

Giordano Bruno: Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know

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A possible relationship between Giordano Bruno and Edward de Vere has not, to my knowledge, been presented previously at Oxfordian conferences or in Oxfordian literature. This relationship, if correct, could have a significant bearing on the Shakespeare authorship question.

I first learned of Bruno in 1999, when Carole Sue Lipman, President of the Shakespeare Authorship Roundtable, California, kindly gave to me a copy of an exceptional talk by Julia Jones addressed to the S.A.R.¹ I subsequently acquired a copy of *Under the Molehill: An Elizabethan Spy Story* by John Bossy (2001), who noted that while Bruno was visiting England in 1583 as a guest of the French ambassador, he had acted as one of Sir Francis Walsingham's secret agents. The information he passed on, under the pseudonym "Henri Fagot", led not only to the arrest of persons associated with Mary, Queen of Scots but ultimately to the imprisoned queen's execution itself (p 157).

Later I bought a copy of *Elizabeth's Spy Master: Francis Walsingham and the Secret War that Saved England*, by Robert Hutchinson (2006). This confirmed that a "Henri Fagot" had betrayed the relationship between Mary, Queen of Scots, and Lord Henry Howard. The revelation implicated Francis Throckmorton, 1554-84, a Catholic and friend of the French ambassador Castelnau, (Hutchinson, p. 104). Throckmorton was subsequently executed.

While Jones and Bossy connect the above to the Authorship Question, neither relates any of it to Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. Hutchinson simply refers to Oxford's players in a footnote:

Catlyn wrote to Walsingham complaining that "the daily abuse of stage plays is such an offence to the godly and so great a hindrance to the gospel as the Papists do exceedingly rejoice at the blemish thereof. And not without cause, for every day of the week, the players' bills are set up in sundry places of the city: some in the names of [the actors' groups of] her majesty's men, some of the Earl of Leicester's, some of the Earl of Oxford's, some of the Lord Admiral's...so that when the bells toll to the lectors, the trumpets sound to the stages, whereat the wicked faction of Rome laughs for joy while the godly weep for sorrow. Woe is me, the play houses are pestered when the churches are naked. At the one it is not possible to get a place, at the other void seats are plenty."²

As we shall see, however, there are numerous suggestive links between Oxford and Bruno: the two may have met at a famous gathering hosted by Sir Fulke Greville on the evening of Ash Wednesday, 1584. More certain is that Bruno's revolutionary ideas, and even the way he phrased them, seem often directly ech-

oed in Shakespeare's plays, especially *Hamlet*. I will illustrate to these claims below.

Bruno's Life

Giordano Bruno (1548-February 17, 1600), was born the son of Giovanni Bruno, a soldier, and Fraulissa Giordano, in the town of Nola, about twelve miles from Naples, on the northeastern slope of Mount Vesuvius. He was christened Filippo, after the lord of the local manor, and at the age of ten was sent to school in Naples. In his fifteenth year he entered the Dominican monastery, where he was given the name Giordano.

Almost immediately the young seminarian began to rebel, especially against those priests who, he later wrote,

attempted to draw me from worthier and higher occupations, to lay my spirit in chains, and from a free man in the service of virtue to make me the slave of a miserable and foolish system of deceit.³

Bruno showed his independent spirit by removing all the pictures of the saints from his cell and by advising another monk to cease reading the *Seven Joys of Mary*, a popular but light-weight devotional book by Romanus Cessario, and occupy himself with more serious forms of literature.



Giordano Bruno, 1548-1600

At the age of twenty-four Bruno took holy orders and said his first mass. Shortly afterward he wrote a satirical play, in which he painted a vivid picture of the depravity which surrounded him. This provoked a charge of heresy by the Provincial of the Order. Realizing his danger, and hoping to escape the horrors of the Inquisition, in 1576 Bruno fled the monastery. He was 28 and destined to wander Europe for the next 15 years.

An Extraordinary Professor

Bruno first went to Genoa, where he supported himself by giving lessons in grammar and astronomy. Then in 1579 he moved to Geneva, where an Italian nobleman helped him to disseminate his ideas. The city of Calvin, however, was still too restrictive to tolerate his liberated notions, and so he left for

France, obtaining the degree of Doctor of Theology in Toulouse. He reached Paris in his thirty-third year.

