

Articoli/5

Giordano Bruno

Heroism, Metamorphosis and Animality*

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The question I wish to ask is the following: why does Bruno appeal to the theme of “speculative” heroism in a work of magic? What are the relationships between heroism, magic and animality? Can magic be equated with heroism? Or is the nature of the mage different from that of the hero? To begin answering the question, we must, in my opinion, revisit the theme of the relationship between heroic frenzy and animal frenzy, as presented by Bruno in *The Heroic Frenzies*. In this context, the relationship between heroism, metamorphosis and animality, highlighted in *The Heroic Frenzies*, is at the heart of Brunian magic.

In the second part of the *Lampas triginta statuarum* (1587-1590), one of the major works devoted to magic, Giordano Bruno defines the application modalities of the «invention method» of the images described in the first part and founded on the principle of the great chain of being (*schala naturae*). Bruno's intention is to highlight the correspondence between the order of nature and that of the human soul, as man's intellectual faculties are capable of creating a mental order that *reflects* the natural order. This analogy is based in particular on the relationship that exists between the natural metamorphosis of beings and the action of the imagination. Human knowledge must indeed be based on the power of images and Bruno intends to specifically make use of the power of the imagination to develop a method of «inventive» knowledge, applicable to the field of physical metamorphosis. This method is, for Bruno, the fundamental tool of natural magic.

It is in this context that Bruno proceeds to classify things according to their proximity to or distance from the «superior level» (*gradus supremus*) of beings. The result is a «ladder of nature» composed of thirty levels, among which are, for example, in ascending order, void, shadow, matter, atoms, water, earth and

metals¹. As such, Bruno also offers a «ranking» of living beings on the natural ladder according to their faculties and, in particular, what he calls their «strength of apprehension» (*vis apprehensionis*), depending on their ability to «feel» (*sensus*). Living beings can thus be classified on the natural ladder according to «genus» that are defined by their «participation» in a specific degree of sensation and apprehension.

At the lowest ranking, Bruno places the «zoophytes» (*zoophyta*), that is to say, beings who seem to possess only the sense of touch². After zoophytes come the «brutes», «who seem to feature a greater number of external senses or who possess all»³. After the brutes come beings endowed with imagination, who are able of combining the activity of the external senses with that of the internal senses, in other words, those who possess memory or the power of «estimation», according to the terminology of Avicenna's *Liber de Anima* that Bruno repeats here⁴. On the fourth level of the classification feature beings distinguished by the action of their «rational substance» (*substantia rationalis*), which is greater than the power of imagination, but inferior to intelligence (*intelligentia*). These are the beings who possess reason, which is the medium between the senses and the intellect⁵.

The last level is occupied by «heroic nature and substance» (*natura et substantia heroica*), which characterises all beings who do not yield to the action of the senses and live in the intellectual sphere, in virtue of a purer spirit⁶. But, Bruno continues, «even if we can assume that such a nature belongs to the human race, the sages nonetheless feel that the predicate 'man' can only be equivocally attributed to heroes, to those who strive for perfection in the speculative sciences and to those who have not reached perfection, as indeed we can only equivocally attribute the predicate 'man' to the dead and the living. There is indeed a greater difference between heroes and men than between idiots, horses and elephants»⁷.

Bruno goes on to say that the difference between animated species is not dependent on their external form or physical conformation but rather on their «interiority», since, in fact, from the perspective of apprehension, many animals are closer to men than to monkeys, even though these latter are similar to men in

* Translated from the French by Jeremy Daly.

¹ G. Bruno, *Lampas triginta statuarum*, in *Opere magiche*, Latin text, under the direction of M. Ciliberto, edited by S. Bassi, E. Scapparone, N. Tirinnanzi, Milan 2000, pp. 1304-1306: «Constat nobis, iuxta vere physicam et antiquam philosophiam plerumque rerum maxime congruentem naturae, schala naturae triginta gradibus».

² *Ibid.*, p. 1308: «Sunt zoophyta, hoc est ea quae solum tactus sensum indicant».

³ *Ibid.*: «Sunt bruta, quae vel pluribus, vel omnibus sensibus externis praedita videntur».

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*: «Est substantia rationalis, quae per rationem mediat inter sensum et intellectum, et habet actus onfra intelligentiam et supra imaginationem».

⁶ *Ibid.*: «Est natura et substantia heroica, utpote his proprie est attributa quae sensum lenocinii non decipiuntur, captivantur, sed puriore spiritu intellectualiter magis vivunt».

