

**“GIORDANO BRUNO”**

**WALTER PATER, 1889.**

**E-Texts for Victorianists**

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## GIORDANO BRUNO.

PARIS: 1586.

“Jetzo, da ich ausgewachsen,  
Viel gelesen, viel gereist,  
Schwillt mein Herz, und ganz von Herzen,  
Glaub’ ich an den Heiligen Geist.”—HEINE.

IT was on the afternoon of the Feast of Pentecost that news of the death of Charles the Ninth went abroad promptly. To his successor the day became a sweet one, to be noted unmistakably by various pious and other observances; and it was on a Whit-Sunday afternoon that curious Parisians had the opportunity of listening to one who, as if with some intentional new version of the sacred event then commemorated, had a great deal to say concerning the Spirit; above all, of the freedom, the independence of its operation. The speaker, though understood to be a brother of the Order of St. Dominic, had not been present at the mass—the usual university mass, *De Spiritu Sancto*, said to-day according to the natural course of the season in the chapel of the Sorbonne, by the Italian Bishop of Paris. It was the reign of the Italians just then, a doubly refined, somewhat morbid, somewhat ash-coloured, Italy in France, more Italian still. Men of Italian birth, “to the great suspicion of simple people,” swarmed in Paris, already “flightier, less constant, than the girouettes on its steeples,” and it was love for Italian fashions that had brought king and courtiers here to-day, with great *éclat*, as they said, frizzed and starched, in the beautiful, minutely considered dress of the moment, pressing the university into a perhaps not unmerited background; for the promised speaker, about whom tongues had been busy, not only in the Latin quarter, had come from Italy. In an age in which all things about which Parisians much cared must be Italian there might be a hearing for Italian philosophy. Courtiers at least would understand Italian, and this speaker was rumoured to possess in perfection all the curious arts of his native language. And of all the kingly qualities of Henry’s youth, the single one that had held by him was that gift of eloquence, which he was able also to value in others—inherited perhaps; for in all the contemporary and subsequent historic gossip about his mother, the two things certain are, that the hands credited with so much mysterious ill-doing were fine ones, and that she was an admirable speaker.

Bruno himself tells us, long after he had withdrawn himself from it, that the monastic life promotes the freedom of the intellect by its

silence and self-concentration. The prospect of such freedom sufficiently explains why a young man who, however well found in worldly and personal advantages, was conscious above all of great intellectual possessions, and of fastidious spirit also, with a remarkable distaste for the vulgar, should have espoused poverty, chastity, obedience, in a Dominican cloister. What liberty of mind may really come to in such places, what daring new departures it may suggest to the strictly monastic temper, is exemplified by the dubious and dangerous mysticism of men like John of Parma and Joachim of Flora, reputed author of the new "Everlasting Gospel," strange dreamers, in a world of sanctified rhetoric, of that later dispensation of the spirit, in which all law must have passed away; or again by a recognised tendency in the great rival Order of St. Francis, in the so-called "spiritual" Franciscans, to understand the dogmatic words of faith *with a difference*.

The three convents in which Bruno lived successively, at Naples, at Citta di Campagna, and finally the *Minerva* at Rome, developed freely, we may suppose, all the mystic qualities of a genius in which, from the first, a heady southern imagination took the lead. But it was from beyond conventional bounds he would look for the sustenance, the fuel, of an ardour born or bred within them. Amid such artificial religious stillness the air itself becomes generous in undertones. The vain young monk (vain of course!) would feed his vanity by puzzling the good, sleepy heads of the average sons of Dominic with his neology, putting new wine into old bottles, teaching them their own business—the new, higher, truer sense of the most familiar terms, the chapters they read, the hymns they sang, above all, as it happened, every word that referred to the Spirit, the reign of the Spirit, its excellent freedom. He would soon pass beyond the utmost limits of his brethren's sympathy, beyond the largest and freest interpretation those words would bear, to thoughts and words on an altogether different plane, of which the full scope was only to be felt in certain old pagan writers, though approached, perhaps, at first, as having a kind of natural, preparatory kinship with Scripture itself. The Dominicans would seem to have had well-stocked, liberally-selected, libraries; and this curious youth, in that age of restored letters, read eagerly, easily, and very soon came to the kernel of a difficult old author—Plotinus or Plato; to the purpose of thinkers older still, surviving by glimpses only in the books of others — Empedocles, Pythagoras, who had enjoyed the original divine sense of things, above all, Parmenides, that most ancient assertor of God's identity with the world. The affinities, the unity, of the visible and the invisible, of earth and heaven, of all things whatever, with each other, through the consciousness, the person, of God the Spirit, who was at every moment of infinite time, in every atom of matter, at every

point of infinite space, ay! *was* everything in turn: that doctrine—*l'antica filosofia Italiana*—was in all its vigour there, a hardy growth out of the very heart of nature, interpreting itself to congenial minds with all the fulness of primitive utterance. A big thought! yet suggesting, perhaps, from the first, in still, small, immediately practical, voice, some possible modification of, a freer way of taking, certain moral precepts: say! a primitive morality, congruous with those larger primitive ideas, the larger survey, the earlier, more liberal air.

