

“I will tell the truth”

Interviewing Giordano Bruno

Bellarmino was not the actual executioner of the Nolan

GUIDO DEL GIUDICE

Interviewing Giordano Bruno is something which has always fascinated me. As I couldn't imagine his face, I always wanted to try to recreate his voice and finally rip off the gag, that sad symbol of the tradition which has always celebrated him as a martyr but ignored him as a thinker. If the myth of the “martyr of the free thoughts” has endured till nowadays, it's not just because of the torture he went through. Many other gallant and indomitable people suffered worse fates. People like Giulio Cesare Vanini, Jan Hus or other perfect strangers forgotten even by history. But the Catholic Church burned alive one of the main philosophers of all time, a prophet moved by an enthusiastic desire of being listened. He decided to face the torture when he realised that he couldn't do that anymore. Fate and history led him to a weird destiny: the fact of having sacrificed



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Guido del Giudice is one of the main scholars in the world who studies the works and philosophy of Giordano Bruno. Author of several essays (among which “The dispute of Cambray” and the curatorship of “Summa of the metaphysical terms”), he also created the most complete website about the Nolan.

his life for the freedom of speech ended up compromising the apostolic spread of his philosophy. This is why, reading his words, we can give him credit, not by raising impressive simulacra for a sacrifice, which should be useful to get to know his extraordinary thoughts. Not vice versa. Thus, an imaginary interview seemed to me the ideal way of expressing in the most clear and concise way the basic ideas of Bruno's philosophy.

It has not been easy, though, finding the right setting. As he was always *on the road*, Giordano Bruno had very few contacts, even where he stayed longer. Being convinced of the fact that “every land is homeland for the true philosopher”, he used to keep moving, looking for a base of operations for his missions: teaching and getting civil and religious reforms. So, apart from the convent of S. Domenico, where he

studied and stayed for a while, the place where he stayed longer (almost eight years!) were, unfortunately, the Inquisition's jails.

I got the hint for the realisation of the project during my studies about the trials and the protagonists of the trials. In jail Bruno met the two most important representatives of his Order: the General Master of the Dominican Order, Ippolito Beccaria, and his Vicar, Paolo Isaresi, chosen by the panel of judges of the Roman Holy Office to carry out the last effort to persuade the stubborn heretic.

There couldn't have been a better occasion to express his actual ideas!

Besides this, the research on Beccaria led me to finding a new, interesting, truth. Often ignored by biographers, this inflexible and merciless Dominican stood out for the severity used to persecute his brother, way before Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino started to be considered the actual "executioner" of the story. He was the one who had insisted for the continuous

and hard torture for the prisoner, though he never managed to subdue the indomitable character of the Nolan, as he was convinced of the importance of supporting the basis of his philosophy, till the extreme consequence.

Bruno: What an honour! The most Reverend General Father is deigning me of visiting my humble cell even today!

Beccaria: You'd better stop joking. Repent!

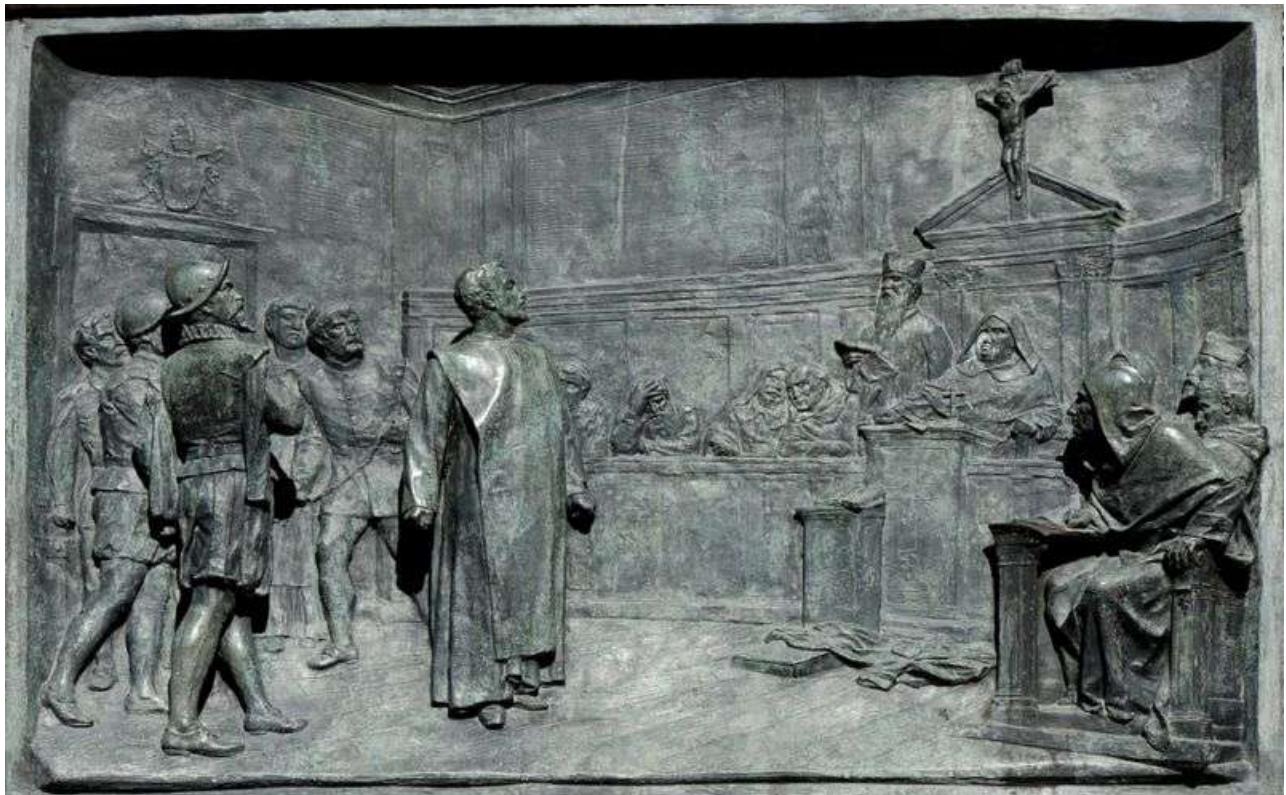
Bruno: Why am I supposed to repent? Because I came to tell the truth? What sort of Mercury would I be if I admitted that it was all false? It's not my duty to