Bruno's first lectures in the French capitol brought him the offer of a professorship at the University, which he was reluctantly obliged to decline because as an excommunicated monk he was forbidden from saying mass. The king, hearing of this, offered him an "extraordinary" professorship, which gave him the opportunity to stay in France and devote some of his time to writing. *Shadows of Ideas* was soon finished and gratefully dedicated to the monarch. This book, based upon Plato's *Republic*, was Bruno's first attempt to portray the essential unity of the universe.

England and Espionage

In the spring of 1583, at the age of 35, Bruno went to England. He carried a letter of introduction from King Henri III, brother of Francois, Duke of Anjou, to the French ambassador, Michel de Castelnau, Seigneur de Mauvissiere.

Castelnau immediately invited Bruno to be his guest at Salisbury Court, near Southwalk. It was apparently there that Bruno's secret life as a spy for Sir Francis Walsingham began. His involvement was not discovered until 1991 by the historian John Bossy. As we shall see, Marlowe himself (also perhaps a government agent) appears to have been aware of it.

Known vaguely as Castelnau's "chaplain," Bruno wrote several warning letters to Sir Francis Walsingham under the pseudonym Henri Fagot. Their chief topic at first was the developing relationship between Mary, Queen of Scots, and the Catholic Lord Henry Howard, author, devotional writer, and later Earl of Northampton. On 24 April 1583 Fagot informed Walsingham:

Post from the King of France arrived at the embassy today. In the packet was a letter from the Duke of Guise, commending himself to the ambassador & earnestly begging him to manage the affairs of the Queen of Scots in England as secretly as he possibly can.

Five days later he wrote:

M Throckmorton dined at the ambassador's house. He has already sent the Queen of Scots 1500 ecus, which is on the ambassador's account. This same day Milord Henry Howard, a Roman Catholic & papist, came to the ambassador's house on the stroke of midnight. He informed the ambassador that he had heard that he kept a Scot in his house who was being threatened with imprisonment on account of his religion.

Your servant,

H. Fagot

And again:

Monseigneur,

There are two merchants of popish books in the ambassador's house, his cook & his butler. They make trips to France to do business & to bring back popish books to sell here. One who helps to sell the books is called Master Herson, also one called Jehan Foxe, married to an Englishwoman: he is the worst of the lot. At the moment they are very worried & on the alert because some searchers have gone to the Half Moon in Southwalk, which is where their books are to be landed. They have given a great deal of money to the landlord of the Half Moon to keep quiet. I also advise you that, if you so wish, I have made the ambassador's secretary (a man named Courcelles) so much my friend that, if he is given a certain amount of money, he will let me know everything he does, including everything to do with the Queen of Scots & the cipher that is used with her. He tells me that, after your Excellency has inspected any packet addressed to her, he can put something else in it without anybody knowing.

Your humble servant,

Henri Fagot

P.S. Keep a close eye on the Scot called Fowler; he is extremely treacherous. The secretary [Courcelles] told me to tell you this.

Throckmorton and Howard were put under surveillance and arrested that November. Courcelles would prove to be the vital link that later enabled Walsingham to foil the Babington Plot, which ultimately led to Mary's trial and execution.

Elizabeth and Oxford University

Bruno was frequently taken to Court where he became a warm friend of Queen Elizabeth who—at least initially—expressed her admiration for his unusual accomplishments.

Encouraged by these early successes, Bruno went to Oxford University, where he introduced himself by giving lectures on the immortality of the soul, the doctrine of reincarnation—and Copernicus's heliocentric theory of the solar system. These ideas aroused such animosity among the professoriate that when he again defended Copernicus in a public debate he was prohibited from giving any further lectures and asked to leave the town.

