped to shreds by these thieving hounds.²⁴

and who are therefore allowed to partake in the divine council. (*Spaccio*, DI p. 593, and p. 611 on masks and costumes).

19 Bruno, *De umbris*, in OL II/1, p. 1–177, p. 75: "Varie sunt in speciebus individuorum figurae: non enim alter olea alteri oleae prorsus est configurata; non alter homo prorsus alteri similis." *Cantus circeus*, in OL p. 240: "Sicut enim natura ipsa abolet similitudinem, ipsam (de similitudine numerali loquor) ita & ars. Numquam enim natura duos homines similes constituit, imo nec unum hominem omnino similem perseverare facit, sed quem mane sumpsit ut unum, vespere sumit sensualiter ut alterum."

20 Bruno seems to think that all sexual orientations are natural, see *De vinculis*, §23. in OL III, pp. 635–700, pp. 659–61; Papi 1968, pp. 252–253.

21 For instance meeting prostitutes is a perfectly acceptable practice for men, as long as none talks about it openly, or so we learn from the *Candelaio* (V, 18).

22 Bruno uses the metaphor that certain forms are "glued" to the body also in the *Spaccio*, where he talks about those gods who are not disguised with artificial horns and beards "apposticci ... ma naturali "

23 *Candelaio*, V, 23, fol. 136v [p. 304]: "Corcovizzo: Vedete che gentil' Madalena, che gli vada il cancro a lui: et le quattrocen-to piattole che deve haver nel boscho dell'una et l'altra barba! Vedete che prezioso unguento vâ spargendo costui. per mia fé, non gli manch' altro, che la gonna per farlo Madalena."

24 *Candelaio*, *Argumento*, [p. 12]: "Considerate dunque come il suo innamorarsi della S. Vittoria, l'inclinò a posser esser cornuto, et quando si pensò di fruirsi di

Bruno is here referring to the famous Greek myth according to which Actaeon surprised Diana naked, while she was taking a bath. As a punishment for this transgression, the goddess of nature and the Moon changed the hunter into a stag; in this shape, his own dogs devoured Actaeon.²⁵ This myth will be pivotal to Bruno's last Italian dialogue, the *Eroici furori*, this time in connection to his theory of the cognition of the infinite. Just as in this infinite realm oppositions coincide, so the facetious plot in the *Candelaio* hides metaphysical truths about nature: As a consequence of his inferior mental capacities (and like Actaeon), the fool is reduced to the natural form appropriate to him.²⁶ Significantly, the myth of Actaeon also had a theological meaning relating to Bruno's ideas about Christianity. In the

Spaccio, a dialogue published in 1584, a couple of years after the *Candelaio*, Bruno quite openly denounced Christianity as a religion of impostors that had (finally) come to an end in his time.²⁷ Here, the myth of Actaeon appears in a passage that seems to be a highly ironic summary of Bonifacio's relationship to his Diana, and, the stag is a figurative representation of Christ.

But the bad thing is that it often happens that whilst these Actaeons are hunting for the stags of the desert, they are transformed into domestic stags by their Diana; who with that magical rite, blowing into their face, and splash the water of the fountain onto them, while they say thrice: When you saw the beast you ran with it. / For me, who has been with you all the time/ you will wait in Galilee.²⁸

quella, dovenne à fatto cornuto. Figurato veramente per Atteone, il quale andando à caccia, cercava le sue corne. Et all'hor che pensò gioir de sua Diana, dovenne cervo. Però non è maraviglia si è sbrantato e stracciato costui da questi cani marioli." (tr. Moliterno 2000, p. 64)

- 25 On Bruno's detailed interpretation of the myth of Actaeon, see *Eroici Furori* DI, pp. 1007–1008; Fellmann 1989, pp. 29–31, Blum, 2012 pp. 65–68. On horns as a magical symbol of the sign of Capricorn, see *Spaccio* DI, pp. 794–796 and 791–793: "De onde appare aperto che ne le corna consiste il splendo, l'eccellenza e potestade, perché son cose da eroi, bestie e dei." For a eulogy of the corna in Aretino, see his *Cortigiana*, V, 21.
- 26 This reduction is brought about by Circe, who in Bruno has a definitely positive significance, as we learn from a work that appeared in 1582, the *Cantus Circeus*. OL 186. See also *Spaccio*, DI 559, *Eroici Furori* DI 945. On the concept of *explicatio* of a latent form, see *Cantus Circeus*, OL II/1, pp. 179–257, p. 193.

- 27 I strongly believe that Gatti 1999, p. 222–9 is right in maintaining that Bruno was not only attacking Lutherans and Calvinists, pace Ciliberto who tirelessly argues to the contrary.
- 28 *Spaccio* DI, pp. 812–813: "Ma il male è che sovente accade che, mentre questi Atteoni vanno perseguitando gli cervi del deserto, vengono, dalla lor Diana ad esser convertiti in cervio domestica, con quel rito magico soffiandoli al viso, e gittandoli l'acqua della fonte a dosso, dicendo tre volte. Si videbas feram,/ tu currebas cum ea;/Me, quae iam tecum eram, Spectes in Galilea." See *ibid.* FN 3 for a fuller discussion of the theological implications of this passage; see also Sacerdoti 2002, pp. 43–5 and *passim* for an extensive and magisterial discussion of the political implications of that parallel.