determine which is the good Church and which is the evil one. It's not my duty to say whether the fairest Church is the Catholic, the Calvinist or the Lutheran. I am ready to confront and state my mistakes. I am a philosopher, not a theologian. But when you ask me to repent, because I supported the heliocentric theory, because I showed the infinity of the universe, are basically telling me: repent of being Giordano Bruno! Then I can't help but telling you: I don't know why I should repent! Because I am myself? That's impossible.

Beccaria: You're still being unreasonably assumptive! Despite the fact that we have been sympathetic with you: nobody else has had as many chances of redemption as you did. We were hoping that your clear intelligence would make you understand your mistakes.

Bruno: Let's be honest, Ippolito. You are playing the cat-and-mouse game. You are trying to unnerve me by alternating tortures with mercy, sympathy and asking for my repentance.





Ettore Ferrari. *The trial to Giordano Bruno in front of the Roman Inquisition*, bronze bas-relief, Rome, Campo de' Fiori. In the previous page, same author, bronze monument portraying Giordano Bruno.

But I won't fall in your trap! Your aim is clear now: what you actually want is a complete, unconditional renunciation to my ideas.

Beccaria: We just want to make you realise how absurd your theories are. You are a great man, Giordano, you know perfectly the Scriptures, Aristotle has no secrets for you: why can't you realise the vacuity of your ideas? How can you waste your knowledge with such fantasies? Don't you realise that your hypothesis have

no basis?

Bruno: My philosophy makes my soul fly higher and magnifies my intellect! It is trust in the physical and intellectual skills of the true man, not the beast.

Isaresi: Is it possible that you, always ready to dissimulate, can't come to terms on some part of your thoughts? Even when your life is threatened? If it is true what you say, that no God will ever account you for whatever lie, why can't you abjure, to save your life?

Bruno: Listen, Paolo. There are some ideas which everyone, who has got to a certain point of philosophical maturity, can't give up on, unless you want to question your entire existence. One has to choose. One has to decide which are the things we can't give up on and which ones we can question. You can say whatever you want on the cornerstones of my philosophy, but there is nothing to do: I can't give up on my ideas, or I wouldn't be who I am!



From left: *Saint Roberto Bellarmino*, Bottega ligure, XVII century, oil on canvas; *Giordano Bruno* in engraving.

February 17, six in the morning. The Comforting Fathers of the Archconfraternity of S. Giovanni Decollato went to take *Giordano of the quondam Giovanni Bruni, friar and apostate from Nola*, shutting his tongue in the gag because of the terrible words he said, and brought him to the location of the torture.

The French ambassador had openly asked for the stakes to be done during the night and in the part of the square which was farther from his house. I wonder whether he knew that on that morning the smell of burnt flesh,

which he hated, came from the body of the Master who had lived, waited on, hand and foot, in a French embassy. During the whole journey from the jails of Tor di Nona to the scaffold in Campo de' fiori square, in front of the Theatre of Pompey, the comforters sang their litany, trying to make the convict acknowledge his mistakes.

Bruno. “What do they want now? I can hear them reading their psalms, suggesting me to repent. Here my nightmare is coming true! I wish I could answer, but I can't speak. I

hear this nail piercing my tongue and the blood flowing hot, almost comforting, from my lips, along the neck, drenching my clothes. If I try to speak, no voice comes out: just blood! Every effort to emit sounds leads to more blood. In streams, a dark red. Every drop is an idea, a piece of truth, which flows luxuriant to clot on my naked body, which they are now tying to a stake, among piles of fagots. On this stake you will only burn my worldly body, but my ideas will survive. You won't manage erasing every sign of my thought and memory!”