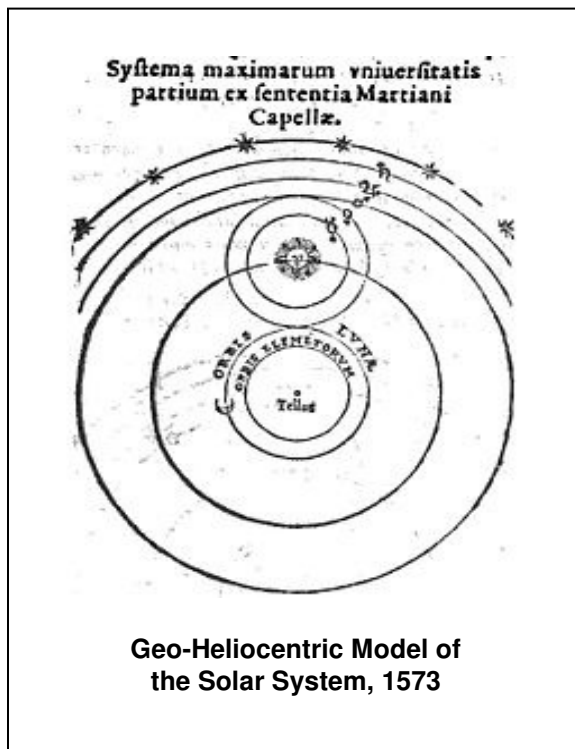
Bruno wrote his greatest and most famous works while in London: *Cena de le Ceneri* ("The Ash Wednesday Supper") and *De l'Infinito, Universo e Mondi* ("On the Infinite Universe and Worlds"), both published in 1584. He also wrote *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast; Cause, Principle & Unity* and *On The Infinite Universe and Worlds*.

In this final work he argued that the stars we see at night are like our Sun, and that the universe is infinite with a "plurality of worlds". Written in Italian but published by the Englishman J. Charlewood, these works are now known as Bruno's "London Dialogues". He dedicated two of them to his friend and "kindred sprit" Sir Philip Sidney, in his opinion the leading light of the English renaissance. Later he presented the queen herself with a compendium of his freshly

printed *Dialogues*, bound in black mullocco leather. But like so many others, Elizabeth now warily regarded him as “mad, bad, and dangerous to know.” Privately she ensured that he was denied a teaching post and thus any chance of remaining much longer in England.

Theosophy and Theocentrism

On the evening of Ash Wednesday, 1584, Sir Fulke Greville invited a number of his friends to his London home to meet the controversial Italian philosopher. Bruno gave a talk proposing that outer space is filled with countless solar systems, each with its own sun and orbiting planets. The stars, he said, are self-luminous, while their planets shine by reflected light. He then spoke of sun-spots, which he had learned of from the Catholic astronomer Nicolas de Cusa, and affirmed his belief that together earth and sun had a forward motion in space.



But where Copernicus’s system was heliocentric, Bruno’s was ultimately theocentric. God, he said, “is the inner principle of all movement, the one Identity which fills the all and enlightens the universe.” He added that everything is contained in this One Principle, “for the Infinite has nothing which is external to Itself.”

After outlining his concept of God, Bruno then proceeded to define Nature as “a living unity of living units, in each of which the power of the whole is present.” Nature may appear to us in numberless forms, but it must always be considered united in its fundamental principle. Therefore, it must never be conceived as a creation, but merely as a development of the First Principle. Where then

should we look for God? Bruno answered:

In the unchangeable laws of nature, in the light of the sun, in the beauty of all that springs from the bosom of mother earth, in the sight of unnumbered stars which shine in the skirts of space, and which live and feel and think and magnify the powers of this Universal Principle.

This seems to be a clear statement of the first fundamental proposition of Theosophy. As for the second, Bruno declared that everything in the manifest universe is in the process of *becoming*, “and this process proceeds under the fundamental Law of the Universe—the Law of Cause and Effect.” The Law of Periodicity also expresses itself as the Law of Reincarnation, so that “we ourselves, and the things we call our own, come and vanish and return again.”

Bruno posited the identity of all souls with the Universal Over-soul, although he was willing to concede that there must be an endless number of individuals. Finally we are all in our nature One, and the knowledge of this unity is the goal of philosophy. The soul of man, he affirmed, is the only God there is. “This principle in man moves and governs the body, is superior to the body, and cannot be constrained by it.” It is Spirit, the Real Self,

in which, from which and through which, are formed the different bodies, which have to pass through different existences, names and destinies.

