

## Introduction

"Sir P. Sidney, & Fulk Greville shut the doors at their phil. conferences with Bruno—if his Conversation resembled this Book, I should have thought, he would [have] talked with a trumpet"

—S. T. Coleridge, *Notebooks*<sup>1</sup>

### i

The figure of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) has been glamorized and rendered heroic for so many years that it bears little resemblance to the original historical man. Yet when on the basis of texts available until now, we ask why the Inquisitors of the Counter-Reformation placed his works on the Index of Prohibited Books and burned Bruno at the stake, we are puzzled. Even his most challenging works which Bruno wrote in Italian do not seem to go beyond what the Roman church might have tolerated. For example, *De la Causa, Principio e Uno*, is a harsh attack on Aristotle, and establishes Bruno's view of the essence of reality as a "unitary process in which matter is both content and form."<sup>2</sup> To Bruno's time this might well be dangerous, but not to the point where one would bum him alive for it.

It is not so much that the image of Bruno has been distorted as it has been splintered, atomized, broken up, with the parts left to stand for the whole, as in a synecdoche. Among recent writers, only a few have attempted to balance their views of Bruno; the Polish scholar, Andrzej Nowicki, is one who has.<sup>3</sup> But most have taken what they chose from Bruno and said that that is all there was.

For example, the religious free thinkers of Italy have adopted him as their martyred saint and have named their newsletter after him.

Marxists championed him, explaining his interest in idealism and the occult as a search for something beyond the normative beliefs of his day and stressed his work in mathematics and astronomy as steps along the way to progress in those areas. The best of this kind of approach is that of Irving Louis Horowitz,<sup>4</sup> who includes both these directions in his analysis and emphasizes the contemplative psychological effect which results from Bruno's concerns. Other Marxists, such as Jack Lindsay,<sup>5</sup> seriously underestimate the centrality of Bruno's mystical side, so important for the present work.

The occultists have made an arch-magus of him, attributed skills such as a vast and profound knowledge of alchemy for which there is no particular evidence (albeit Bruno was, obviously, interested in the subject), and pointed out his interest in astrology and the mnemonic powers that are, in fact, a part of the overall picture. But they never attempted to understand the overall reasons for his involvement in these areas.

The most prominent of recent scholars on Bruno has been the late Frances Yates. In her *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*<sup>6</sup> she stresses Bruno's magical or non-rational side, as do the occultists, but she sees it as cultural evidence of the medieval in his thought. In that book she minimizes his

modernism and syncretism, although in some of her earlier writings collected in *Lull and Bruno* this is less true.

None of these pictures is false, but each results from what we call a synecdochic approach to Bruno, seeing the part as if it were the whole. A great deal of this distortion can be explained simply: the texts which have received the most attention are those which Bruno wrote in Italian, not his Latin works. The former are the ones which have been translated, and there is not, as yet, any body of serious criticism concerning the Latin works.

Bruno's productive life lasted scarcely more than a decade. Thus, although there is some slight shift between the early and the late works, the main evolution of Bruno's thought has to do more with his shift in concern from analyzing the nature of physical reality to probing mental and spiritual dimensions.

In our opinion, the real division in Bruno's works is between the Italian-language pieces which were evidently intended for a broader public, and the Latin works, which are, in the main, more erudite, evidently intended for scientific and scholarly peers whom he seldom knew in life, where he wrote what he really thought for those few who might understand him. If one reads through the *De Magia* ("On Magic"), left in manuscript at the time of his death, one does not wonder that the inquisitors saw fit to burn him but that, given their mentality, they took so long to do so.

But until we did our work, not one single major Latin opus of Bruno's had been translated into any modern language. When we pay as much attention to the Latin works as the Italian the images of Bruno which a scholar might develop will not be so unidimensional.

Yet virtually all the biographies, from Bartholomess (1846-7) to Frith (1887) and so on to Boulting (1914) and even Singer (1950, the best of the lot in spite of its dated style), stress the Italian works above all. Only two works present a fully rounded view of Bruno. One is Spampanato's scholarly *Vita di Giordano Bruno* (1921), a biography which remains untranslated into English, and that is backed up by a companion volume of source materials, *Documenti della Vita di Giordano Bruno* (1933). The other is Nowicki's *Lampa Trzydziestu Spotkan*, also untranslated, an assemblage of quotations from Bruno, arranged as dialogs and interviews, which, taken as a whole, form a sort of collaged intellectual apologia.<sup>7</sup>

Bruno had high ambitions; he was what we might call an over-reacher, like Agrippa before him, and it is from Agrippa that Bruno picked up much of his knowledge of cabbalism, rather than from the more restrained Reuchlin.<sup>8</sup> Yet had Bruno been more modest, a scholarly humanist like Erasmus, for example, there is no way he could have investigated many of the areas with which he was concerned, no matter if they were forbidden or not He would have held himself back. But we find Bruno attempting to reconcile the old Greco-Roman faith with Christianity, and, in the present work, taking steps towards a synthesis of Christian with Chaldean, Zoroastrian with the simply very archaic. Here we do not find him playing that typically renaissance game of masking dangerous views by attributing them to exotic sources. The result, in *De Imaginum... Compositione*, suggests a certain credulousness on Bruno's part, as Charles Nauert has pointed out,<sup>9</sup> but, in his own more radical way, Bruno is following in the train of the more discreet Nicholas of Cusa when he suggests that there are similarities among what normally are seen as opposites or unrelated areas. This constitutes one of Bruno's most challenging aspects.