Cervo domestico (domestic[ated] stag) is a perfect (and highly humorous) description of the state of Bonifacio in the *Candelaio*, after he leaves the prostitute's house where he has been mistreated by his wife. It is also interesting to note that the magic formula, is just recapitulating what happened to Bonifacio, that he was after his own wife. The "magic rite" performed by Diana, also includes a procedure akin to baptism (more on this later). And, tellingly, in *Spaccio*, Christ is repeatedly connected to spurious and superficial magic, in a way that is reminiscent of Bonifacio's dabbling in the occult arts in order to seduce the Signora Vittoria.²⁹

So there seems to be some evidence that Bonifacio/Actaeon is a persona of Christ. Adding to this idea is the opening monologue to the *Candelaio*; here a janitor announces the fool in terms which refer to Christian biblical exegesis, namely as *una bestia tropologica*, *un'asino anagogico* (a tropological beast, an anagogical ass).³⁰ Nor was the idea that a poetic text could be read in a fourfold way like the Bible very uncommon: Dante too, seems to imply that his *Divina commedia* may be read in this fourfold exegetic way.³¹ According to Dante's *Epistula* 13, poets are continuing the work of the Holy Scriptures, and his poem is a new instance of prophetic writing. It is interesting to note that Thomas Aquinas had explicitly ruled out the possibility that other texts besides

biblical texts could be read in this way.³² Even though admittedly quite a pretentious attitude for a writer who was as unknown as Bruno when he published the *Candelaio*, such a reading was feasible.³³ Thus the janitor scorns the size of Boinfacio's horns:

Do you want to see him? Here he is! Give way! Make room! Get back there if you do not want to be gored by horns that have frightened better men than you into fleeing across the mountains.³⁴

As it happens often in his oeuvre, Bruno uses traditional images representing ideas that were easily understood by his contemporaries. So if Bonifacio might be a figurative representation of the Saviour, I started wondering if other personae in the *Candelaio* can be related to Christian mythology. Who could be a representative of Gioanbernardo, the persona of Bruno? And what role would be assigned to the two women, the matron and the prostitute? To answer this question, let us look again at the relationship between the painter and the fool: to be sure, in the play they become clearly distinguishable, one emerging as an enchanting adulterer

29 *Spaccio* DI, pp. 804–5.

30 *Candelaio*, *Bidello* [p. 32].

31 On this, see Eco 1994, pp. 16–17.

32 Eco 1994, p. 17, see also Eco 1989, pp. 28–29.

33 On this topic see also Kodera in Bruno 2013: pp. xli–lvii.

34 *Candelaio*, *Bidello* [p. 32] "[...] desiderate vederlo? Eccolo. Fate piazza. Date luoco. Retiratevi dalle bande: si non volete, che quelle corna vi faccian male: che fan fuggir le genti oltre gli monti." (tr. Moliterno 2000, p. 72)

and the other as a miserable animal, fearing for his life. But we have to acknowledge that the antagonists are also remarkably similar; Bonifacio is easily converted into an image of Gioanbernardo. And the similarities between the two antagonists do not end here: according to their physiognomic resemblance, their sexual inclinations and desires are alike.³⁵ Obviously, Gioanbernardo too, is in love with a woman that at least used to be adored by Bonifacio; both fool and mastermind are driven by one singular universal sexual attraction that is permeating the entire universe – indeed a very Brunian idea.³⁶ This claim is confirmed in the *Antiprologo* where one learns that Madonna Karubina, and Signora Vittoria, the matron and the prostitute, are to be played in a double role. Thus, on closer inspection, Bruno tells his readers that the fool and the mastermind are in love with one and the same woman. The actress who plays both women is called *quella bagassa*³⁷ (that slut) in the *Antiprologo*. What at first seems to be another of the countless sexist testimonies characteristic of the

early modern period, turns out to be a crucial reference to the coincidence of opposites: after all, this *bagassa* impersonates divine nature.

Again, it is instructive to look into the *Spaccio* where Bruno lists the many faults committed by Christ (this time alike as Orion, the archetypal passive homosexual). One of these errors of that a false Saviour is that he has made men wrongly believe that divine nature is actually a *puttana bagascia*.³⁸ This was exactly the mistake committed by the fool in the *Candelaio* – that he takes his Diana to be a slut that can be bought, enchanted and manipulated at will. Obviously, the sexual preferences of the two men assume highly metaphysical and religious dimensions, both aspects pertaining to Bruno's natural philosophy. Again, we are amidst an intricate system of references that strongly indicates the parallels between Christ and Bonifacio, the fool and impostor, who in the *Candelaio* falls victim to his misdeeds.³⁹ A radical criticism of Christianity that had to be well-hidden, and that extends to other aspects Renaissance culture. This becomes obvious in the other two main plots in the *Candelaio*, that of Bartolomeo, the luckless alchemist and that of Mamfurio, the pederast pedant.

35 On the reciprocal relationship between the shape of the body and the workings of soul and the mind in Bruno, see *Spaccio DI*, p. 559.

36 It is interesting to think of this idea as Bruno's physical reading, his re-embodiment of Ficino's doctrine of spiritual Platonic love. See for instance, *De amore*, 6, 10.

37 *Candelaio*, *Antiprologo* [p. 18]: "Quella bagassa che è ordinata per rappresentar Vittoria, et Karubina; have non só che mal di madre." ("That slut who was meant to play the parts of Vittoria and Karubina has I don't know what sort of woman's trouble." tr. Moliterno 2000, p. 67).

38 *Spaccio DI*, p. 804: "[...] facendoli credere che il bianco è nero, che l'intelletto umano [...] è una cecità; e ciò che secondo la ragione pare eccellente, buono ed ottimo, è vile, scelerato ed estremamente malo; che la natura è una puttana bagassa, che la legge naturale è una ribaldaria, [...]."

39 *Spaccio DI*, p. 825: "[...] lui medesimo, ed uno servira per sacrificio e sacrificatore, idest per sacerdote e per bestia [...]."

One also has to keep in mind that Gioanbernardo - the person who substitutes Bonifacio in the play- is remarkably similar to the fool. In order to seduce the object of their desires, both men are trying to manipulate reality in analogous ways; like the Sophists, they are trafficking with deceptive images.⁴⁰ To this end, the fool hires a charlatan to cast a powerful spell on the prostitute; through his occult art, the bogus magician promises to manipulate an enchanted wax puppet, an image of Bonifacio's object of desire.⁴¹ The mastermind turns out to be much more effective by not believing the effectiveness of such procedures; yet, he too is using images to achieve his goal, to seduce Madonna Karubina. Gioanbernardo's peculiar art becomes apparent in a moment of dramatic irony, when Bonifacio commissions a portrait, a two dimensional image, from the painter.