During Bruno’s time and influence in England he enjoyed connections with the Northumberland Circle, including John Florio, Thomas Herriot, Nicholas Hill, Walter Warner, Sir Fulke Greville, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Philip Sidney, Thomas Watson, John Dee (the alchemist, astrologer, magician, and intelligencer), and probably Christopher Marlowe and Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, i.e., Shakespeare, all of whom were members. Seven of Bruno’s works, including *Gli Heroici Furori* heavily annotated by the 9th Earl of Northumberland, were recently found in the earl’s library.

Today, everyone recognizes Bruno’s influence except perhaps the Catholic Church, which actually denied burning him until the 1840’s, i.e. 250 years after his death. No thinker was more controversial in his time, more outspoken, more fearless, more persistent, more suppressed. His works are still on the Church’s Index of Forbidden Books.

Tricked by Jesuit Agent

When Castelnau, the unsuspecting French ambassador who had befriended him in London, was recalled to Paris, Bruno went along. But instead of resuming his former relations with the University of Paris, Bruno presented 120 Theses to the Rector in which he showed how his own philosophy differed from that of Aristotle. Bruno departed for Germany, where he hoped to visit some of the more important university towns.

He met with hostility in Marburg, but Wittenburg welcomed him with open arms. Only the Calvinists in the University remained unfriendly. When they later came to power, Bruno was again obliged to seek another home. He went to Helmstadt, but there a Lutheran pastor ended his hopes by denouncing him publicly before an assembled congregation. He then sought refuge in Frankfurt-am-Main,

where he was described by a Carmelite prior as “a man of universal intelligence and well versed in all sciences, but without a trace of religion.”

About this time, Bruno visited the Frankfurt fair. There he made the acquaintance of two Italian booksellers, who took some of his writings back to Venice, where they came to the attention of a young Venetian nobleman, Giovanni Mocenigo. He at once inquired where the talented Bruno could be found.

But far from being the philosopher’s admirer, Mocenigo was in reality a tool of the Jesuits and an agent of the Inquisition. He invited Bruno to come to Venice, promising him assistance in his work. Bruno accepted, but as soon as he was installed in Mocenigo’s house the young nobleman demanded that he instruct him in the “magic arts.” When Bruno insisted that he could not, as he was a simple philosopher and scientist and knew nothing of the “magic arts,” Mocenigo threatened him with the Inquisition.

Bruno again replied that he had done nothing unlawful and immediately offered to leave the house. But that night Mocenigo, accompanied by his servants, burst into Bruno’s room and seized him. The following day, May 22, 1592, Mocenigo sent a written accusation against Bruno to the Inquisition. The great philosopher was removed from Mocenigo’s house and imprisoned.

The Trial

Seven days later Bruno’s trial began. Mocenigo accused him, “by constraint of his conscience, and by order of his confessor,” of teaching the existence of a boundless universe filled with innumerable solar systems. He pointed out that Bruno had said that the earth was not at the centre, but a mere planet revolving around the sun. He accused him of teaching the doctrine of reincarnation, of denying the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ, of refusing to accept the three persons of the Trinity, and of rejecting the Virgin Birth.

Bruno arose and unfolded his philosophical and scientific doctrines in detail. At the end of the sitting, the Inquisitor again charged him point-by-point with the whole accusation, warning him of the serious consequences if he did not recant. Unlike Galileo, Bruno refused.

The following day he was accused of friendship with the heretical queen of England. For the next eight weeks he was daily subjected to the rack and other instruments of torture. The records of his trial were sent to Rome, and he was summoned to the Holy City, where he arrived on 27 February, 1593, and was incarcerated in darkness for almost seven years.

On December 21, 1599, he was again called before the Inquisition and asked to retract. Bruno replied that “he neither dared, nor would retract his statements”. With those words he sealed his doom.

A Greater Fear

In *De Magia* (Frankfurt, 1591) Bruno wrote:

The order and power of light and darkness are not equal. For light is diffused and penetrates to deepest darkness, but darkness does not reach to the purest regions of light. Thus light comprehends darkness, overcomes and conquers it, throughout infinity...

On January 20, 1600, the Pope ordered Bruno to be delivered to the Inquisition. He was called into the audience chamber, forced to kneel as he listened to his sentence, and then given over to his executioners with the usual request that he be punished without the shedding of blood—in other words, that he was to be burned at the stake. After listening, unmoved to his sentence, Bruno rose to his full height, looked his executioners in the eye, and spoke his last sentence on earth. “It is with far greater fear that you pronounce, than I receive, this sentence.”