## ii

So what was the nature of Bruno's thought? First, it is worth repeating our distinction of a moment ago between his Italian and his Latin works. We do not wish to minimize the former, but his concerns there with the nature of justice and speculations on human relationships are not the issues of the present work. The Italian works almost all predate the Latin ones, and, for the most part, concern themselves with

ethics, science and mathematics. They do not discuss the art of memory in any substantive way. At times, in the Italian works Bruno is involved in dialectics, and implicitly in dialectical method. This is rarely the case in the Latin works and never in *De Imaginum, Signorum et Idearum Compositione*, which, from now on for brevity's sake, we will refer to as *De Imaginum... Compositione*. There are only two minor prose passages in dialog in the work, both portions of anecdotes. Bruno's method in *De Imaginum... Compositione* is literary rather than philosophical; he describes, asserts, gives symbols and allegorical figures, but except for certain sections in Book One, he presents only the barest minimum of ratiocinations. He had to proceed intuitively, with neither the benefit of symbolic logic to check his text's inner consistency or the advice of professional academic colleagues. But Bruno, like Empedocles or Lucretius (and some might say, like Plato himself) but, unlike most other philosophers, he is as much poet as thinker. To clothe his ideas in memorable images and vigorous poetry is not a way open to many philosophers, even should they desire to do so.

The main shift from early to late in Bruno, then, is mainly one of emphasis; the vision which the later Latin works present bespeaks a new religion that reconciles by art and imagination, and not by dogma and tradition, those many fractures and dichotomies in European thinking that manifested themselves in the religious wars in Bruno's lifetime in France and elsewhere, leading up to the even greater horrors of the Thirty Years War, which broke out less than two decades after Bruno's death. Bruno's spirit violently opposes the bigotry on both sides of the Counter-Reformation, for his problem at hand is to explore as many seemingly contradictory aspects of human inquiry up to his time as possible, and, through this, to attempt the reconcillation of body and soul, mind and matter, thought and feeling, dichotomies that would not have comprehensible to people in antiquity before their outlook was realigned by the Christian worldview. Religious schisms and heresies, social and dynastic rivalries, between Catholic and Protestant, England and Spain, Spain and France, France and Germany, medieval tradition and the new spirit of free inquiry from Erasmus to Galileo, these would have appeared as obscenities to a Homer or a Plato. Nonetheless, these are some of the issues Bruno successfully addresses in *De Imaginum... Compositione*, and elsewhere in the Latin works.

We should also bear in mind that Bruno and his contemporaries did not distinguish between Platonism and Neo-Platonism and, in fact, included the Hermetic texts with the Platonic canon. Usually, authorship of some of these was attributed to Thorn, traditionally identified as Hermes— "Hermes Trismegistus." It does not seem unnatural, then, given his interests, for Bruno to focus on the Hermetic tradition, accepting its magical lore and contributing to it his mnemonic investigations, to benefit from its traditional gentleness, permissiveness, and beauty.

To represent the complex syncretic revival of the Hermetic tradition, which, as Edgar Wind has shown in his *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, was well known, thanks to the Florentine Academy, from the Quattrocento to the Counter-Reformation, we use the term "The Church of Thoth," although we use it metaphorically since Bruno never indicates literally any intention to found a new church as such. But it can stand for a set of principles that embody reconciliation and tolerance that will in time replace ecclesiastic inquisition and persecution, that argue for the advancement of knowledge and a general rise in living standards and cultural conditions, as opposed to the closed and sterile world of papal hierarchy, privilege, magisterium, and preordination. The Christian church might claim eternity for itself, but Bruno's ideal Church would be even more eternal and time binding, since it harked back to the remarkable antiquity of the Hermetic texts. Much, perhaps too much, has been made of Isaac Casaubon's dating of them (in 1614) to the Second or Third Century C.E. But what Casaubon and, most recently, Nock and Festugière (the modern editors of the *Poimander*) have dated, is the *Greek* texts in their surviving form. Present understanding suggests they are, in actuality, based on hieroglyphic Egyptian originals, now lost, from the Second or Third Millenium B.C.E. Perhaps this is surely why a conceptual Church of Thoth attracted Bruno. One might imagine him assuming that, since Christ was Prince of Peace, he, as distinct from his church, could also claim a place in this new Church of Thoth. One can sense as well, here and there in the *De Imaginum... Compositione*, Bruno maintaining that, just as the Aristotelians had distorted Plato, Christ had suffered the same fate at the hands of the Christians. Only by

attributing such a view to Bruno can we explain his return to Italy or the substance of his final remarks at his trial.

But Bruno never actually intended to found a church as such, he never even attempted to convert anyone to full-time membership in it; and he never completely gave up hope of renovating Christianity and never felt that his positions had gone beyond what might, some day, be reconciled and accepted in the Roman Church. Yet, in the intellectual and theological system which he seems to espouse, he acts very much as if he were attempting to synthesize many of the most attractive aspects of past religious systems and present them as elements of a new faith.