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 1308-1310: «Quae natura licet in hominum genere intelligatur, indicant tamen sapientes hoc nomen hominis aequivoce dici de heroibus et perfectis per scientias speculativas et de aliis non perfectis, sicut aequivoce dicitur de mortuo et vivo: et forte maior differentia est inter istos, quam sit inter idiotas homines et equos et elephantes».

the arrangement of their limbs⁸. Bruno thus manages to distinguish a substantial degree of difference between two types of «nature»: one that is characterised by the use of reason, and another that is defined by the use of the intellect, a superior faculty to reason. «Men» belong to the first type, while «heroes» belong to the second. However, the interest of the argument summoned here by Bruno particularly lies in the gap between these two types of nature: indeed, there is a wider gap between men and heroes than between men and animals. That is to say that beings on the fourth level are closer to those found on the third and second than those on the fifth – i.e. heroes. While the beings from the first to the fourth level of the great chain of being – zoophytes and natures that possess «rational substance» – constitute a relatively logical series connected by successive transformations presupposing those preceding them, the fifth level represents a true leap forward in the gradual structure of living beings. «Heroic substance» signifies perfection on the ladder of living beings, since it allows for the realisation of intellectual bliss.

It is also due to the following that, according to Bruno, certain men are closer to animals than to heroes: because of their weak rational substance, these men can not reach the last level of heroic substance and, as a result, present behaviours and properties that render them similar to beasts. Reciprocally, certain animals possess sensitivity that sometimes renders them very close to men with rational substance. It is important to emphasise that, in this regard, the arguments summoned by Bruno in this part of the *Lampas triginta statuarum* refer only to the use of a purely «internal» power and do not appeal to «external» conformity, that is to say, power arising from organic and corporeal conformation, such as in *The Cabala of Pegasus*. In this work, indeed, Bruno clearly insists on the substantial homogeneity between the soul of man and that of animals. The difference between men and beasts is a difference of «figure» (*figurazione*), since the soul «of man is similar in its generic and specific essence to that of flies, oysters, plants and all that is animated or has a soul»⁹. It is the «figure», that is to say, the species of body (*specie di corpo*) that determines the difference between the souls of men and beasts, because «according to the diversity of complexions and members, [the soul] acquires different levels and perfections of spirit and operations»¹⁰.

We know that in *The Cabala of Pegasus*, Bruno invokes the hand to highlight the difference between men and animals because, although «it is possible that many animals may have more sense and a more informed intellect than man»¹¹, animals are deprived of appropriate instruments to use this intellect, notably the hand, the «organ of organs», as Bruno specifies. Hands allow men to build «institutions of doctrine, inventions of discipline, congregations of citizens, structures of buildings and so many other things that are signs of greatness and human excellence and which make man the truly undefeated triumphant victor

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1310.

⁹ G. Bruno, *La Cabale du cheval pégaséen*, in *Œuvres Complètes*, tome VI, Paris, 1994, p. 94.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

over the other species»¹². The «material complexion» (*material complessione*) or «figure» of their bodies prevents «universal intelligence» (*universale intelligenza*), with which both animals and men are endowed, from expressing and asserting itself in actions of excellence – that is to say, heroic actions. In *The Cabala of Pegasus*, the heroism that human nature can reveal depends thus on the relationship between the intellect and the hand, and therefore comes from the work of «civilisation», a construction that deeply engages the minds as well as the bodies of men¹³.

In the *Lampas triginta statuarum*, however, Bruno insists exclusively on the strength and power of the intellect as a prerequisite to the affirmation of heroic nature. Therefore, in her commentary on this passage of the *Lampas triginta statuarum*, Nicoletta Tirinnanzi rightly highlights Bruno's Averroist theme of intellectual beatitude from the speculative sciences as well as the use of a specific Ficinian problematic from the *Platonic Theology*. «Heroic» nature is distinguished from «human-animal» nature because of an exceeded limit, an exceptional effort to conquer the beatitude of intellectual knowledge beyond any fixed «assignment» in the great chain of being. This beatitude does not come from divine grace or natural destiny but from the intellectual effort that man is capable of achieving in infinite nature in metamorphosis. From Bruno's point of view, man has no specific «dignity» in this nature, which is always the result of relentless speculative activity in the infinity of material life¹⁴.

This theme of the limit and excess of «heroic» nature in relation to «human-animal» nature, as it is formulated in the *Lampas triginta statuarum*, has led me to formulate my problematic. The question I wish to ask is the following: why does Bruno appeal to the theme of «speculative» heroism in a work of magic? What are the relationships between heroism, magic and animality? Can magic be equated with heroism? Or is the nature of the mage different from that of the hero?

