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GIORDANO BRUNO, RABELAIS AND APOLLONIUS OF TYANA

A quote by Bruno from François Rabelais' *Gargantua et Pantagruel*,
in the *Oratio Valedictoria*.



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SUMMARY

Regarding the influence of François Rabelais on the Giordano Bruno's works, up to now the criticism have only taken into consideration the lexical and thematic analogies. This article individualizes, in a passage of the *Oratio Valedictoria*, a literal quotation from the *Gargantua et Pantagruel*, showing that Rabelais was a direct source of inspiration for Bruno. The protagonist of the passage is the pythagorean Apollonius of Tyana, a character well known by the Nolan, who mentioned him in many occasions. He represents the ideal medium with the oriental wisdom, that had so much influence on the thought of Bruno. Besides, he embodies the model of the "natural magician" in which the philosopher repeatedly identified himself, both in his works and life.

Much has been written in the past about the relationship between Bruno and Rabelais. In particular, we can recall the works of Vincenzo Spampanato and Marcel Tetel, who were inspired by the hypothesis made by Christian Bartholmess¹. Their analysis, besides some passages of *Cena de le ceneri* and *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante*, is mainly focused on *Candelaio*. Spampanato, in particular, finds in the comedy a long series of passages which might show some thematic and linguistic similarities with *Gargantua et Pantagruel*. The critics agree about the Rabelaisian influence on Bruno, since there are some elements which are considered common to both. For instance, we can recall the characterization of the pedantic character and the dialogue between Cherubina and Madonna Angela Spigna, about the opportunity of marriage², which shows clear echoes of the same topic discussed by Panurge and Pantagruel, the King of Dipsodes³. Spampanato notices how "the three 'topics' linked together in *Candelaio*, that is the silliness of a dull lover, the alchemy of a sordid miser and the foolishness of a clumsy pedant are also described [...] in *Gargantua* and in *Pantagruel*"⁴. Tetel, on the other hand, notices the influence of the characters of Janotus de Bragmardo and the student Limosino of the third book, about the caricature of pedantry in *Candelaio*. Both the critics point out that the atmosphere of the comedy, maybe unconsciously, is clearly Rabelaisian, showing the idea that Bruno might well know the French work, since it was one of the most translated at the time. However, Tetel is much more cautious, noticing that these topics were quite discussed in the literature of that period, so even if this concordance of themes and characteristics suggests the existence of a strong influence of Rabelais on Bruno, it cannot be considered a crucial proof. Their analysis is mostly focused on the

¹ In particular, Bartholmess had noticed the similarity between Rabelais' saying "Démocrite héraclitisant et Héraclite Démocritisant" (*Gargantua*, I, 20) and the motto of *Candelaio* "In tristitia hilaris, in hilaritate tristis". C.Bartholmess, *Jordano Bruno*, II, 65.

² Cfr. *Candelaio*, edited by A. Guzzo, Milano 2004, p. 139-140.

³ Cfr. *Pantagruel*, III, 9, 35 e 36. Cfr. also G. Lafaye, *Giordano Bruno* in "Revue Internationale de l'Enseignement", 1889, 552-5; M. Monnier, *Giordano Bruno et ses derniers biographes*, Bibliothèque Universelle et Revue Suisse, XXIV, 1884, 579-81; Sanesi, *La Commedia*, p. 423.

⁴ V. Spampanato, "Il Rabelais e il Bruno" in *Alcuni antecedenti e imitazioni francesi del Candelaio*, 1905, p. 35.

linguistic instruments and material, but all the analogies refer to the simple thematic or lexical similitude, to be then fixed in a quote or in a direct comparison.

Both critics insist mainly on the affinity of disposition of the two authors, lively and unconventional, so that “even if one was more a philosopher and the other one was more a man of letters, they were alike in mind and means”⁵. Furthermore, they both analyze the biographical analogies: “both were friars and had been charged with having Erasmus’ books and with spreading heresies, they abhorred the monastic life and gave up the frock; being uneasy, they were tortured by the longing for travelling; being audacious when speaking and intolerant to whatever kind of restraint, they made angry both the followers and the enemies of Aristotle, of the Catholics and, most of all, of the Calvinists, the latter having considered them as part of their group”⁶. Spampanato believes that Bruno read Gargantua during his first trip to France, between 1579 and 1581, in Paris, Toulouse and mainly in Lyons, in whose hospital Rabelais worked as a doctor and where he published most of his works. This might explain the influences on *Candelaio*, which was written in that period.