Here, then, are some of the underpinnings of Bruno's syncretism. It was directly in the spirit of his time. Yet what he was proposing went against the spirit of the Counter-Reformation.

Nothing in Bruno's thinking directly contradicts Christianity, but he views Christianity as just one of three major pillars, along with *the* Egyptian mysteries and the Olympian faith, that support a vaster and more embracing religion. This, to a presumably sincere Roman Catholic of Bruno's time, must have been even more frightening than the new theologies of the Protestants; Bruno did not merely offer new articles of faith as the Protestants did, he struggled against the whole fabric of what Matthew Arnold, in the nineteenth century, would call the "*Aberglaube*,"<sup>10</sup> the poetry of life, perhaps, but something extraneous to pure belief. Unlike Martin Luther or Jean Calvin, for example, Bruno acted alone. Yet so alien was his spirit to the Roman Church of the Counter-Reformation that he was considered a genuine threat. When the inquisitors realized that Bruno would not recant, Bruno had to die, and die he did.

When Bruno was burned at the stake, there were no reported public protests at the time. Not even a contemporary diary is known in which, safe in the confidentiality of its pages, someone expressed doubt as to the morality of Bruno's execution. Bruno was, indeed, the only martyr to his Church of Thoth.<sup>11</sup> But since *De Imaginum... Compositione* is the work in which he describes this faith on the largest scale, it is, extending our metaphor, the unfinished bible of his new faith. We, unlike Bruno's contemporaries, can see what it might have been, for all that this hypothetical Church of Thoth was destined never to become a real force in the world. Others in Bruno's tribe or lineage, the heterodox illuminati of the Renaissance and Baroque, Paracelsus, Ramus, Dee and others before, or Fludd, Kepler and Kircher after, never got quite so far.

Agrippa, the alleged prototype of Goethe's *Faust*, from whose works Bruno in his own derives the centrality of the seal, wrote only the most technical and specific of texts.

Paracelsus, arguably the most mystical of the group, is also the most inaccessible. His grave at Salzburg is visited mostly by those who honor him, not as a philosopher, but as the father of preventive medicine.

Ramus, who became a Huguenot, perished in the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, a victim of the Guise faction's ultra-Catholic bigotry. Forgotten by all but a few specialists for the next four hundred years, he becomes important only in the twentieth century when the significance of his dialectical logic was appreciated, at least for its historical importance.

As for John Dee, usually described for years as an eccentric bibliophile with an unfortunate interest in necromancy, lately he has returned to the limelight, at least in the history of mathematics, because of his introduction to an edition of Euclid's geometry, an important document in cultural and educational history, and for his *Proaedeumata Aphoristica* (1558 and 1668), a work about earth-centered astronomy.

As regards later members of this heterodoxy, Fludd's fate was to have his books collected as graphic masterpieces, and their illustrations reproduced as fine examples of schemata and concepts for their time. For example, we reproduce his chart of the universe and his picture of a monochord. He is

usually discussed, if at all, as part of some larger picture or as a participant in some controversy, seldom because anyone took a serious interest in his ideas, religious or otherwise.

Kepler is best remembered for his very real and major contributions to astronomy, and sometimes for his interesting musical ideas,<sup>12</sup> but their underlying intellectual or religious structures are seldom discussed now. Nor did Kepler's ideas usually find expression in any major literary or philosophical work by others.

Kircher remained, for all his speculations and visionary proposals in architecture, acoustics, and world culture, a devout Roman Catholic and Jesuit; one sees pictures from his books reproduced here and there, as with Fludd, but, once again, his works are seldom read and, for the most part, do not form the subject of much significant research.

None of these three figures wrote any special commentaries on Bruno or hailed him as their messiah, in spite of certain basic affinities. Nevertheless, we can say with Irving Louis Horowitz, that "in every era, a philosopher with an encyclopaedic sweep emerges; a thinker who synthesizes and transforms all past contributions to thought in terms of the situation of his own times. This is the greatest accomplishment of Giordano Bruno's philosophy."<sup>13</sup> This, we might add, is also what sets Bruno and his ideas above and apart from his contemporaries whom we have just discussed.

### iii

To fit *De Imaginum... Compositione* into Bruno's career, we can suggest that perhaps the most important fact that emerges from Bruno's life is his death and the circumstances which surround it. He was, for most of his life, a wandering scholar and thinker with an admittedly difficult and argumentative personality. As of 1591, when he completed *De Imaginum... Compositione*, he had no particular destination or plan for the immediate future that we know of. It was at this time he gave the text of *De Imaginum... Compositione*, to Johann Wechel for publication.

It was also then that a prominent Venetian, Zuane Mocenigo, approached Bruno's friend, the bookseller Giovanni Battista Ciotti, bought Bruno's *De Minimo Magna et Mensura* from him, and asked him whether he knew and could bring Bruno to Italy to teach him his secrets of memory and invention. All this is documented in the transcript of Bruno's trial.

Bruno had always wanted to be reunited with the Roman Church and consistently said that he taught nothing which could not be reconciled with Christianity. Furthermore, he was after all an Italian and never quite at home in the northern countries. One might well imagine that he would be delighted by the prospect of a return to Italy. Bruno received two letters at Frankfurt from Mocenigo, repeating the invitation. He then accepted and went to Italy (1591), ultimately moving into Mocenigo's home. There survive several manuscript fragments of a work drafted at this time, *De Vinculis in Genere* ("On Chains in General"), now in the Rumianzov Museum in Moscow. Had Bruno completed it, it would have been fascinating, because it seems to expand the metaphysical arguments in Book One, Part Two of *De Imaginum... Compositione*.