Bonifacio: [...] You've reminded me of the portrait. Have you seen the one that I've had done for me?

Gioanbernardo: I've looked at it more than once [...]. It's good; it resembles you more than me.⁴²

40 For such a characteristically negative Renaissance Platonic description of the Sophists, in connexion with erotic attraction, see *De amore* 6, 10, p. 220.

41 This seems to have been a particularly unmanly way to attain the enchantment of a lover, typically used by prostitutes to keep rich clients. See for instance, Aretino's *Cortigiana*, V, 16.

42 *Candelaio*, I, 8, fol 12r [p. 55]: "[...] mi havete fatto sovvenire del ritratto. hai visto quel che mi hó fatto fare? Gioanbernardo: L'ho visto et revisto. [...] È buono, assomiglia assai più à voi che a me." (tr. Moliterno 2000, p. 82) on the idea that ogni pittore

The painter's witticism foreshadows the showdown in the night-time Neapolitan streets, when the doppelgangers will meet. Gioanbernardo is also a master of three-dimensional arts: upon his orders, Bonifacio will transform his outward appearance to become a look-alike of the mastermind. This living image, formed by the mastermind, is much more sophisticated and effective than the portraits and the wax puppet the fool has commissioned.⁴³ The painter/sculptor acts as a demiurge with clear Hermetic undertones; after all, during the Renaissance, the ancient Egyptians were renowned for the magical powers that allegedly allowed them to endow statues with life.⁴⁴

This now leads to another important aspect of the relationship between Bonifacio and Gioanbernardo: as all things are constantly changing, there is no such

dipinge sé (every painter paints himself); an aphorism that appeared in Italian literature between 1477 and 1490 cfr. the discussion in Zwijnenberg 2004, *passim* and p. 192. For a discussion with regard to the *Candelaio*, see Kodera 2010c and Ordine 2003, pp. 173–82, but also Plato's *Sophist* 266B ff. on the art of *eidolopoesis* (image-making) and the imitation of someone else through one's own shape.

43 Spaccio DI, p. 777: "Però Marte si trova più efficacemente in natural vestigio e modo di sustanza non solo in una vipera s scorpione, ma ed in una cipolla ed aglio, che in qualisivoglia maniera di pittura o statua inanimate."

44 See Spaccio DI, p. 784 for well-known and often discussed passages in the *Corpus Hermeticum*; for a general introduction to the topic and its history see Copenhaver 1992. About Bruno's intentions with the long quote from the Hermetic Asclepius, see Gatti 1999, pp. 221–28 with references to other relevant secondary literature.

thing as a stable and self-identical natural form; there is no permanent truth in things, they constantly take on new shapes, hence they are always deceiving in that they deviate from the eternal.⁴⁵ The malleability and consequent immunity of all things to final truths and falsehoods is the glory of things, and the pedigree of someone who is deliberately attacking the doctrine of static and eternal Platonic forms, unavailable (at least) to human beings.⁴⁶ Therefore, Gioanbernardo's triumph is only momentary; the mastermind was just temporarily more clever than the fool; actually they are on a par. In the *Candelaio*, Gioanbernardo is acutely aware that his victory over Bonifacio was dependent on his individual efforts; he proved to be superior, but his temporal success was not grounded in essential differences between the antagonists.⁴⁷ Truth, Bruno

tells us, is consequent upon time, every one aspect will prevail at a certain historical moment; even so, the individual may fight for his/her share at the auspicious instant: success is achieved by the cunning manipulation of the images that guide all our intellectual life. In such ways, Bruno presents the world on stage as a constant performance of travesty hence, of ever changing costumes on the surface of the underlying, divine matter.⁴⁸ This idea of constant change is confirmed in the dedication of the

Questa fà honorato chi non merita dà buon campo à chi nol semina, buon' horto à chi nol pianta, molti scudi a chi non le sà spendere; molti figli à chi non può allevarli, buon' appetito à chi non ha che mangiare, biscotti à chi non hà denti. Ma che dico io? deve esser iscusata la poverina, perché è cieca, et cercando per donar gli beni ch'have intra le mani, camina a' tastoni; et per il più s'abbatte a sciocchi, insensati et furfanti; de' quali il mondo tutto è pieno. [...] Dumque, si non è colpa sua; è colpa de chi l'ha fatta [...]. Quantumque questo bene, ch'ho posseduto questa sera, non mi sii stato concesso da' dei et la natura. benché mi sii stato negato dalla fortuna: il giuditio mi hà mostrato l'occasione; la diligenza me l'ha fatta apprendere pe' capelli; et la perseveranza ritenirla. In tutti negocij la difficulta consiste che passi la testa: perche à quella facilmente il busto et il corpo tutto succede." For a parallel quote on the role of Fortune, see Spaccio DI 689–92. In Bruno's system, Fortuna secures the unity of all things by treating everyone equally.

45 Spaccio DI, p. 592: "Vedi, dunque, cara Sorella, come ne doma il tempo traditore, come tutti siamo soggetti alla mutazione: e quel che più tra tanto affligge, è che non abbiamo certezza né speranza alcuna di ripigliar quel medesimo essere a fatto, in cui tal volta fummo. Andiamo, e non torniamo medesimi; e come non avemo memoria di quel che eravamo, prima che fusse in questo essere, cossì non possem aver saggio di quell che saremo da poi."

46 Spaccio DI, p. 807: "Basta, figlia mia [dice Giove alla Minerva] la sapienza contra queste ultime cose, che da per sé invecchiano, cascano, son vorate e digerite dal tempo, come cose di fragilissimo fondamento." For interesting parallels in Pomponazzi see *De fato* II, 7, 205 and *Epilogue* 221.

47 *Candelaio* V, 19, fol 127v–129r [pp. 286–9]: „Gioan Bernardo [...] tutti gl' errori che accadeno, son per questa fortuna traditora; quella ch'ha dato tanto bene al tuo padrone Malefacio, et me l'hà tolto.