It is more likely that Bruno got to know the works of the French writer during the period of his regular visits to the library of Saint Victor’s abbey, from December 1585 to the first months of the following year, as the memoirs of the librarian Guillaume Cotin testify⁷. Saint Victor, indeed, had been the favourite refuge of Rabelais, during his studies at the University of Paris before 1528, and had inspired him in writing the compilation of the famous farcical catalogue of imaginary books (even if some refer to real authors and works), described in the VII chapter of the I book of Gargantua, in which the scholastic and theological sciences are mocked. For what concerns *Cena de le Ceneri*, the analogies which are commonly pointed out concern the theme of the “Sileni” and the description of the dispute with the doctors from Oxford. In relation to the first theme, which is also used by Bruno in *Proemiale epistola*⁸, we can see how the prologue of Gargantua is taken as model, starting with the quote from the famous speech in which Alcibiades defines Socrates “semblable es Silènes”⁹. It is, though, a very common *topos*, which, from the platonic *Simposio* and through the Erasmian *Adagia*, gets to Rabelais and Bruno, who uses it even in *Spaccio* and for the donkey Cillenico.¹⁰ The second analogy is identified in the famous defence of the Copernican theory from the attacks of the Oxonian doctors, which reminds a lot the episode described in the XVIII chapter of the I Book of

⁵ Ibidem, p. 16.

⁶ Ibidem, pp. 13-14.

⁷ Cfr. L. Auvray, *Giordano Bruno à Paris*, in “Memoires de la Société de l’Histoire de Paris et de l’Ile-de-France », XXVII 1900, pp. 208-301, republished in V.Spampanato, *Vita di Giordano Bruno*, pp. 641-59.

⁸ Cfr *La Cena de le Ceneri*, *Dialoghi filosofici italiani*, edited by M. Ciliberto, Milano 2000, p. 14: “*se non sapran scuoprir quel ch’è ascosto sotto questi Sileni*”.

⁹ F. Rabelais, *La vie inestimable du grand Gargantua, pere de Pantagruel*, Prologue de l’auteur .

¹⁰ “Many will remember, for different reasons, this wonderful platonic image used between the V and the VI century: from Pico to Erasmus in his *Sileni Alcibiadis*, to denounce the false wise men; Rabelais, in the prologue of *Gargantua*, to reveal the therapeutic power of laughing. But even Pierre de Ronsard and Torquato Tasso will use it in their poems”. Bruno, as he often does, uses this *topos*, which is strewn in several relevant parts of his works”. N.Ordine, *La soglia dell’ombra*, p. 39 note 37.

Gargantua.¹¹ Here Thaumaste, a great English doctor, who came to challenge Pantagruel in a public discussion¹², is beaten by Panurge and, as the Oxonian Nundinio and Torquato, remains “as a chick in the tow, the poor doctor”¹³. Being impressed by Pantagruel’s knowledge, which he considers equal to his size, Thaumaste compares himself to the great philosophers who faced long journeys to get to know men of science, as he describes:

« En Pythagoras, qui visita les vaticinateurs memphitiques; en Platon, qui visita les mages de Egypte et Architas de Tarente; en Apolonius Tyaneus, qui alla jusques au mont Caucase, passa les Scythes, les Massagettes, les Indiens, navigea le grand fleuve Physon jusques ès Brachmanes, pour veoir Hiarcas, et en Babiloine, Caldée, Medée, Assyrie, Parthie, Syrie, Phoenice, Arabie, Palestine, Alexandrie, jusques en Ethiopie, pour veoir les gymnosophistes. »¹⁴

Even if this episode has been analysed as a possible Brunian source, no one has ever recognized in this extract what is, in my opinion, an evident quote from Rabelais. Spanpanato passed over this passage without noticing it, maybe because his research, which was completely focused on Candelaio, did not allow him to look for comparisons with a work of another period and occasion. In fact, the extract is incredibly similar to a passage of *Oratio Valedictoria*, the leave oration which, on the 8 March 1588, Giordano Bruno pronounced in front of the senate of Wittenberg’s Academy. When he was about to finish his speech, with an outburst of gratitude for the welcome received in Germany, the Nolan addressed to the ancient philosophers:

« Go now, Pythagoras, to the prophets of Menfi; Architas, to Italy, Plato, to Sicily. Go now, Tianeus, among the Persian, pass the Caucasus, the Scythians, the Massagetes, enter the affluent kingdoms of India and, after passing the wide river Phison, go to the Brachmanes, walk among the Elamites, the Babylonians, the Chaldeans, the Medias, the Assyrian, the Parthians, the Syrians, the Phoenicians, the Arabs, the Palestinian, Alexandria, and go to Ethiopia to see the Gymnosophists and the famous table of the sun on the sand».¹⁵

¹¹ *Les horribles et épouvantables faits et prouesses du très renommé Pantagruel, Roy des Dipsodes* is the first book of Rabelais’ work, published in 1532 (the second for the whole work that we now know, which does not follow the chronological order of writing, but that of the described events).

¹² Cfr. G. Lafaye too, work quoted.

¹³ *La Cena de le Ceneri*, Dialoghi filosofici italiani, quote p. 101.

¹⁴ “In Pythagoras, who visited the vaticinators of Menfi; in Plato, who visited the Magi of Egypt and Archytas of Tarentum; in Apollonius of Tyana, who went to the Caucasus mountains, passed the Scythians, the Massagetes, the Indians, sailed the big river Phison till the Brachmanes to see Hiarcas; and then he was in Babylon, Chaldea, Media, Assyria, Parthia, Syria, Phoenicia, Arabia, Palestine, Alexandria and till Ethiopia to see the Gymnosophists.” F. Rabelais, *Gargantua e Pantagruel* Book I Chapter XVIII.

¹⁵ “Ite nunc, veteres philosophi, lustrate provincias, novos adite populos, maria transite. I nunc Pythagora ad Memphiticos vates, Archita in oras Italiae, Plato in Siciliam. I nunc, Thianaeae, intra Persas, peroransi Caucasum, Scythas, Messagetes, opulentissima Indiae regna penetra, latissimoque Phison amne trasmesso, perge ad Brachmanas, discorre per Elamitas, Babilonios, Chaldaeos, Medos, Assyrios, Pathos, Syros, Phoenices, Arabes, Palestinos, Alexandiam, et perge in Aethiopiam ut Gymnosophistas et famosissimam solis mensam videas in sabulo. Ea enim universa, et iis majora, et maiora ijs, quae vos in tot tantisque mundi regionibus quaesivistis, ego in una Germaniae regione inveni.” *Oratio valedictoria*, Opera Latine conscripta, vol. I, tome 1, edited by F. Fiorentino et alii, Napoli, Morano, 1879-91, p. 22 A.

Comparing Bruno's words and Rabelais' ones, we can see that they coincide almost completely, most of all in the enumeration of the places and people visited by Apollonius of Tyana, so that one could hardly think that the Nolan was able to remember them all by heart in the exact order, if one did not know his extraordinary mnemotechnical skills.

The main news about Apollonius, born in Tyana, in Cappadocia around 4 BC, and dead in Ephesus around 97 AC, has been reported by Philostratus of Lemnos¹⁶, who wrote his "*Life of Apollonius of Tyana*" on commission of Giulia Domna, the wife of the emperor Septimius Severus, who was of African origin and was a follower of some oriental religious beliefs, linked to the solar cult¹⁷.

The biography of Philostratus is a sort of revision, between the historical and the romanticized, of the diary written by the faithful follower of Apollonius, Damis of Ninive. His manuscript, handed down from generation to generation, might have then been passed to Giulia Domna, who had then given him to make it published. The work was then rediscovered during the Renaissance thanks to the Aldina edition of 1501-02 and to the contemporary Latin translation of Filippo Beroaldo, so it is likely that both Rabelais and Bruno read it. The Nolan, in fact, recalls Apollonius in several occasions, showing a first hand knowledge of the character. For instance, in *Candelaio* he already described the telepathic skills that made him foretell the murder of the tyrant Domitian¹⁸:

"Bonifacio: How did you get to know that?"

Scaramurè: As Apollonius, Merlin and Malagigi¹⁹ used to know distant things."