Mocenigo's real motives are unknown; presumably he wanted to know about Bruno's memory system in order to amass wealth and was perhaps disappointed by the lack of results, after Bruno arrived and instructed him. Also, it seems incredibly rash to us, as indeed it did to Bruno's contemporaries, that he should have returned to Italy at all. Perhaps he had second thoughts about coming. In any case, he told Mocenigo that he intended to return to Frankfurt, presumably to oversee the printing of *De Imaginum... Compositione*. By this time Mocenigo had, however, decided to denounce Bruno to the Inquisition and have him incarcerated. So when Bruno reiterated his intention to go north again, Mocenigo determined that the time had come to act. Bruno was roused from his bed by Mocenigo, arrested on Friday, May 22,

1592, and the following day conducted to the jail of the Holy Office, never again to be a free man. In due course (February 1593) Bruno's transfer from Venice to Rome was authorized by the Doge's Council, and Bruno was moved to Rome to the dungeons of the Inquisition.

The story of Bruno's trials is in all his biographies. We need not repeat it in any detail. After Napoleon conquered Rome, transcripts of Bruno's interrogations and trial were discovered in the Papal archives and later published by Spampanato in his *Documenti...* (1933). To this volume we refer the reader who wants full details. We will simply summarize the actual events. They make chilling reading, although some people such as Giovanni Battista Ciotti, a Venetian bookseller, gave daring testimony on Bruno's behalf.

Bruno first testified on May 26, 1592, and from then on, until the conclusion of the trials, he did not defend himself or recant so much as attempt to justify his intellectual and religious positions. From April 1594 until March 1597, he was given every opportunity to recant, but since his ideas were, for him, matters of firm conviction and conscience, he did not. A serious attempt was made to persuade him to recant in December 1598. Once again he did not. Evidently, of the inquisitors, only one, Tommaso Morosini, truly wanted to burn Bruno. The others were more concerned for the prestige value of a recantation from so eminent a heretic.

Time passed.

Bruno did not recant, although in January 1599 alone he was given two opportunities. Finally on January 25, Bruno declared his readiness to accept the personal decision of Pope Clement VIII (r. 1592-1605) as to his guilt. Why did he do that? We can only speculate: this pope was a great patron of the arts. Perhaps Bruno imagined that, when all was said and done, the pope would excuse him on the basis of his artistic achievements. No such luck. On February 4, 1599, the pope, in full Congregation, announced his decision: Bruno was to be given forty more days to recant, and, if he did not, he was to be burned.

On February 18th, this decision was read to Bruno in the dungeon. Bruno still did not recant. In August and September he was given yet two more last chances to do so. He did not. On December 21, 1599, he was visited by the papal officers once more, but he said that he would not recant since he had nothing to retract, despite the fact that the Inquisition claimed to have found at least eight heretical passages in his writings. On February 4, 1600, he was brought from the dungeon and the sentence of death pronounced. On February 8, the Inquisition transferred him to the Secular Arm, to be burned alive on February 12th. There was yet one more postponement. Bruno was tortured by the Bishop of Verona's staff, yet he did not recant, did not appeal for mercy. And so, on February 17th, 1600, at the age of fifty-two, Bruno was burned alive in the Campo dei Fiori in Rome. Legend has it that his last words were: "I die a martyr and willingly. My soul shall mount up with the smoke to paradise." Actually, however, he was gagged to prevent any last outburst.

*De Imaginum... Compositione*, since it is the last of his works that is anywhere near complete, must stand, then, as the final indicator of his thoughts prior to martyrdom. It is also, perhaps, the most outspoken and intransigent of the works published in his lifetime, at least from the viewpoint of Roman Catholic orthodoxy.

## iv

We can only indicate other aspects of Bruno's thought and work, here, by turning to *De Imaginum... Compositione* itself. What kind of book is it?

As we have noted, it was published in Germany in 1591 at the time Bruno left on his final trip to Italy and the stake. Evidently, he never saw proofs, and the printers did an inadequate job both of

typesetting and printing the book. Little attention was given to *such* details as pagination, so that, for instance, pages 18, 142 and 158 appear as pages 10, 124 and 188. No manuscript survives, so we will never know how finished the original text was. Parts, especially in Book One, read more like lecture notes or outlines intended to be filled in later. Yet other parts are undoubtedly finished and polished, with rugged verse sections, Lucretian or Ovidian in inspiration, interspersed throughout the prose.