To begin answering the question, we must, in my opinion, revisit the theme of the relationship between heroic frenzy and animal frenzy, as presented by Bruno in *The Heroic Frenzies*. I will focus my analysis in particular on the Fourth Dialogue of the First Part. I will only recall in this regard that Bruno, from the *Argument* that introduces *The Heroic Frenzies*, insists that his research targets divine love and does not concern «the effects of an obstinate vulgar love,

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ On this subject, cf. the classic works of F. Papi, *Antropologia e civiltà nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno*, Florence 1968; M. Ciliberto, *La ruota del tempo. Interpretazione di Giordano Bruno*, Rome 1986; N. Ordine, *Le mystère de l'âne: essai sur Giordano Bruno*, Paris 1993.

¹⁴ G. Bruno, *Lampas triginta statuarum*, cit., p. 1570-1571. Here Bruno particularly refers to Averroës' *Proemium in Libros Physicorum*, as well as Chapter 2 of Book X of Marsilio Ficino's *Theologia platonica*. N. Tirinnanzi's interpretation essentially echoes the treatises formulated by M. Ciliberto, *La ruota del tempo. Interpretazione di Giordano Bruno*, cit.; Id., *Umbra profunda. Studi su Giordano Bruno*, Rome 1999; Id., *L'occhio di Atteone. Nuovi studi su Giordano Bruno*, Rome 2002.

animal and bestial»¹⁵. We know that here Bruno conducts a controversial anti-Petrarchan polemic based on Ficino's famous distinction between divine love (*amor divinus*) and bestial love (*amor ferinus*)¹⁶. Indeed, he asserts that «my first and principal, secondary and subordinate, final and ultimate design in this work to which I have been called, was and is to signify divine contemplation and present the eye and ear with other frenzies, not those caused by vulgar love, but those caused by heroic love»¹⁷.

In the eyes of Bruno, Petrarchan poetry is «melancholic» poetry that celebrates the love for a woman in flesh and bone and is therefore unable to rise to divine frenzy. More generally, in *The Heroic Frenzies*, Bruno takes a position in debates raised, especially in Italy from the first half of the 16th century, by the numerous commentated editions of Aristotle's *Poetics*. These discussions concerned, in particular, the status and function of poetry based on the Aristotelian definition of the poet as «the one who creates a representation» or as an «imitator of images», like a painter¹⁸. We also know that the issue of Petrarchism was at the centre of poetic controversies in England in the late 17th century and that *The Heroic Frenzies* is targeted at Petrarchan poets like Philip Sidney¹⁹.

At the end of the Third Dialogue of Part I, Bruno clearly associates, as in *Lampas triginta statuarum*, «heroic frenzy» with «ultimate happiness», corresponding to perfection in the speculative sciences, according to the terms employed by Peripatetics and Averroës. He particularly emphasises the fact that «[f]or in this condition of ours we cannot desire or attain greater perfection than that which is ours when our intellect through the medium of some noble intelligible species is united either to the separate substances, as some say [the Averroists, ed.], or to the divine mind, if we employ the idiom of the Platonists»²⁰. But this perfection, adds Bruno, lies not so much in full and complete comprehension of divine unity - impossible to achieve by man - but in the effort with which his finite intellect tries to understand it, according to his own possibilities within infinite material. «It is enough that all attempt the journey. It is enough that each one do whatever he can; for a heroic mind will prefer falling or missing the mark nobly in a lofty enterprise, whereby he manifests the dignity of his mind, to obtaining perfection in things less noble, if not base»²¹.

¹⁵ G. Bruno, *The Heroic Frenzies* [Electronic Version], retrieved from <http://www.esotericarchives.com/bruno/furori.htm>, 1964.

¹⁶ Cf. M. Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, tr. by J. Sears, Thompson, Dallas 1985, chap. VII. For Plato's passage, cf. *Phaedrus*, 265a. On this theme, cf. G. Canziani *Le metamorfosi dell'amore. Ficino, Pico e i Furori di Bruno*, Milan 2001.

¹⁷ G. Bruno, *The Heroic Frenzies*, I, 3, cit.; argument of the Nolan.

¹⁸ Cf. Aristotele, *Poetics*, 1640b 8.

¹⁹ Cf. J. C. Nelson, *Renaissance theory of love: the context of Giordano Bruno's Eroici Furori*, New York 1958; P. Sabbatino, *Giordano Bruno e la «mutazione» del Rinascimento*, Florence 1993; M. P. Ellero, *Lo specchio della fantasia. Retorica, magia e scrittura in Giordano Bruno*, Lucca 2005.