48 On this, see also *Cabala* DI, p. 918: "[...] e benché tu sia un uomo, puoi esser stato [...] un grand' asino, secondo che parrà ispediente al dispensor de gli abiti e luoghi e disponitor de l'anime trasmigranti." On that topic, see also Clucas 2001, p. 95, who emphasizes that nature and the mind are forming everything out of a set of a few limited elements and that this forming activity is also an ethical enterprise.

Candelaio, where Bruno reminds us that he is sorrowfully in exile, and certainly not doing as well as the Gioanbernardo pittore in the play. Here we learn that the plot of this comedy is modelled on a true story, as Bruno sends his greetings to a certain Candelaio living in the Nolan's home town:

Greet for me that other candlebearer of flesh and blood of whom it is said *Regnum dei non possidebunt*, and tell him not to rejoice overly at the rumour that my memory has been trampled under pig's feet and battered by the kicks of donkeys because already the donkey's ears have been cropped and the pigs, one of these Decembers, will be paying me their dues. And let him not feel too secure [...] because if the heavens ever allow me effectively to say *Surgam et ibo*, this fattened calf shall undoubtedly be part of our feast. [...] Thus, at whatever point I may be in this night of waiting, if change is real, I who am in the night await the day and those who are in the day await the night: everything that is, is either here or there, either near or far, either now or future, either early or late.⁴⁹

49 Candelaio, Dedication [4–5]: “Salutate da mia parte quell’ altro Candelaio di carne et ossa, delle quali è detto che *Regnum Dei non possidebunt*. Et ditegli che non goda tanto che costì si dica la mia memoria esser stata strapazzata à forza di piè di porci, et calci d’asini: per che à quest’ hora à gl’ asini son mozze l’orecchie, et i porci qualche decembre me la pagharanno. [...] per che si averrà gaimai ch’i cieli mi concedano ch’io effettivamente possi dire *Surgam et ibo*: cotesto vitello saginato senza dubbio

Bruno here tells us about his comeback, when he will enact a truth that is always and inextricably related to the auspicious moment. As times change and as the wheel of fortune is moving on, Bruno will be eating his adversary, the “fatted calf”, the “candelaio in flesh and blood”; like “the pigs in December”; now, if Bonifacio is Christ, this is a rather radical statement. The tone of the above quote is clearly messianic, and indeed if one goes back to the stage-play (away from the drab reality of the Viceregno and exile in France) one finds a whole series of intertextual hints that confirm the idea that Gioanbernardo/Bruno is here the herald of a new philosophy (still to be written in England in the coming years) and that he also hopes to replace Christ. But how would Bruno imagine such a messianic role? Would he want to supplant the old religion entirely? This is not very probable for the philosopher of the infinite: Bruno was

sarrà parte della nostra festa. [...] Però qualumque sij il punto di questa sera ch’ aspetto. Si la mutazione è vera: io che son ne la notte aspetto il giorno, et quei che son nel giorno, aspettano la notte. Tutto quel ch’è; ò è cquà, ò llà, ò vicino, ò lungi, ò adesso, ò poi, ò presto, ò tardi.” (tr. Moliterno 2000, p.60). See also *De rerum principiis*, § 99 in: OM, pp. 711–2 for a passage that comments Luke, 23, 53: “Questa é l’ora vostra e il potere delle tenebre” Christ’s words upon his arrest. The motif of the vicissitudinal change between light and darkness is repeated in the *Spaccio DI*, p. 778: “No ti dia fastidio questo, o Momo, disse Iside, perché il fato ha ordinata la vicissitudine delle tenebre e la luce. – Ma il male è, rispose Momo, che essi teggono per certo di essere nella luce. – Ed Iside soggiunse, che le tenebre non gli sarrebbono tenebre, se da essi fussero conosciute.”

rather strongly in favour of the conservation of conflicting ideas, as they are part of a constant coincindencia oppositorum.⁵⁰ After, all, there is no truth or falsehood, there are no things that can be absolutely good or bad.⁵¹

Accordingly, there are some hints in the *Candelaio* that a religious reform should not end in yet another sixteenth-century massacre; to start with, Gioanbernardo is certainly not the Anti-Christ - mastermind and fool are too similar. In the following part of this paper I will argue that Gioanbernardo/Bruno is a persona of John the Baptist, a Christian mythological persona who has not only distinct resemblances to the Saviour but also to Bruno. As no one else seems to have noticed so far, there is an important theological clue to the relationship between the fool and the painter, concealed in one of the plays on words that abound in the *Candelaio*. Karubina's name, the object of the painter's desire, leads the way into one of the many textual labyrinths constructed by the Nolan: the gorgeous Lady's name is a diminutive for the Italian word *caruba*, or *mel silvestre*, (*Ceratonía siliqua*, English *carob*). As its common name, St. John's Bread, suggests, this fruit formed the diet of John the Baptist during his life as a hermit in the desert (Mark 1,6; Math. 3, 4). Of course, this may be just another tawdry allusion in the *Candelaio*: Karubina, Gioanbernardo's wild

honey,⁵² or his cherub, his angel, therefore.

Yet, just as with Bonifacio's corna that turn him into a stag, I think there is more to the story of the carob. To start with, the names of John the Baptist, in Italian Giovanni Battista, and Gioanbernardo have a similar sound: moreover, the painter's name is abbreviated as GIO. B. in the play:⁵³ the combination of letters may signify "Giordano Bruno", "Gioanbernardo", and "Giovanni Battista". There are also physiognomic similarities between the saint and the author, for in the *Antiprologo* Bruno describes himself in the following way:

Our author, were you to see him, you'd say looks like a real lost soul; forever in contemplation of the punishments of hell, he looks as though he's already been put through the wringer; a fellow who laughs just to be like everyone else; most of the time you could see him annoyed, restless, out of his wits, never happy of anything, [...] doleful as a dog who's been fed on onions and beaten a thousand times.⁵⁴

50 Gatti 1999, p. 231, *Spaccio DI*, pp. 158–9; *Causa DI*, p. 275.

51 *Spaccio DI*, p. 686: "[...] nessuna cosa è assolutamente mala [...] ma ogni cosa è mala rispetto di qualche'altro."