Even more specific is the quote of *Sigillus Sigillorum* (1583), which is focused on a specific kind of contraction, which is common to both Pythagoras and Zoroaster:

"I pass over the fact that because of that sort of contraction, made in a well formed soul, one's own body and other people's body are kept in good health, as Zoroaster said, and as Pythagoras, Apollonius and Abaris did"²⁰

In the work *De monade* (1591), we find again Pythagoras and Zoroaster with Apollonius, who is described as a great expert of the virtue of numbers, which allowed him to raise a young girl²¹:

¹⁶ Philostratus was born in Lemno in 160 AC and died around 249 AC. He taught rhetoric in Athens to move then to Rome, where he was high in Septimius Severus' and Giulia Domna's favour. She commissioned him the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. The works of Apollonius did not reach us in the original version. We only know some titles: "*Initiations*", "*Oracles*", "*Hymn to Memory*". One of his astrology treatises seems to have been translated into Arabic in the IX century. He is also considered the author of *Life of Pythagoras*. Again in Rome he wrote *The Heroic*, a work in dialogue about the cult of Protesilaus and, in Athens, *Lives of Sophists*.

¹⁷ There is also a series of indirect testimonies, among which we can recall, as one of the most relevant examples, the exaltation of Apollonius made by Philo, two centuries after his death, as the prophet of a mystic cult based on the communion with God.

¹⁸ Cfr. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Adelphi Milano, 2004, pp. 392-3.

¹⁹ *Candelaio*, quote. p. 118. Merlino (V century) and Malagigi are magicians celebrated in the poems of chivalry.

²⁰ "Omitto quod quidam in animum bene formatum contractione facia proprium alienumque corpus servatur, sicut cecinit Zoroaster, fecit Pythagoras, Apollonius et Abb." *Sigillus Sigillorum*, Opera Latine conscripta, quote I, p. 181 F. Abaride or Abari (greek Ábaris), legendary Greek thaumaturge of shamanistic origin, was told to have the ability of ploughing the air riding an arrow, as Herodotus and Pindar told us. The Greeks used to consider him as a descendant of the wonderful Hyperboreans. The neo-Pythagoreans considered him a forerunner of Pythagoras.

“As to our aim, we have to remember that, for Pythagoras, Aglaophamus, Zoroaster and Hermes of Babylon, this kind of numbers became the same principles thanks to which men could cooperate with the active nature. Furthermore, it seems that Plato had put this kind of figures over the world of the sensible species; Apollonius, thanks to the virtue of numbers, raised a young girl, after having heard his name.”²²

Again in *De Monade*, his birth is referred, along with those of Romulus, Merlin and Teuti, to demoniac operations, which, during some particular astrological conjunctions, might generate men being able of incredible prodigies:

“Those who invoked the evil spirits in the crossroads do that being turned as much as possible to the North. They say that those people, at the time of the big conjunctions of Saturn, Jupiter and Mars in Cancer and in Capricorn, turn into nightmares or slaves for unusual parts and thus present themselves as violent men who bend the Laws to the fulfilment of wonderful events and with extraordinary prodigies change and sometimes feel the condition of men (if they are not protected by a better and more benevolent deity). Under their influence they put the birth of Romulus, Merlin, Tianeo, Teuti and many others who were born by unknown parents.”²³ Thus, Bruno knew well Tianeo and highly regarded him. This character, a wise magician, very similar to the one of Hermes Trismegistus,²⁴ who was considered a true Messiah of Pythagorism in the I century²⁵, must have exerted a great charm on him, as a possible link between the Pythagorean tradition and the oriental one. The accuracy of the quote from *Oratio*, make us believe that even if Bruno knew well Philostratus’ work, he used Rabelais’ extract as a true *locus memoriae* to remember the “peregrinatio”. Rabelais had been slightly imprecise, inserting a long series of exotic places in the description of Apollonius itinerary, listing them in confusion and not following Philostratus’ work. Thus, for example, he had included the Massagetes among those he had visited (deceiving even Bruno), while Philostratus said the opposite:

“I’m not coming from Scotland, my Lord, nor from some other uncivilized place, nor have ever been among the Massagetes or the Tauri, since I would have surely convinced them to stop doing sacrifices”²⁶

If we make a detailed comparison of the two works, we can notice that there are some small differences, which make us believe that Bruno, as he usually does, works by heart, correcting or integrating the quote while remembering it.