²⁰ G. Bruno, *The Heroic Frenzies*, I, 3, cit.

²¹ *Ibid.*

It is in this respect that Bruno evokes the famous image of the «wheel of metamorphoses», already at the centre of *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*. Indeed, he writes, «this conversion and change is symbolized in the wheel of metamorphoses, in which a man is placed at the top, a beast lies at the bottom, one half-man and half-beast descends from the left, and one half-man and half-beast ascends from the right»²². The highly paradigmatic character of this image, as well as the Plotinian and Ficinian terminology used here by Bruno, should not deceive us: it is clearly emphasised that this metamorphosis is only accomplished in the cycle of infinite material and that it does not presuppose any form of ultimate ascension to hierarchically-ordered divine transcendence. Unlike Ficino, Bruno believes that the «heroic conversion» of man takes place entirely within material infinity in metamorphosis and that it corresponds to the maximal use of the intellect and intellectual will. These are precisely the methods and forms of this «use of the faculties» that distinguish the heroic lover from the man who yields to bestial nature²³.

The impossibility of man leaving the «wheel of metamorphoses» determines the specific meaning that Bruno attributes to the difference between the «heroic lover» and the man endowed with a bestial nature. Following the example of Jupiter, who assumes the form of a beast because of the affection he feels for inferior and multiple things but who, remembering his dignity, then resumes his divine form, the heroic lover must go through all the metamorphoses of infinite life, including those that come from the body and those that make of him a «beast», in an attempt to comprehend, by the intellect and intellectual will, divine beauty and goodness²⁴. The end of the Third Dialogue of Part I of *The Heroic Frenzies* is based entirely on the need for the heroic lover to pass through the «animal» condition, that is, through infinite matter, to attain the «perfection» of the speculative sciences. It is a journey that in no way corresponds to a «blockage» of the wheel of metamorphoses, nor to a prolonged permanence in animality or bestiality – that is, confined to a state entirely determined by the affections of the body. The need to pass through the bestial condition allows for appreciating the true value of the frenzy's «nobility» – by comprehending the beauty and divine goodness grasped in the cycle of metamorphosis²⁵.

This analysis of the frenzy, based on the theme of animality, is taken up and developed in the Fourth Dialogue, particularly from the famous example

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.* For the difference with Ficino, cf. M. Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, translated by M. J. B. Allen, Harvard 2006, VI, 2.

²⁴ G. Bruno, *The Heroic Frenzies*, I, 3, cit. The example of Jupiter caught in the wheel of metamorphoses naturally refers to *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* and the theological-political question of «sacrifice». Cf. A. Ingegno, *La sommersa nave della religione. Studio sulla polemica anticristiana del Bruno*, Naples 1985; G. Sacerdoti, *Sacrificio e sovranità. Teologia e politica nell'Europa di Shakespeare e Bruno*, Turin 2002; on the relationship between *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* and *The Heroic Frenzies* in regard to the «wheel of metamorphoses», cf. F. Raimondi, *La Repubblica dell'assoluta giustizia. La politica di Giordano Bruno in Inghilterra*, Pisa 2003.

²⁵ Cf. A. Ingegno, *Observations sur les concepts de furor et de métamorphose*, in *Fureurs, héroïsme et métamorphoses*, dir. by P. Magnard Louvain 2007, pp. 7-21.

of Actaeon, who as we know plays the model of the heroic lover²⁶. The figure of Actaeon is indeed presented by Bruno and based on animal metaphors that highlight the characters and forms of his frenzy. In the poem by Tansillo, which illustrates the «capture of divine wisdom» carried out by Actaeon, as well as in the extended commentary by Bruno, it is clear that the frenzy is inseparable from a *devenir-animal*, to use Machiavellian terminology²⁷. What does Actaeon in fact do? He «unleashes the mastiffs and the greyhounds», symbols of the intellect and will, «near the traces of the wild beasts», that is to say, «the intelligible modes of ideal concepts», who reside «among the waters», namely in infinite nature or «in the mirror of similitudes». It is in seeing nature, «the power and external operation» of divinity, that «the great hunter [...] becomes the prey». Indeed, «this hunter set out for prey and became himself the prey»²⁸.

Actaeon is, *simultaneously*, hunter and prey: «this hunter set out for prey and became himself the prey through the operation of his intellect whereby he converted the apprehended objects into himself [...] And he becomes the prey by the operation of the will whose act converts him into the object»²⁹. As a hunter, Actaeon must appeal to his «dogs», that is, his «intelligible modes» and his will, which are unleashed in search of the «wild beast» – the good, wisdom and beauty. And «[o]nce he was in their presence, ravished outside of himself by so much beauty, he became the prey of his thoughts and saw himself converted into the thing he was pursuing. Then he perceived that he himself had become the coveted prey of his own dogs, his thoughts, because having already tracked down the divinity within himself it was no longer necessary to hunt for it elsewhere»³⁰.