In the early morning of Friday, February 17, 1600, one of those processions which were all too familiar in Rome was seen wending its way to the Campo di Fiora, the place where Holy Mother Church burned her heretical children. Giordano Bruno was led to the pile, clad as a “heretic” and literally tongue-tied by authority lest he should utter one last word against the Church. A crucifix was held before him. He turned his eyes away, before he was bound to the stake and slowly reduced to ashes.

The *Register of the Archives, The Brotherhood of Pity of St. John the Beheaded*, 17 February 1600, records:

At the second hour of the night, it was intimated to the Company that an impenitent was to be executed in the morning; so at the sixth hour, the comforters and the chaplain met at St. Ursula, and went to the prison of the Tower of Nona. After the customary prayers in the chapel, there was consigned to them the under-mentioned condemned to death, viz. Giordano, son of the late Giovanni Bruno, an Apostate Friar of Nola in the Kingdom, an impenitent heretic. With all charity our bretheren exhorted him to repent, and there were called two Fathers of St. Dominic, two of the Society of Jesus, two of the New Church, and one of St. Jerome, who, with all affection and much learning, showed him his error, but he remained to the end in his accursed obstinacy, his brain and intellect seething with a thousand errors and vanities. So, persevering in his obstinacy, he was led by the Servants of Justice to the Field of Flowers, there stripped, bound to a stake, and burnt alive, attended always by our Company chanting the litanies, the comforters exhorting him up to the last point to abandon his obstinacy, but in it finally he ended his miserable, unhappy life.

Bruno had written in *The Candlemaker* (Paris, 1582):

Remember Lady, what I know I need not teach you: “Time takes all, and gives all; everything changes but nothing vanishes; only one thing cannot change, is eternal, and will be forever one, changelessly itself.” With this philosophy my spirit thrives

and my mind expands. So in whatever the moment of this evening of life I wait, if this mutation is true, I who am in the night will move on into day, those who are in the day will move on into night; for everything that is, is here or is there, either near or far, either now or to come. Be happy, then, if you can, keep well, and love him who loves you.

Bruno's Poetry

Bruno also wrote strangely modern-sounding poetry, full of prescient insights. For instance:

The universe is infinite
 with matter as we know it extending throughout;
 the universe has no borders nor limits;
 the sun is just another star;
 the stars are other suns,
 infinite in number and in extent
 with an infinity of worlds (like our own) circling them.
 In the universe
 there is neither up, nor down, nor right, nor left
 but all is relative to where we are
 there is no centre;
 all is turning and in motion,
 for vicissitude and motion is the principle of life;
 earth turns around its own axis even as it turns around the sun
 the sun turns too around its own axis

The following poem appears in his *Of the Infinite Universe and Worlds*, written in Italian, published in London, 1584:

Nothing stands still,
 but all things swirl and whirl
 as far as heaven and beneath is seen.
 All things move, now up, now down,
 whether on a long or short course,
 whether heavy or light;
 perhaps you too go along the same path
 and to a like goal.
 For all things move till overtaken,
 as the wave swirls through the water,
 so that the same part
 moves now from above downward,
 now from below upward,
 and the same hurly-burly
 imparts to all the same successive fate.

The Elizabethan Cosmos

Four questions were at the center of the age's astronomical inquiries: 1. What is at the center of the universe? 2. What goes around what? 3. Does the outer sphere belong to this world? 4. Does the outer sphere go all the way to Heaven?

Bruno's answer was: "...there is no centre, there are no spheres, and...there is no Heaven, only space, endless infinite space, eternity..." Ramon Mendoza, in his book *Acentric Labyrinth*, sets forth the ultimate consequences of this cosmological vision:

The All is no longer necessarily a sea of billions of galaxies and clusters of galaxies; the All may be an infinite ocean of infinite universes! In this ocean, our insignificant tiny universe is only an island in the infinite archipelago of universes. Humanity has thereby been stripped for good and all its cherished centres. Riding on its speck of dust, humankind drifts aimlessly along the endless pathways of the labyrinth of universes—a labyrinth with no centre and no edges, no beginning in time, and no end.