In the first part, whereas the exhortation to Pythagoras to visit the vaticinators in Menfi is the same, he changes the reference to Plato and Archita, mentioning both as

²¹ Cfr. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, quote p. 218.

²² *De monade, numero et figura*, Opere latine, edited by C. Monti, Torino 1980, p. 305.

About the virtue of numbers “to operate on things” Cfr. M. Ciliberto, Giordano Bruno, Laterza 1992, pp. 228-9.

²³ Ibidem, p. 357

²⁴ In the hermetic-occult Renaissance tradition, Apollonius will be linked to authors such as Cornelius Agrippa, Hermes and Zoroaster, as magicians and authors of wonderful works.

²⁵ He scrupulously followed the dietetic precepts of Pythagoras: vegetarian diet, no wine nor sex, wearing sun dresses and fibers and, as reported by Philostratus, he remained silent for five years, during which he expressed himself only « with the eyes and hands and nods of the head », *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, quote. p. 73.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 369.

messengers of wisdom. The first is set in Sicily and the second travelling around various parts of Italy, and he removes the reference to Magi, whom Rabelais had described in Egypt by mistake, instead of Persia or Chaldea.²⁷

The following passage is a sort of literal translation of the French text, both in the words and in the order used to describe the long itinerary of Tianeus. Bruno only adds the Persians and the Elamites²⁸ in the list of people with whom Apollonius came into contact, and the news – taken from Herodotus – about the existence of “the famous table of the sun on the sand” by the Ethiopians.²⁹ Apart from these changes, he quotes all the different people in the exact order of Rabelais, keeping the identification of Ganges with the biblical river Phison³⁰. He omits, or forgets, instead, the reference to Iarca, the eldest Brahman wise man, maybe because the importance that Apollonius gives to him and all the Indian wisdom, that he considers superior and mother of the Egyptian one, upsets the order of classification of wisdom, drafted by Bruno before his oration, in which the Egyptians and the Chaldeans preceded the Indian Gymnosophists:

“On these seven columns Wisdom built its house among the men. That house, if we look through history, first appeared among the Egyptians, and the Chaldeans by the Assyrians. Secondly, among the Persians, the Magi, under Zoroaster. Thirdly by the Indians, among the Gymnosophists. Fourthly among the Thracians and, at the same time, among the Lybians, under Orpheus and Atlas. Fifthly among the Greeks under Thales and the other wise men. Sixthly, among the Italics under Archita, Gorgia, Archimedes, Empedocles, Lucretius. Seventhly, among the Germans during our time: so it seems sure that, with Jove and the Empire in the likeness of the celestial curia, Minerva, this Sophia, has changed country and residences with a vicissitude of successions.”³¹

²⁷ The Magi were priests devoted to the cult of fire, to astrology and divination, generally at the service of the dominations which controlled the Middle East, most of all Mesopotamia and Persia, from the Media and Babylonian kings to the Achaemenids and the Parti.

²⁸ Elam was a territory surrounded by the Iranian south-western upland and the lands east of low Tigris.

²⁹ “famosissimam solis mensam videas in sabulo”: according to the ancient tradition, which is gathered here by Bruno, in the kingdom of Ethiopia (a word referring generally to all the far people from East and South) there was the habit of preparing the table to the sun. Cfr. Herodotus, III, 18 (Latin translation of Lyon, 1542, p. 71: “Est in suburbano pratum, omnium quadrupedum assa carne refertum, quam per noctem singuli civium magistratis prosperant ponere, ad eamque, ubi illuxit, cuilibet epilatam licet accedere. Haec ipsa a terra reddi adsique indigenae credunt.” (“In the surroundings of the city there is a lawn full of roast meat of every kind of quadruped, that the citizens take trouble to prepare during the night for their authorities. At daybreak everyone can come and eat it. The natives believe that this meat, which is continuously eaten up, is continuously reinstated by the earth”).