But *De Imaginum... Compositione* is not simply another of Bruno's mnemonic texts, a "magic memory system" or "power source," as Yates puts it,<sup>14</sup> but an attempt to investigate and lay bare the images themselves, to discover what makes them work, and how, both in theory and by example, they are constructed. The images do, in fact, add up to assemblages of extraordinary vividness. As for the underlying theory, Bruno seems to be approaching something like modern semiotics, the study of signs and codes (though of course he does not call it that). But semiotics also considers how things acquire meaning, and how such meanings are conveyed. Thus, the centrality in semiotics of the distinction between sign and word, the "signifier" and "signified," the thing it refers to or means.<sup>15</sup> In the following passage from Book One, Part One, Chapter Ten, Bruno discusses the importance of both:

Images do not receive their names from the explanations of the things they signify, but rather from the condition of those things that do the signifying. For in a text we are not able to explicate passages and words adequately by signs like those we trace out on paper, unless we think of the forms of sensible things, since they are images of things which exist either in nature or by art and present themselves to the eyes. Therefore images are named not for those things they signify in intention, but for those things from which they have been gathered...

One wonders if Fernand de Saussure, the father of modern semiotics, who did his researches in the 1890s just after the first collected volumes of Bruno's Latin texts appeared, read it Saussure published nothing about this; in fact most of what we have comes via his and his students' notes. But it is not inconceivable that he knew Bruno's Latin texts, since the 1890s were a time when Bruno was very well known, at least as a martyr figure. But this, of course, is only speculation, yet leading to a line of inquiry, in our view, well worth pursuing.

## V

Turning to the text of *De Imaginum... Compositione*, the careful reader *must not* skip the "Dedicatory Epistle" which begins the work, since there Bruno describes what he is setting out to do, namely to present idea, imagination, analogy, figure, arrangement and notation, the universe of God and the world I of nature and *reason*, so that one may understand precisely how and why analogs among things reflect and imitate divine action. In this way, he will reach a more developed state of knowledge and enlightenment.

*De Imaginum... Compositione* itself is divided into three books. The first presents philosophical reasons and underpinnings, the second provides a vision of the Olympian deities, and the third assembles a methodology of mnemonics, games and ludibria, and diagrams. The first book is further divided into two parts, the first concerned with philosophical and psychological principles and pure logic. It even discusses Christian cabalism in i-1-5 (Book One, Part One, Chapter Five). The second part has to do with the world of communications, and also introduces the mnemonic materials that are further developed in Book Three. In other words, where Part One is general, Part Two is more specific. Neither part deals as such with traditional metaphysical issues like ontology, cosmology, etc. All the issues are discussed in an ongoing dialectic without dialog, resembling in Bruno's works only the much earlier [*Lo*] *Spaccio*. Perhaps the best overview of the First Part is that it summarizes Bruno's views of philosophy and psychology as a whole, while in Part Two he presents what seems to be his new matter and its practical

application. Along the way are many fascinating implications drawn from the main line of development. For example, in i-2-20, the climax of Book One, Bruno argues for the unity of all the arts in a way that suggest Nineteenth Century ideas about synesthesia or Twentieth Century ones about intermedia. We have already noted the semiotics passage in i-1-10, with its particular relevance to contemporary concerns. Some may find Bruno's description of rebuses, also in i-1-10 and in Bruno's time still a novelty, especially delightful.

Book Two is an imagistic approach to the twelve Olympian deities of the old Greco-Roman religion. Neptune does not appear because traditionally he does not dwell on Mount Olympus but in the sea. Neither does Pluto. Each divinity has a court of virtues and personifications, so that one gets something suggesting Renaissance painting with its often multilayered crowd scenes. Here resides the literary center of Bruno's work, for let us not forget that *De Imaginum... Compositione* is both philosophy and art, where Bruno interweaves passages of durable lyrics, with prose that is by turns lofty and didactic.

In Book Three the images are broken down into parts; now specific means of approaching the mind and revitalizing it with images are suggested. Although passages of poetry are less frequently encountered than in Book Two, here, too, there are some chapters with solid poetry: iii-5, "Proteus in the House of Mnemosyne," explores dazzlingly the interconnection of things by means of language. Here, starting with the familiar opening lines of Vergil's *Aeneid*, which any educated contemporary of Bruno might be expected to know by heart (as our own grandfathers did), he points out how this implies the daily world existing outside the text. Since Bruno characteristically insists, especially in his later works, on the interconnection of things, that accepting one part of reality means acceptance of some or even all of the rest of it, this forms one of the most important statements in his entire corpus.

## vi

Up until now, there has been a good deal of confusion regarding the illustrations in Bruno's last works, not just in *De Imaginum... Compositione*, and we believe that we are now in a position to shed some light on the problem. Wandering into an occult book store with a friend, one of us (Dick Higgins) happened to pick up a popular work, Derek and Julia Parker's *A History of Astrology* (1983), and opened it to page 97. There, staring up at us, was a color version of something extremely close to Bruno's "Sun" and "Venus" illustrations from ii-11 and ii-13, taken from "a 1495 copy of the *Flores Astrologici* of Albumasar." We have been unable to locate an edition of 1495, but there is indeed an edition of 1500 of Albumasar's *Flores Astrologiae*, published in Venice by Giovanni Baptista de Sessa, whose illustrations, beautiful wood engravings by an anonymous artist, are also included in Albumasar's *De Magnis [Con]iunctionibus*, also published at Venice but in 1515 and by Jacopo Penzio de Lecho for Melchior Sessa. Although these editions are in black and white, and the copies we have seen are not even hand colored, our belief is that the Parkers' illustration comes from the 1500 edition.