Returning to this ancient “pantheism,” after so long a reign of a seemingly opposite faith, Bruno unfalteringly asserts “the vision of all things in God” to be the aim of all metaphysical speculation, as of all inquiry into nature: the Spirit of God, in countless variety of forms, neither above, nor, in any way, without, but intimately within, all things—really present, with equal integrity, in the sunbeam ninety millions of miles long, and the wandering drop of water as it evaporates therein. The divine consciousness would have the same relation to the production of things, as the human intelligence to the production of true thoughts concerning them. Nay! those thoughts are themselves God in man: a loan, there, too, of his assisting Spirit, who, in truth, creates all things in and by his own contemplation of them. For Him, as for man in proportion as man thinks truly, thought and being are identical, and things existent only in so far as they are known. Delighting in itself, in the sense of its own energy, this sleepless, capacious, fiery intelligence, evokes all the orders of nature, all the revolutions of history, cycle upon cycle, in ever new types. And God the Spirit, the soul of the world, being really identical with his own soul, Bruno, as the universe shapes itself to his reason, his imagination, ever more and more articulately, shares also the divine joy in that process of the formation of true ideas, which is really parallel to the process of creation, to the evolution of things. In a certain mystic sense, which some in every age of the world have understood, he, too, is creator, himself actually a participator in the creative function. And by such a philosophy, he assures us, it was his experience that the soul is greatly expanded: *con questa filosofia l'anima, mi s'aggrandisce: mi se magnifica l'intelletto!*

For, with characteristic largeness of mind, Bruno accepted this theory in the whole range of its consequences. Its more immediate corollary was the famous axiom of “indifference,” of “the coincidence of contraries.” To the eye of God, to the philosophic vision through which God sees in man, nothing is really alien from Him. The differences of things, and above all, those distinctions which schoolmen and priests, old or new, Roman or Reformed, had invented for themselves, would be lost in the length and breadth of the philosophic survey; nothing, in itself, either great or small; and matter,

certainly, in all its various forms, not evil but divine. Could one choose or reject this or that? If God the Spirit had made, nay! was, all things indifferently, then, matter and spirit, the spirit and the flesh, heaven and earth, freedom and necessity, the first and the last, good and evil, would be superficial rather than substantial differences. Only, were joy and sorrow also to be added to the list of phenomena really coincident or indifferent, as some intellectual kinsmen of Bruno have claimed they should?

The Dominican brother was at no distant day to break far enough away from the election, the seeming "vocation" of his youth, yet would remain always, and under all circumstances, unmistakably a monk in some predominant qualities of temper. At first it was only by way of thought that he asserted his liberty—delightful, late-found privilege!—traversing, in mental journeys, that spacious circuit, as it broke away before him at every moment into ever-new horizons. Kindling thought and imagination at once, the prospect draws from him cries of joy, a kind of religious joy, as in some new "canticle of the creatures," a new monkish hymnal or antiphony. "Nature" becomes for him a sacred term. "Conform thyself to Nature"—with what sincerity, what enthusiasm, what religious fervour, he enounces the precept to others, to himself! Recovering, as he fancies, a certain primeval sense of Deity broadcast on things, in which Pythagoras and other inspired theorists of early Greece had abounded, in his hands philosophy becomes a poem, a sacred poem, as it had been with them. That Bruno himself, in "the enthusiasm of the idea," drew from his axiom of the "indifference of contraries" the practical consequence which is in very deed latent there, that he was ready to sacrifice to the antinomianism, which is certainly a part of its rigid logic, the purities of his youth for instance, there is no proof. The service, the sacrifice, he is ready to bring to the great light that has dawned for him, which occupies his entire conscience with the sense of his responsibilities to it, is that of days and nights spent in eager study, of a plenary, disinterested utterance of the thoughts that arise in him, at any hazard, at the price, say! of martyrdom. The work of the divine Spirit, as he conceives it, exalts, inebriates him, till the scientific apprehension seems to take the place of prayer, sacrifice, communion. It would be a mistake, he holds, to attribute to the human soul capacities merely passive or receptive. She, too, possesses, not less than the soul of the world, initiatory power, responding with the free gift of a light and heat that seem her own.