³⁰ Phison: One of the four rivers of the Earthly Paradise, which have a common source under the tree of life, is commonly identified with Ganges (the other three are Nile, Tigris and Euphrates). Cfr. Genesis II, 8-14 – “Et fluvius egrediebatur de loco voluptatis ad irrigandum paradisum, qui inde dividitur in quatuor capita. Nomen uni Phison; ipse est qui circuit omnem terram Hevilath, ubi nascitur aurum; et aurum terrae illius optimum est; ibi invenitur bdellium, et lapis onychinus. Et nomen fluvii secundi Gehon; ipse est qui circuit omnem terram Aethiopiae. Nomen vero fluminis tertii, Tygris; ipse vadit contra Assyrios. Fluvius autem quartus, ipse est Eufrate... » (A river came out of Eden to irrigate the garden, then from there it divided and formed four streams. The first river was called Phison; it flows all around the city of Avila, where there is gold, and the gold of those places is fine; here there is also the odorous resin and the onyx stone. The second river is called Gihon: it flows all around Ethiopia. The third river is called Tigris: it flows east of Assur. The fourth river is Euphrates.

³¹ *Oratio valedictoria*, quote p. 16 A.

For this genealogy of wisdom, Bruno followed the ideas of Marsilio Ficino, who used to consider Hermes Trismegistus (among the Egyptians) and Zoroaster (among the Persians) the main representatives of a tradition which, through Orpheus, Aglaophamus and Pythagoras, culminated in the divine Plato.³² Ficino, whose aim was that of Christianizing the Egyptian *prisca teologia*, turned Trismegistus into a true prophet of Christianity by using the authority of Lactantius, who counted Hermes among the Sybils and the Prophets, and that of Augustin, who thought Hermes to be right about some of his ideas concerning God. Such process was so successful that, in the mosaic which was built at the entrance of Siena Cathedral around 1480, we can find together the images of Hermes Trismegistus and Moses, as if they were contemporaries.³³ Apollonius had a similar destiny. He had such an incredible reputation, which was hard to destroy, that the first Christian theologians both justified his use of those famous talismans, saying that they had been realized thanks to the knowledge of the natural forces and not with the help of supernatural powers, and decided to welcome the wise Tianeos in the Church of Byzantium, turning him into a prophet of the Lord or even into a saint!³⁴ But then, when some of them tried to describe him as a true pagan Christ, comparing his miracles to Jesus' ones, the reaction of the Christian theologians was immediate: his acts turned into impious magical practices, and Apollonius was accused of witchcraft. We have to recall that Philostratus had thought it necessary, at the beginning of his book, to avoid any kind of misunderstanding:

“since he met the Magi in Babylon, the Brahmans in India and the Gymnosophists that live in Egypt, there are some people that consider him a magician and accuse him of having practiced witchcraft: but they say it out of ignorance”³⁵

And he had reminded how Empedocles, Pythagoras, Democritus and Plato himself had never practiced the magical arts, even if they had known the prophets and the priests of Babylon and Egypt. The prophetic skills and the ability of “magically” interacting with nature are the intermediate steps of a sort of karmic evolution, so that the wise man can create a mystic contact with divinity through meditation and with no need for sacrifices, cults or churches.

“The magicians, that I consider the most disgraced men, say that they can change the course of destiny... Instead he submitted himself to the will of Moire, and he could only foresee how these would necessarily happen: his predictions weren't based on magical means, but on the divine revelation”.³⁶

³² “He is said to be the first of the authors of theology; then Orpheus succeeded him, the second among the theologians in the past: Aglaophemus, who had been initiated to the sacred teaching of Orpheus, was succeeded in theology by Pythagoras, whose disciple was Philolao, the teacher of our divine Plato. There is, then, a *prisca theologia* ... which has its origin in Mercury and culminated in the divine Plato.” M. Ficino, *Argumentum del Poimandres* .

³³ In the work, Hermes shows Moses a board on which there are the words of Pimandro: "*Deus, omnium creator secum Deum fecit visibilem et hunc fecit primum et solum quo oblectatus est et valde amavit proprium Filium* " and under that, on the plaque of the title one can read: "*Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus Contemporaneus Moysi*".

³⁴ D. Del Corno, Introduction to *Vita di Apollonio di Tiana*, Adelphi, 2004 pp. 45-46.

³⁵ Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, quote p. 62.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 228.