What is the meaning of this decisive passage in *The Heroic Frenzies* in light of our problematic? In my mind, it resides entirely in the need for the heroic lover – Actaeon – to confront *animal metamorphosis* in order to achieve union with infinite nature. This nature is the wild beast (*la fiera boscareccia*) that cannot initially be hunted by Actaeon's «dogs» (*i mastini* and *i veltri*) and that then transforms Actaeon himself into prey. This means that the «animal nature» can only be known by Actaeon by a process – hunting – which presupposes an action by «animal thoughts», that is to say, thoughts that «searched [...] outside himself», as Bruno states. But the hunt ends with a radical metamorphosis and

²⁶ G. Bruno *The Heroic Frenzies*, I, 4, cit.: «Actaeon represents the intellect intent upon the capture of divine wisdom and the comprehension of the divine beauty.» For the complete study of Actaeon, cf. M. A. Granada, *Giordano Bruno. Universo infinito, unión con Dios, perfección del hombre*, Barcelona 2002; M. Ciliberto, *L'occhio di Atteone. Nuovi studi su Giordano Bruno*, cit.; F. Papi, *La costruzione delle verità. Giordano Bruno nel periodo londinese*, Milan 2010.

²⁷ It is indeed evident that Bruno takes up and develops here, according to a new perspective, the famous Machiavellian problematic of Chapter 18 of *The Prince*, devoted to the need for the «Prince» to «know well how to utilise beast and man.» Cf. N. Machiavel, *Le Prince*, Paris 2000, Chapter 18, p. 149 - 153. On the relationship between Bruno and Machiavelli, cf. M. A. Granada, *Giordano Bruno. Universo infinito, unión con Dios, perfección del hombre*, cit.; Id., *El umbral de la modernidad*, Barcelona 2000.

²⁸ G. Bruno, *The Heroic Frenzies*, I, 4, cit.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

he «becomes the prey of his own dogs», since Actaeon understands that the divine nature resides in him «by virtue of the regenerated intellect and will»³¹.

The heroic frenzy, of which Actaeon is the model, is therefore inconceivable outside of a double *devenir-animal*: the first corresponding to the intellectual knowledge of nature through intelligible modes – the dogs – and the second identifying the will that converts him into the beloved thing and makes him the prey – an animal. Actaeon in this way understands that only love for natural knowledge – the endless quest for infinity – can transform and metamorphose his own nature. «Actaeon becomes the prey of his own dogs, pursued by his own thoughts, turns his feet and *directs his new steps*; is renewed for a divine course [...] *toward the densest places*, toward the deserts, toward the region of incomprehensible things: from the vulgar and common man he was, he becomes rare and heroic, rare in all he does, rare in his concepts, and he leads the extraordinary life»³².

It is thus in virtue of this *devenir-animal* that Actaeon leaves the «bestial» condition of sensual love to acquire a heroic nature. Exceeding bestial love only takes place by the metamorphosing passage through animal nature. Herein also lies the richness on the Brunian reflection on the relationship between heroism and animality. Heroism, as the love of knowledge, is only conceivable as a voluntary conversion to the speculative sciences, oriented towards «the mirror of similitudes» and applied to the «shadows» of divine nature. It is the love for the knowledge of material nature in all its «animal» forms, that is to say, living and multiple, that transforms Actaeon from an ordinary man into a «heroic frenzy». The heroic metamorphosis of Actaeon, which allows him to leave «the world of folly, of sensuality, of blindness, and of illusion», and start «to live by the intellect; [to live] the life of the gods», symbolises from this point of view the *devenir-animal* of human nature, without which the transformation of intellectual power in speculative beatitude is not possible.

Actaeon's heroism is not the result of an immediate conversion arising from a pardon or divine gift: it always comes from his «virtue» and his *studio*, his willingness to go in search of wisdom and release his dogs in pursuit of the wild beast. Only then can Actaeon «*direct his new steps ... toward the region of incomprehensible things*», and «[feed] upon ambrosia and [become] drunk with nectar»³³, i.e. that he accesses a «new life», entirely governed by love, which «has the power to transform the heart into that other nature to which it aspires»³⁴. The love of knowledge that impelled Actaeon in pursuit of the «sublime prey» hidden in the woods – in the multiplicity of matter, moving shadows of divine unity – represents the sole cause of his «new life» and the «renaissance» of his nature.