52 "Esca autem ejus erat locusta et mel silvestre." (Math. 3, 4) The term is ambiguous, as *esca* may mean food, but also bait. On the story of the Baptist, and the tradition of his visual representations, cfr. *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, vol. VI, cols. 617–618.

53 *Candelaio*, fols. 11v-12 r [pp. 54–5]. But also *inbid.*, fols. 82v-83r [pp. 196–7] where on a couple pages three different abbreviations are printed (GIO. B.; GIO. BER.; GIO: BE).

54 *Candelaio*, *Antiprologo* [pp. 19–20]: "L'autore si voi lo conosceste: dirreste ch'have una physionomia smarrita. par

This description is highly evocative of the iconographic tradition that represented John the Baptist as an emaciated hermit in the desert (Math. 3, 4 John 1, 23).⁵⁵

In Bruno's time, it was generally accepted that the Baptist was the most important male Christian saint;⁵⁶ he was at the same time a prophet of the Old Testament, and therefore endowed with exceptional divine powers. Giovanni baptizes Jesus in the river Jordan, (Mathew 3, 13–17 Luke 1,5–26; 57–80) which is named Giordano in Italian, another memento that we are in the midst of an intricate play of references created by the Nolan.⁵⁷

Apart from these exterior characteristics, there are also doctrinal similarities no less radical than the ones in the dedication of the Candelaio, for St. John prophesizes: „And now also the axe has been laid unto the root of the trees: every

tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.“ (Luke 3, 9 also Mathew 3,10) It is perhaps no coincidence that (in the context of a violent polemic against the Reformation and Counterreformation churches) Bruno also emphasizes the idea that the value of actions should be assessed by their results, their fruits, in the Spaccio.⁵⁸

There is more evidence that the Baptist could be the most adequate persona from Christian mythology to represent Bruno's new philosophy. The pair of St. John and Christ is traditionally associated with a cyclical concept of time that is expressed in the annual sequence of seasons: John the Baptist celebrates his birthday on the 24th of June; Christmas, at the opposite end of the year, marks the date when the slightly younger Saviour is born (and the time when the pigs are slaughtered). But St. John is also associated with the (heterodox) idea that religions may cyclically change, just as the seasons do; as a prophet of the Old Testament, St. John says *Illum oportet crescere, me autem minui*. “He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3, 30). This emphasis on constant change is also a central aspect of Bruno's philosophy. Moreover, the Baptist is connected to the intrinsic, natural virtues of plants and animals: in the night of his

che sempre sii in contemplatione delle pene dell'inferno. par sij stato alla presa come le barrette. un che ride sol per far come fan gli altri. per il più lo vedrete fastidito, restio, et bizzarro, et non si contenta di nulla, [...] phantastico com'un cane ch'hà ricevute mille spellicciate, pasciuto di cipolla.” (tr. Moliterno 2000, pp. 67–68.

55 I am thinking here for instance of a painting by Andrea del Verrochio e Leonardo, *Il battesimo di Cristo*, Uffizi. According to Aronberg Lavin 1955, p. 92 Donatello's, *St. John the Baptist in the Bargello*, Florence is the prototype of this representation.

56 Mathew 9, 2–11: „inter natos mulierum non surrexit major Johanne Baptistae.” See for instance the Sermon of St. Bernhard on the birthday of Giovanni Battista, PL, Vol. 184, col. 991–1002; especially col. 1000C.

57 On rumours that Bruno believed himself to be a leader of a new sect, called the Giordanisti, cfr. F. A. Yates 1964, pp. 312–313, 345.

58 Spaccio DI, p. 777 and p. 555: „Del resto, in questo mezzo ognuno prenda gli frutti che può secondo la capacità del proprio vase; perche non è cosa ria che non si converta in profitto ed utile de buoni, ed non è cosa tanto buona e degna che non possa esser caggione e materia di scandalo à ribladi.”

birthday all the medicinal herbs have to be collected. The idea that divine virtues are present in even the humblest natural objects is again congenial to Bruno's philosophy of nature and religion. And of course, St. John was the crier in the desert; he was, like Bruno, in exile; all tentative reasons to adapt the guise of that saint. In his most recent Book, Jon Marino has described the development and practice of the extremely popular feast of the Baptist in Naples from the 13th century to the end of Spanish dominion.⁵⁹ Marino emphasizes the political character of the celebrations. They were involving the concept pointing to "both an individual's and the city's fortuna". The feast centered on "marriage arrangements and amorous games which were part of the order of the day and the disorder of the night" before the saint's birthday.⁶⁰ These celebrations involved frantic dance and naked bathing and happened in the "notable absence" of the clergy (ibid., 208). The idea of re-baptism and renovatio was also conveyed by the full immersion into the sea.⁶¹ "St. John was venerated as the regenerative Prophet of a new era, both a new solar and an agricultural year. His ceremonies of purification and passage carried the bivalent meaning of death as rebirth and of commencement as a time of ending and beginning."⁶²

Let me now concede that this is as good as it gets: as far as I can see, Bruno does not explicitly identify himself with

St. John. I therefore cannot positively say that Bruno in the *Candelaio* was referring to the relationship between the Baptist and the Saviour, both standing at opposite ends of the year and of the traditions of an old and a new law. But certainly this quite preposterous messianic mode of self-representation is very much in tune with the outlook Bruno's philosophy in general. This claim is substantiated by what Richard Blum has demonstrated in one of his many magisterial and at the same time highly regarded contributions to Bruno scholarship. In *Brunos Brunianismus* Blum shows how the *Nolanus* considers his own person as the only point of reference to truth in philosophy. Being the only "*subject, producer and guarantor*" of his own thought, Bruno's philosophy requires that all its philosophical ideas are finally referring back to its ingenious inventor.⁶³ And, as Blum has shown, in a similar vein of thought Bruno's philosophy is in need of (negative) default positions, which the *Nolanus* strives to transform from "prejudices into temporary assumptions".⁶⁴ From a philosophical perspective on the *Candelaio*, this means that Bonifacio/Christ impersonates the default position of Gioanbernardo/Baptist.