One has to consider the expression “divine revelation” as the understanding, in a Pythagorean way, of the inner mechanisms of nature in which divinity expresses itself, purging Philostratus’ interpretation from the tribute to the solar cult of the *sponsor* Giulia Domna. This clearly reminds of that “natural magic”, which was the only true magic accepted by Bruno:

“Before facing the theme of magic, as one has to do for any other subject, one has to distinguish the name according to its meanings; in fact there are as many meanings of the word magic as the kinds of magician one can find. First of all, a magician is a wise man, as the trismegisti were among the Egyptians, the druids among the Gallics, the Gymnosophists among the Indians, the cabalists among the Jews, the magi (whose first example was Zoroaster) among the Persians, the σοφοί among the Greeks, the wise men among the Latins.”³⁷

If we recall the successful and discussed definition of “hermetic magician”, which was formulated by Frances Yates, we might say that Bruno was a magician in the meaning of “natural magician”:

“When it is used by the philosophers and among the philosophers, the word magician means a wise man with the ability of acting”³⁸,

and was hermetic insofar as he identified the hermetism as the doctrine which could better interpret the fundamental needs of his ontological and cosmological vision³⁹.

The Nolan must have identified himself a lot with the character of Apollonius, as Philostratus has transmitted to us. Master and guide of kings and emperors⁴⁰, he urged them to guide their people over any kind of sectarianism, since no religion can declare itself as repository of the unique truth.

His philosophical syncretism, which derives from the insertion of the oriental and Jewish doctrines on a solid Pythagorean basis, must have seemed to Bruno the ideal point of junction between Egypt and East. Thanks to him, the *prisca sapientia* goes up a step, from the Egyptians to the Brahmans, of whom, on several occasions, he declares the superiority⁴¹:

“Who is so expert to correct the Egyptian rituals?”. “Any wise man” said Apollonius “that comes from India”⁴².

In these words the Nolan must have felt the weight of the Indian wisdom standing above the wonderful Egypt, reversing the judgement of the hermetic Lament, that he

³⁷ *De magia naturali*, Opere Magiche, edition by M. Ciliberto, edited by S. Bassi, E. Scapparone, N. Tirinnanzi, Milano, 2000, p. 160.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 167.

³⁹ About that I suggest the work of G.del Giudice, *La coincidenza degli opposti. Giordano Bruno tra Oriente e Occidente*, Di Renzo, Roma 2005.

⁴⁰ Apollonius was friend and counsellor, before and after Vespasian, Titus and Nerva were designated emperors.

⁴¹ In order to distinguish them from the Βραχμᾶνες (Brahmans), that the Greeks used to call Γυμνοσοφισταί (Gymnosophists), Philostratus calls Γυμνοί (Ginni) the wise men from Africa.

⁴² Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius Tyana*, quote pp. 237-238.

translates in *Spaccio*⁴³. By celebrating the Egyptians, through Pythagoras, he rewarded, indirectly, their Indian ancestors:

“Now, since you love wisdom, which was found by the Indians: and you want to call it not with the name of its natural fathers, but with that of the adoptive ones? Do you really want to give the Egyptians a bigger gift than what they would have if the Nile flooded again their lands along with honey, as they celebrate in their songs?”⁴⁴

In fact, of Pythagoras, that Apuleius’ testimony considered a disciple of the Hindu wise men⁴⁵, Apollonius remembers over and over the debt towards the Brahmanic doctrines, even if he came to know second-hand from the Ginni from Egypt, descendants of the Ethiopians, who, in their turn, originally came from India.

“I have never sacrificed victims, I do not sacrifice them, I do not touch blood, even if it is shed on an altar. This principle had been stated by Pythagoras and his school too, by the Ginni in Egypt and the Brahmans in India, from whom Pythagoras and his disciples got to know the foundations of wisdom”.⁴⁶

The knowledge of the oriental theosophies had made Apollonius find in them origins and confirmations of the Pythagorean teachings. It is the case, for instance, of the faith in reincarnation:

“And what is your opinion about the soul?”, “The same” said Iarca, “that Pythagoras told you, and we told the Egyptians. Thus Apollonius asked: “You are saying that, as Pythagoras said he was Euphorbus, as you, before living in this body, were a Trojan or a Greek, or another kind of man?”⁴⁷.