Yet a nature so opulently endowed can hardly have been lacking in purely physical ardours. His pantheistic belief that the Spirit of God was in all things, was not inconsistent with, might encourage, a keen and restless eye for the dramatic details of life and character for humanity in all its visible attractiveness, since there, too, in

truth, divinity lurks. From those first fair days of early Greek speculation, love had occupied a large place in the conception of philosophy; and in after days Bruno was fond of developing, like Plato, like the Christian platonist, combining something of the peculiar temper of each, the analogy between intellectual enthusiasm and the flights of physical love, with an animation which shows clearly enough the reality of his experience in the latter. The *Eroici Furori*, his book of books, dedicated to Philip Sidney, who would be no stranger to such thoughts, presents a singular blending of verse and prose, after the manner of Dante's *Vita Nuova*. The supervening philosophic comment re-considers those earlier physical impulses which had prompted the sonnet in voluble Italian, entirely to the advantage of their abstract, incorporeal equivalents. Yet if it is after all but a prose comment, it betrays no lack of the natural stuff out of which such mystic transferences must be made. That there is no single name of preference, no Beatrice or Laura, by no means proves the young man's earlier desires merely "Platonic;" and if the colours of love inevitably lose a little of their force and propriety by such deflection, the intellectual purpose as certainly finds its opportunity thereby, in the matter of borrowed fire and wings. A kind of old, scholastic pedantry creeping back over the ardent youth who had thrown it off so defiantly (as if Love himself went in for a degree at the University) Bruno develops, under the mask of amorous verse, all the various stages of abstraction, by which, as the last step of a long ladder, the mind attains actual "union." For, as with the purely religious mystics, union, the mystic union of souls with each other and their Lord, nothing less than union between the contemplator and the contemplated—the reality, or the sense, or at least the name of it—was always at hand. Whence that instinctive tendency, if not from the Creator of things himself, who has doubtless prompted it in the physical universe, as in man? How familiar the thought that the whole creation longs for God, the soul as the hart for the water-brooks! To unite oneself to the infinite by breadth and lucidity of intellect, to enter, by that admirable faculty, into eternal life—this was the true vocation of the spouse, of the rightly amorous soul—"à filosofia è necessario amore." There would be degrees of progress therein, as of course also of relapse: joys and sorrows, therefore. And, in interpreting these, the philosopher, whose intellectual ardours have superseded religion and love, is still a lover and a monk. All the influences of the convent, the heady, sweet incense, the pleading sounds, the sophisticated light and air, the exaggerated humour of gothic carvers, the thick stratum of pagan sentiment beneath ("Santa Maria sopra Minerva!") are indelible in him. Tears, sympathies, tender inspirations, attraction, repulsion, dryness, zeal, desire, recollection: he finds a place for them all: knows them all

well in their unaffected simplicity, while he seeks the secret and secondary, or, as he fancies, the primary, form and purport of each.

A light on actual life, or mere barren scholastic subtlety, never before had the pantheistic doctrine been developed with such completeness, never before connected with so large a sense of nature, so large a promise of the knowledge of it as it really is. The eyes that had not been wanting to visible humanity turned with equal liveliness on the natural world in that region of his birth, where all its force and colour is twofold. Nature is not only a thought in the divine mind; it is also the perpetual energy of that mind, which, ever identical with itself, puts forth and absorbs in turn all the successive forms of life, of thought, of language even. But what seemed like striking transformations of matter were in truth only a chapter, a clause, in the great volume of the transformations of the Spirit. To that mystic recognition that all is divine had succeeded a realisation of the largeness of the field of concrete knowledge, the infinite extent of all there was actually to know. Winged, fortified, by this central philosophic faith, the student proceeds to the reading of nature, led on from point to point by manifold lights, which will surely strike on him, by the way, from the intelligence in it, speaking directly, sympathetically, to the intelligence in him. The earth's wonderful animation, as divined by one who anticipates by a whole generation the "philosophy of experience:" in that, the bold, flighty, pantheistic speculation became tangible matter of fact. Here was the needful book for man to read, the full revelation, the detailed story of that one universal mind, struggling, emerging, through shadow, substance, manifest spirit, in various orders of being—the veritable history of God. And nature, together with the true pedigree and evolution of man also, his gradual issue from it, was still all to learn. The delightful tangle of things! it would be the delightful task of man's thoughts to disentangle that. Already Bruno had measured the space which Bacon would fill, with room perhaps for Darwin also. That Deity is everywhere, like all such abstract propositions, is a two-edged force, depending for its practical effect on the mind which admits it, on the peculiar perspective of that mind. To Dutch Spinoza, in the next century, faint, consumptive, with a hold on external things naturally faint, the theorem that God was in all things whatever, annihilating, their differences suggested a somewhat chilly withdrawal from the contact of all alike. In Bruno, eager and impassioned, an Italian of the Italians, it awoke a constant, inextinguishable appetite for every form of experience—a fear, as of the one sin possible, of limiting, for oneself or another, that great stream flowing for thirsty souls, that wide pasture set ready for the hungry heart.