Mendoza goes on to say:

However, there is really no need for despair; by discovering our appalling spatio-temporal insignificance, we have come to realize the only title to greatness we still possess, and which has become, precisely in the process of this millenary quest for centres, all the more manifest and inspiring: the boundlessness and almost unlimited power of the human mind.

And Rudolf Theil writes in his book on the history of astronomy, *And There Was Light*:

Copernicus had banished the Earth from the center of the universe; Bruno now did the same for the Sun. He realized that the Sun was only a star, one among millions of other stars.

The second upheaval, even more revolutionary than the first, was in Bruno's time pure prophecy; many generations were to pass before it could be demonstrated. In fact, it was not until 1924 that the sun was no longer seen as the center of the universe. Hubble established that the fuzzy spiral "nebulae" were not clouds of gas but were distant galaxies of billions of stars—"island universes," like our own Milky Way.

Central to Bruno's theory of an extended cosmos lay his radical theories about matter itself. These were far more threatening to the Church authorities than his cosmological vision. For to Bruno, Matter was Divine since it was the Divine Unity underlying at the heart of all reality.

Bruno and Shakespeare

Bruno totally rejected Aristotle's theory of "quintessence". His stars consisted of fire, and other elements "of this world":

Doubt thou that the stars are fire
 Doubt that the sun doth move
 Doubt truth to be a liar
 But never doubt I love—

—*Hamlet*, II.ii.116-119

The greatest astronomer of the time was Tycho Brahe (1546-1601). He lived in his subterranean observatory on the island of Uraniborg, off the coast of Denmark, near to the royal castle, Helsingør (Elsinore). A fine portrait of Brahe depicts the famed astronomer framed by a stone portal. Heraldic shields, on either side, bear the names of his ancestors: Erik Rosenkrantz and Sophie Gyldenstjerne (see graphic, next page).

In *De La Causa, principio et uno* (London, 1584), Bruno uses satire to expose the prevailing conventions of the day when his Pedant "Poliinnio" holds forth on women and Matter:

Without a doubt, form does not sin and error is engendered by no form unless it is conjoined to matter. That is why form, signified by the male, when placed in a position of intimacy with matter, or composition with it, replies (quoting Adam) "the woman he gave me"—that is matter—"she, she deceived me"—that is the cause of all my sin (breaking off he says) "O, I see that colossus of Indolence, Gervase, coming to sap the thread of my elaborate speech. I fear he has overheard me, but what does it matter?"

The loquacious Polinnio is much like Polonius playing on the word "matter": "What is the matter, my Lord?" I suggest that the names Polonius and Polinnio may have derived from the same source. Could whoever wrote *Hamlet* have deliberately changed the original name Corambis (meaning "double-hearted") after reading/hearing *De la Causa*?

Bruno's follower Gervase arrives. "What's up?" he asks, and Poliinnio replies:

I came upon a passage of Aristotle in the first book of *Physics* where he sets out to elucidate what primary matter is, and takes as a mirror the female sex; the sex, I mean, capricious, frail, inconstant, soft, petty, infamous, ignoble, base, abject, negligent, unworthy...



Tycho Brahe surrounded by the arms of his noble ancestors, including (clockwise from bottom), *Gyldenstjerne* and *Rosenkrantz*.

Bruno quotes Ovid:

Whether the fire burns our bodies, or age wastes them away, death holds no evils to suffer. Souls cannot die, they leave their previous dwelling and live in new homes, which they forever inhabit. All things change, but nothing perishes.

The dialogue continues:

Polonius: What is the matter, my Lord?

Hamlet: Between who?

Polonius: I mean the matter that you read, my Lord.

—*Hamlet* II.ii.193-5

It turns out that Hamlet is reading Bruno's play, *Il Candelaio* (1582). We can infer this from the fact that in it A Gentleman asks Manfurio: "What is the matter of your verses?" This leads to the following familiar interplay:

Manfurio: Letters, syllables, diction, power of speech, the parts related directly or indirectly to the whole.

Gentleman: I mean what is their subject matter, their theme?

Hamlet answers Polonius:

Slanders, sir, for the satirical rogue says here that old men have gray beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plumtree gum, and that they have a plentiful of wit, together with most weak hams.