Apollonius of Tyana taught that the Soul, covered with the body, leaves it for another one after a certain period, after having experienced childhood, youth and old age. His idea about death is clearly connected to the Pythagorean theories, as we can see in the epistle sent to the consul P. Valerio Asiatico to give comfort to him because of the untimely death of his son:

“... No one dies truly, but only to all appearances, as everyone is born to all appearances. In fact, the passage from essence to substance, that is what some people might call “to born”; thus, what has been called dying is the passage from substance to essence. Nothing is born and nothing actually dies. The visible turns into invisible: the visible is generated by the density of the substance, the invisible by the thinness of essence. The being is always the same, he is sometimes activity and other times it is rest: the being has this essential peculiarity, that his changing isn’t provoked by something different from himself: the entire turns into parts and the parts turn into the entire, in the unity of the whole”.⁴⁸

⁴³ “Egypt, Egypt, of thy pious cults tales only will remain, as far beyond belief for thy future generations; words only will be left cut on thy stones, thy pious deeds recounting, and they will be told not to deity or men (because the latter will be dead, and the first will transmigrate to heaven), but to Schyths or Indians, or some one like them of wild nature.” *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante*, Dialoghi filosofici italiani, quote p. 637.

⁴⁴ Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, quote p. 272.

⁴⁵ Apuleio, *Florida*, quote p. 130, ed Bip.

⁴⁶ Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*,., quote pp. 373-374.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 154.

⁴⁸ Philostratus, *Epistle to P. Valerio Asiatico*.

This is why the wise man, if necessary, has to face death neither for heroism nor to state the right to the freedom of thinking, that no man can ever take away from him, so that it will never be under discussion, but only to protect his principles:

“In fact, dying for freedom is prescribed by the laws; for relatives, sons, for one’s love it is imposed by nature: and all the men must submit to nature and the laws, to nature because of their will, to the law against one’s will. But the wise men are more suited for dying for their ideals, to which they have devoted themselves. These are not established by law, nor have been generated by nature, but they have practised them thanks to their strength and their courage. In order to protect these principles, when violated, the wise man has to face fire and axes, because nothing of this kind can ever overcome him, or wrap him in the coils of lies: but he has to hold tight to his wisdom, as if he had been initiated to the mysteries”.⁴⁹

For these same reasons, Bruno cannot be considered a martyr of the free thinking, as a worn-out anticlerical propaganda has been upholding, but the tireless upholder of his own ideas, in conformity with the inviolable dignity of wisdom. From this point of view, Apollonius’ behaviour during the trial ordered by the emperor Domitian, has some suggestive analogies with that against Giordano Bruno. Before facing the judgement, he warns the frightened disciple Damis:

“... the soldiers and the hoplites do not need only courage, but also a strategy to interpret the different opportunities of the battle; in the same way the philosophers too have to pay attention to the circumstances of death, in order not to face them as those who risk everything and look for risks on purpose, but they must choose them according to some kind of principle. That we have chosen to die in the best way and in the circumstances that are most convenient to the philosopher, presuming that someone might want to kill him, I have already proved to other people in your presence, and I have tried hard to teach you that *ad nauseam*”.⁵⁰

This reminds a lot Bruno’s trial, the cautious and lucid strategy with which he stood up to the Inquisition during eight years⁵¹, before he chose to vanish from the earth to flow again into the One-whole⁵². To those who asked him: “*And why don’t you fear Nero?*”, Apollonius answered: “*Because the god that has allowed him to infuse fear, has allowed me not to feel it*”.⁵³

It seems quite possible to hear the disdainful warning that Bruno addressed to his executioners after hearing, unmoved, the verdict: “*Maybe you are pronouncing this sentence against me with more fear than that I feel in receiving it*”.

⁴⁹ Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius Tyana*, quote p. 319.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 339.

⁵¹ About that cfr. the sharp analysis made by M. Ciliberto about the use of Dissimulation, in *Pensare per contrari, Interpretazione del processo di Giordano Bruno*, 2005, 325-363.

⁵² For the episode in which Apollonius, after saying to Domitian the sentence: “you won’t kill me, in fact, because I am not mortal”, he disappears from the court before the sentence, cfr. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius Tyana*, quote p. 354.

⁵³ Ibidem, p. 217.