Considered from the point of view of a minute observation of nature, the Infinite might figure as "the infinitely little;" no blade

of grass being like another, as there was no limit to the complexities of an atom of earth, cell, sphere, within sphere. But the earth itself, hitherto seemingly the privileged centre of a very limited universe, was, after all, itself but an atom in an infinite world of starry space, then lately displayed to the ingenuous intelligence, which the telescope was one day to verify to bodily eyes. For if Bruno must needs look forward to the future, to Bacon, for adequate knowledge of the earth—the infinitely little; he looked back, gratefully, to another daring mind, which had already put the earth into its modest place, and opened the full view of the heavens. If God is eternal, then, the universe is infinite and worlds innumerable. Yes! one might well have supposed what reason now demonstrated, indicating those endless spaces which sidereal science would gradually occupy, an echo of the creative word of God himself,

“Qui innumero numero innumerorum nomina dicit.”

That the stars are suns: that the earth is in motion: that the earth is of like stuff with the stars: now the familiar knowledge of children, dawning on Bruno as calm assurance of reason on appeal from the prejudice of the eye, brought to him an inexpressibly exhilarating sense of enlargement of the intellectual, nay! the physical atmosphere. And his consciousness of unflinching unity and order did not desert him in that larger survey, making the utmost one could ever know of the earth seem but a very little chapter in that endless history of God the Spirit, rejoicing so greatly in the admirable spectacle that it never ceases to evolve from matter new conditions. The immovable earth beneath one's feet! one almost felt the movement, the respiration of God in it. And yet how greatly even the physical eye, the *sensible* imagination (so to term it) was flattered by the theorem. What joy in that motion, the prospect, the music, the music of the spheres!—he could listen to it in a perfection such as had never been conceded to Plato, to Pythagoras even.

“Veni, Creator Spiritus,  
Mentes tuorum visita,  
Imple superna gratia,  
Quæ tu creasti pectora!”

Yes! the grand old Christian hymns, perhaps the grandest of them, seemed to blend themselves in the chorus, to deepen immeasurably under this new intention. It is not always, or often, that men's abstract ideas penetrate the temperament, touch the animal spirits, affect conduct. It was what they did with Bruno. The ghastly spectacle of the endless material universe, infinite dust, in truth, starry as it may look to our terrestrial eyes—that prospect from which Pascal's faithful soul recoiled so painfully—induced in Bruno only the delightful consciousness of an ever-widening kin-

ship and sympathy, since every one of those infinite worlds must have its sympathetic inhabitants. Scruples of conscience, if he felt such, might well be pushed aside for the "excellency" of such knowledge as this. To shut the eyes, whether of the body or the mind, would be a kind of dark ingratitude; the one sin, to believe directly or indirectly in any absolutely dead matter anywhere, because involving denial of the indwelling spirit. A free spirit, certainly, as of old! Through all his pantheistic flights, from horizon to horizon, it was still the thought of liberty that presented itself to the infinite relish of this "prodigal son" of Dominic. God the Spirit had made all things indifferently, with a largeness, a beneficence, impiously belied by any theory of restrictions, distinctions, absolute limitations. Touch, see, listen, eat freely of all the trees of the garden of Paradise with the voice of the Lord God literally everywhere: here was the final counsel of perfection. The world was even larger than youthful appetite, youthful capacity. Let theologian and every other theorist beware how he narrowed either. The plurality of worlds! how petty in comparison seemed the sins, to purge which was the chief motive for coming to places like this convent, whence Bruno, with vows broken, or obsolete for him, presently departed. A sonnet, expressive of the joy with which he returned to so much more than the liberty of ordinary men, does not suggest that he was driven from it. Though he must have seemed to those who surely had loved so lovable a creature there to be departing, like the prodigal of the Gospel, into the furthest of possible far countries, there is no proof of harsh treatment, or even of an effort to detain him.