This last point also seems crucial to understanding the meaning of Bruno's reflections on this subject. It is indeed clear that, in infinite matter in motion,

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

only heroic metamorphosis can allow human nature to reach the vision, in the shadow, of divinity³⁵. Furthermore, this metamorphosis still presupposes the need to confront the «contradictions» of matter and the prerogatives of animality. Therefore, the metamorphosis of Actaeon, through his *devenir-animal*, is reminiscent of Nietzsche's «three metamorphoses» of Zarathustra. Like Actaeon, Zarathustra must go through the cycle of the «three metamorphoses» (camel, lion and child) before reaching the «game of creation» and the innocence of the future. And like the metamorphoses of Actaeon, those of Zarathustra also imply «forgetting and beginning anew», forgetting his animality and beginning anew the «game of his creation» – his will for power. Bruno and Nietzsche here undoubtedly trace the outlines of a philosophy of metamorphosis based on the variation and perpetual transformation of «human-animal» power into heroic and superhuman power³⁶.

Another question is nevertheless necessary in this regard. Can the frenzy completely leave the human-animal life to only live a «heroic» life? Bruno is well aware of this difficulty and underlines the issues in the pages that follow the description of Actaeon's heroic frenzy. This means that the theme of exceeding animality by the frenzy is even more articulated than the example of Actaeon predicts. Bruno writes: «How shall I be able to feed upon the intelligible species alone, the food for the intellect, if my substance is a composite?»³⁷. This question is asked by the soul, that is to say, by the natural form that structures and orders the human compound, made of body and mind. «Come, come, oh my fleeting thoughts, my rebellious heart. Let the sense live on sensible things and the intellect upon intelligible things. Let matter and the corporeal subject be the support of the body, and the intellect be satisfied by its own objects; so that this complex continue to subsist, so that there be no dissolution of this machine, whose spirit unites the soul to the body»³⁸.

Through the voice of the soul, Bruno thus seems to again question the very meaning of Actaeon's heroic enterprise. Hence the other essential question that the soul asks of the «heroic thinkers»: «Does it seem natural to you that creatures should refuse the animal or the human life in order to live the divine life when they are not gods but only men and animals? It is a law of fate and of nature that each thing work according to the condition of its nature»³⁹. These questions asked of the «heroic thinkers» by the soul bring out all the difficulties

³⁵ See S. Ansaldi, *Giordano Bruno. Une philosophie de la métamorphose*, Paris 2010.

³⁶ Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Erster Teil, Von der drei Verwandlungen, Augsburg 1984. On the relationship between Bruno and Nietzsche, which has not been systematically studied, cf. D. Morea - S. Busellato *Nietzsche e Bruno. Un incontro postumo*, Pisa 1999; M. A. Granada, *Giordano Bruno. Universo infinito, unión con Dios, perfección del hombre*, cit., in particular pp. 331-363; P. Invernizzi, *Bruno e Nietzsche. Uomo eroico ed Oltreuomo*, <http://www.secretum-online.it/default.php?num=1568>, May 2011. For more in general on the relationship between Nietzsche and the philosophies of the Renaissance, cf. C. Bouriau, *Nietzsche et la Renaissance*, Paris 2015.

³⁷ G. Bruno, *The Heroic Frenzies*, I, 4, cit.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

in regard to exceeding human-animal nature by the heroic frenzy. Indeed, this excess implies breaking the laws of nature (*legge della natura*), which assign to each being his own conditions of life. Thus, from the position of the soul, human nature belongs to the same order as animal nature, as it consists of body and thought, flesh and spirit, sensitivity and reason. «Therefore let the sense feed itself according to the law of sensible things, the flesh according to the law of the flesh, the spirit according to the law of the spirit, the reason according to the law of the reason; let them not be confused or troubled with one another»⁴⁰.

The discourse of the soul is that of reason, which recalls the importance of not leaving a «human-animal» life, mindful of the requirements of the body. The heroic frenzy represents, from the point of view of the soul, a veritable separation from natural law since it establishes a split, even within human nature. «Therefore you transgress when, seduced by the beauties of the intellect, you leave the other part of me in danger of death. Whence have you engendered this perverse and melancholy humour of breaking certain natural laws of the true life, a life you hold in your power, for an uncertain life that is nothing if not a shadow beyond the limits of the imaginable?»⁴¹. The frenzy of love, as Ficino perfectly demonstrated in his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, is rooted in melancholy and forgetting the desires of the body⁴². This is why it represents, in this sense, a real «perversion» of the natural law of «human-animal» nature, which implies considering both the love of the intellect and the desires of the body. Thus, Bruno states, «[b]y these and similar arguments the soul, pleading the cause of its more infirm part, seeks to recall the thoughts to the care of the body»⁴³.