"Albumasar" is the Latin name of Abu Ma'shar, short for Abu Ma'shar Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Balkh (ca. 805-886 C.E.), a Moslem astronomer from Balkh in Central Asia. One of his major works is the *Kitab Ahkam Sini al-Mawalid*, translated into Latin as *De Magnis [Con]iunctionibus*; the core portion of this work was first published as *Flores Albumasaris* in 1487, 1488 or 1489 by Erhard Ratdoldt at Augsburg, and the complete version appeared later that year with the same publisher and also at Augsburg. In both these early editions there are wood-engraved illustrations which are similar to Bruno's, with superior impressions in the earlier book, and slightly more worn ones in the later one. They are printed over and over again in both works, according to the combinations of the heavenly bodies with the signs of the zodiac; in the complete work, for example, a gentler-looking Saturn than Bruno's is at D1<sup>r</sup> and D3<sup>r</sup>, Mars at D1<sup>r</sup>, Jupiter at E1<sup>r</sup>, Sol (Sun) at E4<sup>r</sup>, Venus at R<sup>r</sup>, Mercury at F1<sup>v</sup>, and Luna (Moon) at K2<sup>r</sup>. This last differs the most from Bruno's; Luna has two youths pulling her chariot, not women, but on its wheels is the sign for Cancer, the crab.



Albumasar's work was, we know, highly regarded; it was reprinted into the seventeenth century, for example the *TraumBuch Apomasaris* (1655). In modern times the *Flores Albumasaris* (1487) has even been reprinted in a bibliophile edition. There are serious studies of his writings, concerning their place in the history of science both in German and in English, for example Pingree (1968) and Sarton (1927-31; 1,568 and 2,170). No wonder, then, that an Italian edition should appear so soon after the German one, and that its illustrations should be closely redrawn from the earlier one. The main difference in the Italian edition concerns the image of Luna, which now shows women instead of two youths pulling her chariot.

We do not know how many editions of the *Flores Albumasaris* appeared under various names in the sixteenth century, but there must have been at least seven of them. These to have become one of the normative ways in which standardized and popular images of the Olympians spread even after Bruno's death. Nowicki (1970, fcg.334) includes the Moon (the earlier version), Sun, Venus, and Moon (the version appearing in Bruno), reprinted from Caspar Hersbach, *Curzer Discurs...* (Koln: printer unknown, 1616); this work discusses, among other things, the appearance of a great comet in that year, and the illustrations could only have come from Albumasar.

However, it is not directly from Albumasar that Bruno borrowed his illustrations but from an important edition of the Venerable Bede, *Opera Bedae Venerabilis Presbyteri, Angbsaxonis...* (Basel: per Ioannem Heruagium, 1563), where they appear on pages 403 and 439, used as illustrations for Bede's "Mundi Sphaera." These illustrations are, line for line, Bruno's actual wood engravings, reused by the printer and slightly more battered than when they first appeared in the Basel edition of Bede. Whether they were used for the first time in the Bede book we do not know; they may have been lifted from some unknown earlier source. But the Bede work deals with heavenly bodies, as does Albumasar's book. It also agrees with Bruno's remark in ii-12, the "Luna" section, that "In Germany I came upon this not inappropriate illustration of the Moon," since at least part of the Bishopric of Basel was included in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. He could well have encountered the book itself in Germany proper. And finally, Bruno, as he considered these images that were made for works on astrology or astronomy, could then see how different they were from traditional views of the Olympians, thus giving us such sometimes puzzling discrepancies as the "German Sun" in ii—11.