It happens, of course most naturally, that those who undergo the shock of spiritual or intellectual change sometimes fail to recognise their debt to the deserted cause: how much of the heroism, or other high quality, of their rejection has really been the growth of what they reject? Bruno, the escaped monk, is still a monk: his philosophy, impious as it might seem to some, a new religion. He came forth well fitted by conventual influences to play upon men as he was played upon. A challenge, a war-cry, an alarum; everywhere he seemed to be the creature of some subtly materialised spiritual force, like that of the old Greek prophets, like the primitive "enthusiasm" he was inclined to set so high, or impulsive Pentecostal fire. His hunger to know, fed at first dreamily enough within the convent walls as he wandered over space and time an indefatigable reader of books, would be fed physically now by ear and eye, by large matter-of-fact experience, as he journeys from university to university; yet still, less as a teacher than a courtier, a citizen of the world, a knight-errant of intellectual light. The philosophic need to try all things had given reasonable justification to the stirring desire for travel common to youth, in which, if in nothing else, that whole age of the

later Renaissance was invincibly young. The theoretic recognition of that mobile spirit of the world, ever renewing its youth, became, sympathetically, the motive of a life as mobile, as ardent, as itself; of a continual journey, the venture and stimulus of which would be the occasion of ever new discoveries, of renewed conviction.

The unity, the spiritual unity, of the world:—that must involve the alliance, the congruity, of all things with each other, great reinforcements of sympathy, of the teacher's personality with the doctrine he had to deliver, the spirit of that doctrine with the fashion of his utterance. In his own case, certainly, as Bruno confronted his audience at Paris, himself, his theme, his language, were the fuel of one clear spiritual flame, which soon had hold of his audience also; alien, strangely alien, as it might seem from the speaker. It was *intimate* discourse, in magnetic touch with every one present, with his special point of impressibility; the sort of speech which, consolidated into literary form as a book, would be a dialogue according to the true Attic genius, full of those diversions, passing irritations, unlooked-for appeals, in which a solicitous missionary finds his largest range of opportunity, and takes even dull wits unaware. In Bruno, that abstract theory of the perpetual motion of the world was a visible person talking with you.

And as the runaway Dominican was still in temper a monk, so he presented himself in the comely Dominican habit. The eyes which in their last sad protest against stupidity would mistake, or miss altogether, the image of the Crucified, were to-day, for the most part, kindly observant eyes, registering every detail of that singular company, all the physiognomic lights which come by the way on people, and, through them, on things, the "shadows of ideas" in men's faces (*De Umbris Idearum* was the title of his discourse), himself pleasantly animated by them, in turn. There was "heroic gaiety" there; only, as usual with gaiety, the passage of a peevish cloud seemed all the chillier. Lit up, in the agitation of speaking, by many a harsh or scornful beam, yet always sinking, in moments of repose, to an expression of high-bred melancholy, it was a face that looked, after all, made for suffering—already half pleading, half defiant—as of a creature you could hurt, but to the last never shake a hair's breadth from its estimate of yourself.

Like nature, like nature in that country of his birth, the Nolan, as he delighted to proclaim himself, loved so well that, born wanderer as he was, he must perforce return thither sooner or later, at the risk of life, he gave *plenis manibus*, but without selection, and, with all his contempt for the "asinine" vulgar, was not fastidious. His rank, unweeded eloquence, abounding in a play of words, rabbinic allegories, verses defiant of prosody, in the kind of erudition he professed to despise, with a shameless image here or there, product not of formal method, but of Neapolitan improvisation, was akin to