Moreover, and tantalizingly, there is another aspect of the relationship

59 Marino 2011, pp. 198–233.

60 Marino 2011, p. 209.

61 Marino 2011, p. 199.

62 Marino 2011, p. 203.

63 Blum 1999, p. 206–207. Blum says (ibid., p. 208) "Dass eine Wahrheit ohne [Bruno] Bestand haben könne, das scheint ihm undenkbar. ... Eigentlich interessiert sich Bruno nur für die *filosofia nolana*."

64 Blum 2013, p. 17 and passim and hist classical study Blum 1980, now fortunately also available in Italian and English translations.

between Bruno and the Baptist. It is well known that Bruno held that we think in images and indeed we use these images to organize our minds and memories. In order to convey his new philosophy Bruno sought to use language and sets of images that would be comprehensible to his contemporaries: the anti-pedantic content of the *Candelaio* gives ample evidence of his ways of using the language of the common people to convey a new vision of nature and the universe.⁶⁵ And it could allow the existing religious and political institutions to remain intact. In that light Gioanbernardo's extraordinary and ironic profession of faith in the *Candelaio* becomes meaningful. The painter speaks just after having sinned *contra sextum* [against the sixth commandment] by consuming his wild honey, the sweet Madonna Carubina.

[...] I'm a Christian and I profess to be a good Catholic. I go often to confession and I take communion on all important feast days. My art is that of the painter, to place before the worldly eyes the image of Our Lord, Our Lady, and of other saints in Paradise.⁶⁶

65 On the topic of malleable words which are changing like every other natural being; see Gatti 1999, pp. 203–8; Bärberi-Squarotti 1999; Ordine 1996, ch 14. See also, puzzlingly, Bruno's *De rerum principiis*, § 91, OM, p. 702 on the different ways to write the name of Johannes (Giovanni, etc.) and the idea that the consequently different ways to pronounce this name change its magical virtue.

66 *Candelaio*, V, 23, fol 137v [306]: “[...] io son Christiano, et fò professione di buon catholico. Io mi confesso generalmente, et

This topical statement⁶⁷ is especially confusing, as a few scenes earlier (and in one of his most emotionally authentic moments, when he tries to seduce Madonna Karubina) the painter has explained quite a few highly heterodox ideas about the role of fortune, and that he believes that the gods do not care for us. Honour is a wholly conventional concept that depends on outward reputation, the images others have of ourselves. As long as appearances are saved, no harm is done: just as the horns of Bonifacio will discreetly remain invisible, so Christian icons may be charged with new meaning.⁶⁸ The fool,

comunico tutte le feste principali dell'anno. La mia arte è di depingere, et donar à gl'occhij de mundani la imagine di nostro signore, di nostra madonna, et d'altri santi di paradiso.” (tr. Moliterno 2000, p. 185, tr. slightly modified) On the devotional function of these three different classes of religious images and their worship, see Belting 1990, p. 618–619.

67 See for instance, the contemporary and very similar declaration for the tribunal of the Inquisition, made by the miller who was called Menocchio in Ginzburg 1980, p. 87.

68 *Candelaio*, V, 11, fol 104 r-v [p. 240–241]: “Gioan Bernardo: Vita della mia vita, credo ben che sappiate che cosa è honore, et che cosa anco sij dishonore. Honore non è altro che una stima, una riputatione. però sta semper intatto l'honore. quando la stima et riputatione persevera la medesima. Honore è la buona opinione che altri habbiano di noi. mentre persevera questa; persevera l'honore. Et non è quel che noi siamo et quel che noi facciamo, che ne rendi honorati ò dishonorati; ma sì ben quel che altri stimano, et pensano di noi. Carubina: Sij che si vogli de gl'homini, che dirrete in conspetto de gl'angeli, et de' santi, che vedeno il tutto, et ne giudicano? Gioan Bernardo: Questi non voglono esser veduti più di quel che si fan vedere. Non voglono esser temuti più, di quel che si fan temere. Non voglono esser conosciuti più di quel che si fan conoscere.”

Bonfacio/Christ will not even realize that he is being cuckolded by his clever antagonist.

But what kind of picture would Gioanbernardo, *buon cattolico*, paint to represent himself and of his antagonist? We remember that the painter was commissioned to do a portrait of Bonifacio. I have one tentative suggestion: In the sixteenth century the close and yet antagonistic relationship between Christ and St. John the Baptist found its visual representation in a popular iconographic model typical for Italy. The numerous representations of the *Madonna con il Bambino e San Giovanni* (Madonna with the infant Jesus and St. John) of which we have examples by the most famous Renaissance painters amongst them Leonardo, Botticelli or Raphael, Coreggio, Francesco Maria Rondani, Andrea Sabbatini to name but a few.⁶⁹ Let me emphasize that I do not think that Bruno was trying to recall one of these paintings in particular. This would have been unnecessary anyway, as the iconography of these devotional images was highly stereotypical. These paintings show two very young boys, playing on the lap of the Madonna, who sits in blissful peace. In the context of the *Candelaio* I take the two boys to represent Bonifacio (Christ) and Gioanbernardo (Gio. B.); they are fooling around in the lap of the Virgin Mary, who represents the one actress who plays the prostitute Vittoria and the matron Karubina, thus impersonating different creative aspects of Brunian infinite *natura*;

69 For the development of this image, see Aronberg Lavin 1955.

from her womb the ephemeral masculine forms are constantly emerging and transforming in never-ending circles.⁷⁰ Characteristically, and reminiscent of the doppelgangers in the *Candelaio*, the two boys are very often represented as look-alikes:⁷¹ only Giovanni Battista's hair is longer than Christ's because he is 6 months older than the Saviour (I take Bonifacio's false beard to be a reference to this difference in age). Christ is usually represented stark naked: just as Bonifacio, who rented a coat to look like Gioanbernardo, the young Saviour could easily pick up the piece of cloth or the animal skin usually slung around the body of the Baptist. The genitals of the Saviour are visible, as a reference to his sexuality which makes Christ capable of true human suffering.⁷² Accordingly, Madonna Karubina in the *Candelaio* mistreats her husband's sexual organs in the brothel, in order to punish his attempt to betray her.⁷³

70 *Spaccio* DI, p. 797: "[...] tante altre specie d'animali usciti dal materno grembo della natura [...]."