In this regard, Bruno points out that it is not about contrasting two types of souls, one that would be close to the body and to matter and the other close to the intellect, because «there are not two contrary essences, but only one essence subject to two extremes of contrariety»⁴⁴. Rather, it is about understanding the effects that come from «the impulse of the one and the other potency or faculty»⁴⁵. What consequences can be drawn from the elevation of the soul to the intelligible world – that of the «frenzy» – or from its descent to the sensitive faculty and activities related to the body? Bruno's answer is thus: he states that, in fact, «there are three degrees of intelligences – those in which the intellectual dominates over the animal, called celestial intelligences; those in which the animal prevails over the intellectual, called human intelligences; and others in which the two balance each other as in the intelligences of demons or heroes»⁴⁶.

In regard to the «ranking» of living beings to be established in the *Lampas triginta statuarum*, Bruno provides no definition of animal intelligence as such,

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Cf. M. Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, cit., particularly the 7th discourse.

⁴³ G. Bruno *The Heroic Frenzies*, I, 4, cit.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

but rather *links* the criterion for defining different degrees of intelligence to animality. Therefore, although the ranking is less accurate and comprehensive than that of the *Lampas*, the relationship between humans, animals and heroism remains most important. What then signifies that heroic (or demonic) intelligences are those where animals are equal to the intellectual? This means that intelligences follow the natural movement of the wheel of metamorphoses. While celestial intelligences are not subject to the downward descent and animal-human intelligences do not ascend, the heroic intelligences are those that must constantly struggle to climb up and avoid falling down. It is in this sense that animals can equal the intellectual. This fight or combat is precisely that highlighted by Bruno during the discourse of the soul, which constantly reminds the intellect of the action of the body's affectations. Bruno continues,

[f]or that reason souls can be known to ascend or descend by their affectations, to come from above or from below, to be on the way of becoming beasts or gods, according to their specific natures [...] for the human soul need not have the power to become the soul of a brute⁴⁷.

The heroic soul is that which rises «by virtue of contemplation, or is transported above the horizon of the natural affectations» and is therefore, «conquered by its most lofty thoughts, as though dead to the body [...] and although it continues to live in the body, the soul vegetates there as if dead and is present in the body as an animate potency incapable of any action»⁴⁸. Unlike an *animal-human* soul or intelligence, which lives entirely according to the body's operations and its sensitive nature, the heroic intelligence, by its elevation in the wheel of metamorphoses, forgets its human-animal nature and leads *another* life, where «the operations of the soul as a composite are delayed, enfeebled, and debilitated»⁴⁹. The heroic intelligence no longer struggles with the thoughts of the body, like the human soul where the animal prevails, because it can, by virtue of the *equality* between the intellectual and the animal, exercise *all the power* of the intellect. That is why «there are degrees of loves, affectations, and frenzies, according to the degrees of greater or lesser light of cognition and intelligence»⁵⁰.

It is, therefore, in these terms, at the end of the Fourth Dialogue of Part I of *The Heroic Frenzies*, that Bruno illustrates the «passage» of the animal frenzy to the heroic frenzy, emphasising the need to fully exceed the level of human intelligence, where the animal prevails over the intellectual. In light of these findings and to return to our initial question, why is the classification of living beings that is found in the *Lampas Triginta Statuarum* more articulated and complex than that of *The Heroic Frenzies*? Why does Bruno, in this magical work, introduce additional levels in the great chain of being and intelligence? Because it is precisely in this work that he defines the *heroism of the mage*. What

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

then is this type of heroism? And can we specifically speak of magical heroism? I will respond to these questions in the affirmative⁵¹.

To my eyes, magical knowledge effectively presupposes a double heroism. Why? Because the mage must first acquire knowledge to be able to act, as Bruno alleges in the *De magia naturalis* – which specifically arises from a heroism of knowledge⁵². The mage's knowledge, in fact, consists of two types of knowledge. The magician must indeed, on one hand, know the methods of the constitution of images in terms of the human mind and, on the other hand, agree to the laws of the «community of things» and possess «an overall understanding of the universe» to be able to act «civilly»⁵³. A work like the *Lampas triginta statuarum* is devoted to the first type of knowledge, while the *De magia naturalis* and *De Vinculis* are devoted to the second. This means that the acquisition of magical knowledge is borne out of a specific frenzy, leading the mage to go beyond his human-animal nature in view of «civil» action. What is, in this context, the meaning of the mage's civil action? It lies in the fact that the mage can act on the human-animal nature of other men, that is to say, the «linkables», according to the terminology of *De Vinculis*.