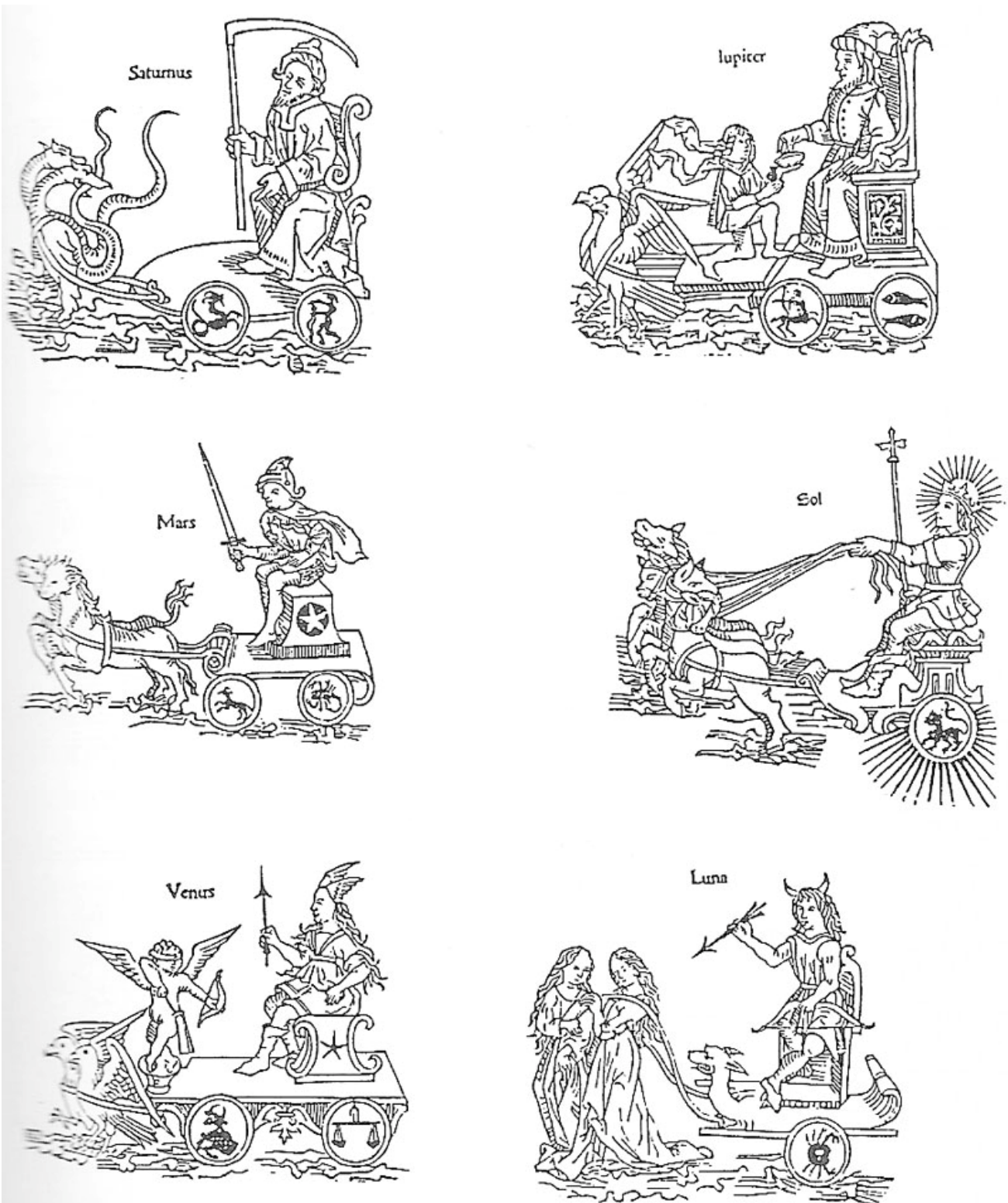
But, of course, *De Imaginum... Compositione* includes other illustrations as well: diagrams in Books One and Three. The following passage appears in the introduction by Johann Wechel to another book by Bruno, *De Triplici Minimo et Mensura* (1591), ill (1889:1 pt 3,123-4), already mentioned in another context:

*Opus aggressus, ut quam accuratissime absolveret, non schemata solum ipse sua manu sculpsit, sed etiam operarum se in eodem correctorem præbuit.* (He [Bruno] having energetically begun the work, so that he could finish it as accurately as possible, did not just engrave the charts with his own hand, he even made changes in them).

A few of the diagrams in the 1591 edition of *De Imaginum... Compositione* are printed in "reverse," that is, with white lines on a dark background. These must be the ones which Bruno engraved himself. As anyone knows who has tried to carve a linoleum or wood block, it is easier to etch lines *into* a piece of wood (or linoleum) than shave away just enough wood so as to leave only a thin, raised portion. But when one carves the lines into the material, the raised portion is what catches the ink and prints dark; the incised lines do not catch ink, and there the paper shows through as a white line on a dark background. Therefore, we believe that it is these negative cuts which were made by Bruno's own hand, that he was not skilled enough (nor did he attempt) to make the more complex illustrations or the diagrams which are printed in type.

Finally, there is one diagram which appears twice, the "Archetypus" at i-2-19 and iii-4. In its second appearance, however, there is only a smudge in the center of the picture. Could it be that Bruno attempted to make changes on this block after it had already been used in i-2-19? Do we detect, perhaps, a

**Below (clockwise from top right):** Jupiter, Sol, Luna, Venus, Mars and Saturn. from Albumasar's *Flores Albumasaris* (1487), from the reprint of the Deutscher Verein für Buchwesen und Schrifttum zu Leipzig, Zwickau: F. Ullmann, 1928. Courtesy of the Rare Book Room, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. \*KB/1489.



**Below (clockwise from top right):** Mars, Venus, Saturn, Mercury, Sol and Jupiter, from Albumasar's *De Magnis [Con]iuncttanibus* (Venezia: Mandato expensis M.Sessa, per J. Pentium de Leucis [=Jacopo Penzio de Lecho].1515. Courtesy of the Rare Book Room, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. \*KB/1515.





tone of dismay in Wechel's remark above, that Bruno was "also" trying to make changes? Publishers have lamented authors' changes since that industry began; perhaps Wechel had this in mind as well. **We**

In Tocco's edition, the illustrations have not been reproduced photographically from the originals but have, instead, been completely redrawn, made more elegant, cleaned up and refined. The diagrams are all positive (dark on a light background), and the Olympians are rendered as handsome and beautiful as possible, although technically such details of the iconography as the horoscopic signs on the wheels of the Olympians' chariots are unchanged. What is lost in expressive impact is gained in clarity. However, the current reprint (1962) of Tocco's edition does not do these illustrations justice; it is about fifty per cent smaller than the original edition, and inevitably visual impact is lost. Tocco's illustrations are fairly good nineteenth-century book plates, correct in imagery, but perhaps too pretty for Bruno's text. This is especially true of Tocco's Saturn, who looks like a nice middle-aged gentleman, not the fearsome figure in Bruno's text.