the heady wine, the sweet, coarse odours, of that fiery, volcanic soil, fertile in the irregularities which manifest power. Helping himself indifferently to all religions for rhetoric illustration, his preference was still for that of the soil, the old pagan one, the primitive Italian gods, whose names and legends haunt his speech, as they do the carved and pictorial work of the age, according to the fashion of that ornamental paganism which the Renaissance indulged. To excite, to surprise, to move men's minds, as the volcanic earth is moved, as if in travail, and, according to the Socratic fancy, bring them to the birth, was the true function of the teacher, however unusual it might seem in an ancient university. *Fantastic*, from first to last that was the descriptive epithet; and the very word, carrying us to Shakespeare, reminds one how characteristic of the age such habit was, and that it was pre-eminently due to Italy. A bookman, yet with so vivid a hold on people and things, the traits and tricks of the audience seemed to revive in him, to strike from his memory all the graphic resources of his old readings. He seemed to promise some greater matter than was then actually exposed; himself to enjoy the fulness of a great outlook, the vague suggestion of which did but sustain the curiosity of the listeners. And still, in hearing him speak you seemed to see that subtle spiritual fire to which he testified kindling from word to word. What Parisians then heard was, in truth, the first fervid expression of all those contending apprehensions, out of which his written works would afterwards be compacted, with much loss of heat in the process. Satiric or hybrid growths, things due to ὑβρις\*, insolence, insult, all that those fabled satyrs embodied—the volcanic South is kindly prolific of this, and Bruno abounded in mockeries: it was by way of protest. So much of a Platonist, for Plato's genial humour he had nevertheless substituted the harsh laughter of Aristophanes. Paris, teeming, beneath a very courtly exterior, with mordent words, in unabashed criticism of all real or suspected evil, provoked his utmost powers of scorn for the "triumphant beast," the "constellation of the Ass," shining even there, amid the university folk, those intellectual bankrupts of the Latin Quarter, who had so long passed between them gravely a worthless "parchment and paper" currency. In truth, Aristotle, as the supplanter of Plato, was still in possession, pretending to determine heaven and earth by precedent, hiding the proper nature of things from the eyes of men. Habit—the last word of his practical philosophy—indolent habit! what would this mean in the intellectual life, but just that sort of dead judgments which are most opposed to the essential freedom and quickness of the Spirit, because the mind, the eye, were no longer really at work in them?

To Bruno, a true son of the Renaissance, in the light of those large, antique, pagan ideas, the difference between Rome and the Reform would figure, of course, as but an insignificant variation upon

some deeper, more radical antagonism between two tendencies of men's minds. But what about an antagonism deeper still? between Christ and the world, say! Christ and the flesh?—that so very ancient antagonism between good and evil? Was there any place for imperfection in a world wherein the minutest atom, the lightest thought, could not escape from God's presence? Who should note the crime, the sin, the mistake, in the operation of that eternal spirit, which could have made no misshapen births? In proportion as man raised himself to the ampler survey of the divine work around him, just in that proportion did the very notion of evil disappear. There were no weeds, no "tares," in the endless field. The truly illuminated mind, discerning spiritually, might do what it would. Even under the shadow of monastic walls, that had ever been the precept, which the larger theory of "inspiration" had bequeathed to practice. "Of all the trees of the garden thou mayst freely eat! If you take up any deadly thing, it shall not hurt you! And I think that I, too, have the spirit of God."

Bruno, the citizen of the world, Bruno at Paris, was careful to warn off the vulgar from applying the decisions of philosophy beyond its proper speculative limits. But a kind of secrecy, an ambiguous atmosphere, encompassed, from the first, alike the speaker and the doctrine; and in that world of fluctuating and ambiguous characters, the alerter mind certainly, pondering on this novel reign of the spirit—what it might actually be—would hardly fail to find in Bruno's theories a method of turning poison into food, to live and thrive thereon; an art, surely, no less opportune in the Paris of that hour, intellectually or morally, than had it related to physical poisons. If Bruno himself was cautious not to suggest the ethic or practical equivalent to his theoretic positions, there was that in his very manner of speech, in his rank, unweeded eloquence, which seemed naturally to discourage any effort at selection, any sense of fine difference, of *nuances* or proportion, in things. The loose sympathies of his genius were allied to nature, nursing, with equable maternity of soul, good, bad, and indifferent, rather than to art, distinguishing, rejecting, refining. Commission and omission; sins of the former surely had the preference. And how would Paolo and Francesca have read the lesson? How would this Henry the Third, and Margaret of the "Memoirs," and other susceptible persons then present, read it, especially if the opposition between practical good and evil traversed another distinction, to the "opposed points," the "fenced opposites" of which many, certainly, then present, in that Paris of the last of the Valois, could never by any possibility become "indifferent," between the precious and the base, æsthetically—between what was right and wrong, as matter of art?

WALTER PATER.

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\*234. From *Aus der Harzreise*, “Bergidylle 2”: “Tannenbaum, mit grünen Fingern,” Stanza 10. See the [Project Gutenberg Text](#).

\*243. *Hybris*. *Liddell and Scott* definition: “*wanton violence*, arising from the pride of strength, passion, etc.”