71 For instance Raphael's *Madonna del Cardellino*, Uffzii, Florence.

72 On the topic of the sexuality of Christ, see Steinberg 1983.

73 *Candelaio*, IV, 12, fol 81r-v [pp.193-4] „Fatto questo secondo atto, mostrarro di volergli concedere l'entrata maestra per una volta, prima che ci colchiamo al letto. M'acconciarro in atto da chiavare; et tosto che lui harrà cacciato il suo cotale: farrò bene che venghi all'attolite porta: ma prima che giongha all'introibi Re gloria. volgo apprendergli i testicoli et la vergha con due mani, et dirgli. O ben mio mio tanto desiderato, ò Speranza di quest'anima infiammata, prima mi sarran le mani tolte, che tu mi sij tolto da le mani, et con questo le voglie premere tanto forte, et torcergli come torcesse

Christian devotional literature gave clear instructions how to contemplate such sacred images. Emphasizing the connection of the visual representations of single scenes to their context in the entire story of Christ, the faithful were advised to identify with the sacred persons, for instance with the Madonna and the sacred child, and at the same time to consider the mother with her son's dead body. In such ways the peaceful image of the two boys with the Madonna could also refer to the agony and the deaths of the Baptist and the Saviour; an idea that is in accordance with the references to the slaughtered *candelaio* in the play's dedication.⁷⁴

If my reading is correct, the two boys, playing with each other on Mary's lap are an embodiment of the Nolan's celebration of the cyclical world view, in which all things constantly change, in order to return to their places again, differently inside infinite nature. In the *Candelaio* this idea is conveyed through the fact that Gioanbernardo is unable to step out of this painting, to escape from the vicissitudes of the physical world. Bruno's thought has always been characterised as plasmatic and elusive — precisely for that reason, that infinite nature is always within ourselves: the truth Bonifacio has to learn.

drappi bagnati di bucata. Son certa che le sue mani in questo caso non gli serviranno per difendersi."

74 Goffen 1989, p. 34 and pp. 23–64. I wish to thank Bruce Edelstein for this information. On the changing devotional function of Christian images in general, see Belting 1981, pp. 18–23, and Belting 1990, pp. 459–70, 523–33.

Like the fool, he too is in love with the matron and the prostitute, with the great Mother Nature who has produced these two eternal forms in the first place. In Bruno's infinite universe, the meaning of the *Madonna con bambini* would be charged with sexual meaning. When they meet the painter, his look-alike, and Madonna Karubina in the night-time streets of Naples, Barra and Marca, petty criminals disguised as policemen, sum these sexual implications nicely up:

Barra: These three, with the woman included will be two in one flesh.

Marca: I think they must be trying to decide who to be the husband of the woman.⁷⁵

Just as Giovanni Battista is playing around with Christ on Leonardo's and Raphael's paintings, Gioanbernardo/Bruno is inside the picture, driven by his sexual desire, as is his opponent, the fool, Christ.⁷⁶ Paralleling the Christian

75 *Candelaio* V, 10, 100 r [231]: "Barra: Questi tre insieme con la femina, farranno dui in carne una. Marca: Credo che cercano chi de lor dui è esso; per essere il marito de la femina." (tr. Moliterno 2000, p. 155)

76 On the philosopher as painter who is unable to step back from the canvas to consider his work, see an often commented passage of *Cena DI*, p. 16. In *De vinculis* § 30, OM p. 451 Bruno says that in order to bind something one has to be bound too, because the same emotional disposition is necessary to operate effectively on the world. In a similar way, Plotinus, *Enneads* 4, 4, 40 maintains that the magus has to be inside the universe to be able to manipulate it. "For if anyone put a magician outside the All, he could not draw or bring down by attractive or binding spells. But now, because he does not operate as if he were someone else, he

devotional practice, Bruno portrays himself as part of the picture, because it is impossible to step out of an infinite universe. The *Candelaio* thus emerges as a distinctly Anti-Christian celebration of the mutability and instability of all things: an immanentist Anti-Idealism at its best, performed on stage. Yet, Bruno is keenly aware that the visual paraphernalia of that religion (as good as that of any other one) may be a mnemonic device for organizing the mind, in new and more natural ways. According to Bruno, the automatic appearance of such images is constitutive of the organisation of our minds; we are only thinking in images. Any mental activity is bound to the physical body which inexorably produces malleable images; there is no such thing as an un-metaphorical speech, developing as parthenogenetic products of reason. Accordingly, such *phantasmata* may be employed as *loci* and *imagines* for a natural art of memory. The images do not even necessarily have a direct connection to the contents that are to be remembered.⁷⁷ Let me emphasize that Bruno in the *Candelaio* is referring to a popular devotional image that is *not* represented or mentioned in the text. Even so, the

Madonna con i bambini, a popular devotional image, would be an ideal candidate for a painting by Gioanbernardo pittore, devout catholic, charged with an entirely Brunian meaning; just as the *Candelaio* is a popular comedy that hides the Nolan's new philosophy, and at the same time allows for cultural coherence (as opposed to a radical break with the culture) within the change from light into darkness (which will not even be perceptible for those who are in the dark).⁷⁸ Bruno probably sought precisely that kind of irenic peace – across the petty boundaries created by religious fanaticism in all Christian sects of the time. In the comedy, the revolution brought about by Gioanbernardo is quite discreet; outwardly, he remains a good catholic because he is aware that the preservation of appearances is of great importance: the painter puts the horns on Bonifacio with great discretion. What the mastermind strives for is nothing less than a privileged relationship to the Madonna.⁷⁹

can work on subjects by what way on thing is drawn to another in the living being." (tr. Armstrong, p. 263).