Here we again find the question of metamorphosis. The mage must not only transform his «animal-human» into a heroic nature, but he must also metamorphose the nature of others by *simultaneously* and *continuously* metamorphosing his own heroic nature. This implies a double metamorphosis, which affects two kinds of distinct natures: firstly, the mage-hero metamorphoses the nature of the «linkable» on which he exerts his action – the human-animal, according to the ranking of beings presented in the *Lampas triginta statuarum*; secondly, this process of metamorphosis affects his own, *already heroic* nature, which continues to metamorphose itself, because any magical action presupposes a reciprocal relationship between the «linker» and the «linkable», as Bruno clearly stresses in *De Vinculis*. The mage is indeed always involved in a double process of transformative action and metamorphosis – of himself and others⁵⁴.

In this context, the relationship between heroism, metamorphosis and animality, highlighted in *The Heroic Frenzies*, is at the heart of Brunian magic. Nevertheless, it is clear that both heroisms should in no way be confused: if the heroism of the frenzy comes from a solitary «contraction» of the power of thinking, then that of the mage is related to a sort of multiple «dissemination» of his power to act⁵⁵. It is nonetheless both fury and magic that are based on a

⁵¹ On the continuity between frenzy and magic, see S. Bassi, *L'arte di Giordano Bruno. Memoria, furore, magia*, Florence 2004.

⁵² G. Bruno, *De Magia naturali*, in *Opere Magiche*, cit., p. 166 : «A philosophis ut sumitur inter philosophos, tunc magus significat hominem sapientem cum virtute agendi».

⁵³ G. Bruno, *De Vinculis in genere*, in *Opere Magiche*, cit., p. 416 : «Nihil tandem esse videtur quod a civili speculatione sub forma huiusce considerationis (quatenus vel vincuntur vel vincuntur vel vincula quaedam sunt vel horum circumstantiae) possit esse alienum».

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, XXIX, p. 450. Cf. on this point, B. Pinchard, *Au péril des liens*, in P. Magnard (dir.), *Fureurs, héroïsme et métamorphoses*, cit., pp. 91-105.

⁵⁵ Cf. G. Bruno, *De Vinculis in genere*, cit., VI, pp. 422-424, where Bruno opposes the multiple talents of the mage to the «heroic delight» of certain philosophers, such as Anaxarchus, Epi-

«heroism of knowledge», in other words, the acquisition of specific knowledge, in virtue of which the frenzy and mage «exceed the ordinary», since both «do not go about speaking and acting as mere receptacles and instruments, but as chief inventors and authors»⁵⁶. Bruno recalls that the heroic frenzies are «not the rapture of one caught in the snare of bestial passion under the law of an unworthy fate; but a rational force following the intellectual perception of the good and the beautiful comprehensible to man»⁵⁷.

Like frenzy, magic is conceivable and only becomes possible from an extraordinary effort of understanding and mastering the art of memory, that is to say, the science of the «composition of images»⁵⁸. This art involves understanding perfection in the speculative sciences, a long journey of research and of learning the truth, far from all «delight» or free gift from the deity⁵⁹. Ultimately, the perfection that characterises both the frenzy's momentum and the mage's art always involves exceeding one's «human-animal» nature, arising from an «excessive» and metamorphosing affirmation of one's power to act and to know within the great chain of being⁶⁰. Highlighting the forms and methods of this excess is without doubt one of the major contributions of Giordano Bruno's philosophy to the question of the relationship between man and animal.

curus or Diogenes, who «showed to have attained a life similar to that of the gods.»

⁵⁶ G. Bruno, *The Heroic Frenzies*, I, 3, cit.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Cf. P. Rossi, *Il tempo dei maghi*, Milan 2006, pp. 79-102.

⁵⁹ Cf. G. Bruno, *Lampas triginta statuarum*, cit., p. 928: «Animae cibum esse veritatem, utpote quae in eius substatiā, veluti proprium nutrimentum, transmutabilis est, [esse] constat: perfectio et finis huius nutrimenti est lumen contemplationis».

⁶⁰ The theme of exceeding the «human-animal» nature goes back to the broader question of *anthropogenesis*. For a study of this question and its relationship to the notion of animality, cf. G. Agamben, *L'aperto. Uomo e l'animale*, Torino 2002.