## vii

A short introduction is no place to go into a detailed study of sources and influences. Sources here, in any case, are very hard to determine. However, Bruno may well have had access to texts which disappeared in the burning of libraries such as John Dee's during the religious controversies and wars of the time; and some of these lost works might indeed have influenced him.<sup>16</sup> We know Bruno is not always accurate when he quotes sources. On the one hand, as a travelling scholar he must have had to depend a lot on his memory. On the other, he may have known variants of texts which are no longer accepted and are thus not always easy to recognize. For instance, he may well have known works on natural history, since lost, which provided him with the lists we could **could** not identify in, for instance, iii-1. We doubt he made up his names from whole cloth; that would not be in keeping with his spirit.

Whatever else he is, he is no carbon copy of the others in his lineage: Llull (whose relationship with Bruno has only just begun to be explored, by Frances Yates, Anthony Bonner and others),<sup>17</sup> Ficino, Agrippa, Paracelsus, Ramus, Dee, and, later, Kepler. He strives to be inclusive in his moving into the vast and the unknown, to incorporate into his thought every idea or system which appeals to him.

As for influence, *De Imaginum... Compositione* had, as such, virtually none, because it was considered a rare and difficult text for hundreds of years, and the 108 known surviving copies of the 1591 edition were usually inaccessible. There was no other one until Tocco's in the *Opera Latine Conscripta* (dated 1890 but probably 1891), published almost exactly three hundred years later. However, in the Brunonian corpus, it provides the best summation of his thoughts in general and of the more specialized ideas presented in the Latin works in particular. Apart from the *De Imaginum Compositione's* intrinsic interest, if Bruno himself is important, then the role this work plays in his entire corpus becomes extremely significant.

About Bruno's influence in general, many have attempted to document it, with varying degrees of success, on this or that literary or philosophical figure and to describe just what it was. Passing over Spinoza, Leibniz, and Jacobi, where the influence is quite complex, Beyersdorff attempts to show influence on Shakespeare (unconvincing, except, perhaps, for Prospero in *The Tempest*);<sup>19</sup> Lakin's PhD dissertation attempts to detect it in Chapman;<sup>20</sup> Warnlof's in Sidney (Sidney was a friend of Bruno for a time, and is the dedicatee of the *Heroici Furori*);<sup>21</sup> Saenger in Goethe;<sup>22</sup> Frye in Novalis;<sup>23</sup> Snyder in Coleridge (her views are balanced and hold up well),<sup>24</sup> and Boldereff and Voelker in Joyce.<sup>25</sup> This list could be extended; as of yet, nobody, to our knowledge, has tackled the Schlegel brothers, whose ideas in the *Athenaeum* "Fragmente" overlap extensively with Bruno's (more so than with their fellow *Athenaeum* author Novalis).

For the most part, it is not, however, the work of Bruno that has had the greatest impact but the mythic figure, that of the martyred magus. The romantic philosopher Schelling presents his Bruno as a dramatist would, as an interesting character but not a mouthpiece for Bruno's ideas. Joyce appears to have read some Bruno, but seems more delighted by his name (*bruno* means "brown," of course, and is a traditional name for a bear) than by any specific concepts or ideas. In such a situation, it should be *De Imaginum... Compositione* which one consults as a touchstone Latin text, if only to establish influence.

But having suggested a dissociation of Bruno from those names with which he is most often associated, we can also suggest other important areas. In the context of our own time, when "postmodernism" has been made an issue by many, it is interesting to see a mind from so long ago working on the basis of semiotics.

Another "postmodern" concern is myth; it is clearly also a preoccupation with Bruno, who uses it as a way of extending language and concept by tapping into what was, to his day, either the familiar or perhaps, as Bruno often makes of it, the dangerous. His synesthesia, which sometimes becomes an aesthetic, the convergence of poetry, prose and visual art, is of interest today also, and it is noteworthy that Bruno provides a historic paradigm for this. Perhaps the main influence of Bruno's *De Imaginum... Compositione* is yet to come, in some area as yet unknown.

But to stress only the historical significance and contemporaneity of *De Imaginum... Compositione*, to look for its influence, is to miss part of the point. This work is not just a recast Bible for Bruno's hypothetical "Church of Thoth," as we called it earlier, not just a source for others or even only a paradigm. It is a literary monument. Philosophers tend to mistrust literary philosophy, and with good reason; their objectives are, however, different. But *De Imaginum... Compositione* is, as we have noted, midway, intermedial as it were, between philosophy and work of art. As we read it, we not only discover the philosopher, the scientist and the believer, but we encounter the man speaking to us in his own voice, complete with feelings. Sometimes in *De Imaginum... Compositione* he rages, at another moment, as in the "Venus" chapter of Book Two, he sings us love songs, or perhaps, as in Books One and Three, he will play word or number games for our amusement. In Book Two he creates, in word and image, a vast portrait of the Olympians and their friends, with dazzling and sometimes horrifying vividness (as in the long chapter on Saturn, with its visions of grief, hunger and death). Even if one rejects the work as philosophy, has no particular interest in history or even the slightest interest in Bruno's religion, the work can still be appreciated as a work of art that achieves a measurable awareness and heightening of the purposes and methods of mental and spiritual development.

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