77 Bruno is promising that the *Candelaio* will cast some light on the *Shadows of ideas*. The *De umbris idearum* were also published in Paris in 1582; see *Candelaio, Dedication*, [p. 4]: "[...] eccovi la candela che vi vien porgiuta per questo candelaio che da me si parte, la qual in questo paese ove mi trovo potrà chiarir alquanto certe ombre dell' Idee le quali in vero spaventano le bestie [...]" (Italics mine)

78 *Spaccio DI*, p. 778. Bruno obviously did not think that a cult of images deeply rooted in local traditions could or should be forcibly changed. In the *Cabala*, Bruno for instance recounts the story that after their defeat against the Persian King Ochus the Egyptians had to abolish worshipping the bull Apis. Ochus forced them to worship the ass, an animal which the Egyptians despised and therefore forced onto the Jews, their own slaves, who in their turn passed this beast to the Christians. But such a change of idols would be forced, come from outside and therefore be unfitting for the Egyptians. The Jews, on the other hand, easily accepted the ass because it represented their genuine Saturnine inclinations. (*Cabala*, DI pp. 807–808).

79 *Candelaio* V, 19, fol. 129r [p.289].

In portraying Gioanbernardo as an embodiment of St. John the Baptist I am perhaps creating an image that is more akin to an account of what happens when one is studying Bruno; the worst that could be said then is that my activity would be an archetypically Brunian enterprise. According to the Nolan, the intellectual energy created by the elaboration and exploration of such images is in tune with his philosophy of an infinite universe, in which every action is part of an extended whole, and therefore everything contains the infinite. In describing the intellectual movement triggered by some instances in the *Candelaio*, the doppelgangers, a portrait and iconography, I am merely following Bruno's precepts. I am aware that with this reading that I am pushing the envelope very far, and that I am perhaps simply voicing ideas that contemporaries who were sympathetic to Bruno's philosophy could have easily read into the *Candelaio*.⁸⁰

Yet, I am less interested in pursuing what Umberto Eco has called a "suspicious reading" of texts.⁸¹ Other than some esoteric authors, (like Gabriele Rossetti and his esoteric/masonic reading of Dante's *Divina commedia* with whom Eco takes issue) I am not postulating that Bruno was an adept to a secret tradition. According to Rossetti, Dante was thus a Rosicrucian *ante litteram*. Therefore, Eco concludes, that according to Rossetti, the masonic text of the 18th

century as well as the *Divina commedia* are to be perceived as pointing to a form of "third archetype" of text, which is a secret unknown and imaginary embodiment of an occult tradition.⁸² I am thus not implying that Bruno was referring to a type of secret text that is now unknown to us: my reading of the theological and political implications of the relationship between the two main antagonists in the *Candelaio* seeks instead to situate my hypothesis in contemporary Neapolitan culture and to read Bruno's comedy was often appropriating the thoughts and texts of others to serve his own intellectual and spiritual ends – a fact to which Richard Blum has often alerted his readers.⁸³ For Bruno such references are part of a strategy of evocation and subversion, as M. A. Granada has aptly characterized them.⁸⁴

I hope to have shown in one particular instance how Bruno teaches his attentive readers a lesson that is characteristic for his entire philosophy; namely that we are always thinking in images, that our intellectual activity is articulated in visual phenomena (the so-called *phantasmata*) which are indistinguishable from our mental processes.⁸⁵

80 I wish to thank to Walter Stephens for this comment and for pointing me to the to the discussion in Eco, see below.

81 Eco 1989, p. 16.

82 Eco 1989, pp. 30–31 and *passim*, cfr. also the exposition in Bonadella 1997.

83 See Blum 2015, with regard to Bruno's Aristotelianism.

84 Granada 1998, pp. 179 and 186; See also Bassi 2007, p. 392 in regard to Bruno's theories on magic: "... è mai sufficiente individuare la fonte [che Bruno usa], ma, volta per volta, va piuttosto analizzato il movimento di scavo e di torsione che egli mette in atto nella ripresa della fonte stessa."

85 Borsche 1993 *passim*.

These images are malleable, changing, and thus immune to ultimate truth or falsehood: just as bodies are changing with the different costumes, the living images of the theatre with its false beards and its costumes allow Bruno to express such ideas through performance. In the *Candelaio* we encounter one of the instances where his cyclical worldview⁸⁶ is enacted in the medium of a visual representation on-stage,

moving, ever changing *tableaux vivants* that are exempt to ultimate questions of truth and falsehood. Or, as Gioanbernardo puts it:

In fact, what you did yesterday you will never do again, and I never before painted the portrait I did today, nor will I ever be able to do it again; what I can do, however, is paint another.⁸⁷

86 Such ideas had been condemned by the church ever since Augustine.

87 *Candelaio* I, 8, fols. 11v-12r [pp. 54–5]: “[...] Cossì quel che facesti hieri non lo farai mai più, et io mai feci quel ritratto ch’hò fatto oggi. ne manco è possibile ch’io possa farlo più, questo sì che potrò farne un âltro.” (tr. Moliterno 2000, p. 82).

ABBREVIATIONS

Candelaio = Bruno, G. (1582). *Candelaio*. Paris: Gulgliemo Giuliano. [1999 facsimile ed. by Eugenio Canone. Firenze: Olschki].

De amore = Ficino, M. (1956). *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon Marsile Ficin* (ed. R. Marcel) Paris: Belles Lettres.

DI = Bruno, G. (1958). *Dialoghi italiani, nuovamente ristampati con note da Giovanni Gentile*, 3a ed. a cura di G. Aquilecchia. Florence: Sansoni.

OL = Bruno, G. (1879–1891). *Opera latine conscripta* (ed. F. Tocco, H. Vitelli, V. Imbriani, & C. M. Tallarigo). Naples-Florence (3 Vols. in 8 Parts).

OM = Bruno, G. (2000). *Opere magiche* (eds. M. Ciliberto, S. Bassi, E. Scapparone, & N. Tirinnanzi). Milan: Adelphi.

PL = *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina* (ed. J.-P. Migne). (1844–64). 221 vols. Paris: Garnier.

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