—*Hamlet* II.ii.196

He is both insulting Polonius and citing Bruno, whose character Momus, the Greek God of Satire, says in *Lo spaccio de la bestia trionfante* (*The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, London, 1584):

...my body is wrinkling and my brain gets damper...my flesh gets darker and my hair is going grey; my eyelids are going slack and my sight gets fainter; my breath comes less easily and my cough gets stronger; my hams grow weaker and I walk less securely.

Further suggestive links include Tycho Brahe's two "ancestor-henchmen," Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who arrive and trigger a further series of allusions to Bruno. Hamlet speaks of his "bad dreams," a reference Guildenstern translates into "ambition", a concept strongly associated with Bruno's *De Umbris Idearum* (*The Shadow of Ideas*, 1582):

Guildenstern: Which dreams indeed are ambition; for the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.

Hamlet: A dream itself I hold but a shadow.

Rosencrantz: Truly, and I hold ambition so airy light a quality that it is but a shadow's shadow.

—*Hamlet*, II.ii.257-63

Bruno also remarks, in his dedication to *Il Candelaio*:

Everything which is, either here or there, either near or far, either now or to come, is either early or late.

This ineluctably recalls Hamlet's

If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come.

—V.ii.220-3

Traditionally dated 1601, *Hamlet* was probably written or revised soon after Bruno's execution in February, 1600.

A Note on Bruno and Marlowe

Links between Marlowe and Bruno, via the poet Thomas Watson who had met Bruno in Paris, are detailed in the *New World Encyclopedia*:

Marlowe was arrested in Norton Folgate near Shoreditch in September 1589 [after] Thomas Watson killed a man named William Bradley. A jury found that Marlowe had no involvement in Bradley's death and Watson was found to have acted in self-defence.⁴

Regarding *Doctor Faustus*, the *New World Encyclopedia* adds: "The Hermeticists Henry Cornelius Agrippa and Giordano Bruno are perceived as having had a considerable influence on Marlowe."

The *Journal of Religion and Theatre*, Vol.4, No.2, Fall 2005, records:

An even stronger, but less easy to document, connection between Bruno and Marlowe may have resulted from the fact that it appears both worked as spies for Sir Francis Walsingham around the same time, with Bruno writing reports under the pseudonym "Henry Fagot". Marlowe probably started spying in 1583, which is when he was absent for half a term from Cambridge, although he also missed seven weeks the previous academic year. Bruno lived in London from 1583 through 1585, and possibly continued his espionage for the British from France in 1586. That their paths may have crossed during these years is certainly a possibility.⁵

There are several indications in the B Text of *Doctor Faustus* that Marlowe knew Bruno—in fact too many for it to be coincidental. First, the antipope is named "Bruno" which, given Giordano's tremendous antipathy towards the papa-

cy, was appropriate. Second, when the chained Bruno is first brought in, the pope tells his attendants, "Cast down our footstool." This is similar to *Tamburlaine the Great, Part I*, where Tamburlaine uses Bajazeth as a footstool.

Another connection with the historical Bruno recalls his drama, *Le Cena de le Ceneri (The Ash Wednesday Supper, 1584)*. In it the character Gervasio tells the papal figure (p.156) Polyhimnio that he is *servus sevorum et scabellum pedum tuorum* ("the servant of your servants and the footstool under your feet").

Another connection exists in lines 183-184 of the same scene, where Faustus, speaking slyly and even dangerously of "Bruno" says:

He shall be streight condemn'd of heresie,
And on a pile of Fagots burnt to death.

If the reference is to the real Bruno, this must surely be the ultimate professional in-joke, grimly prophetic and understood only by Walsingham's cloak-and-dagger coterie. It also suggests that Bruno may have chosen his pseudonym "as a piece of black humor," and Marlowe may have composed his lines in the same spirit. Given the vagaries of Elizabethan orthography, there may be nothing in the parallel. But if there is, Marlowe would have had to know of Bruno's pseudonym, either from the man himself or from Walsingham's circle. It was a closely guarded secret until recent times.

Another possible Bruno connection comes earlier in the scene, when Faustus says he will restore this Bruno to his liberty: "And beare him to the States of Germany." That country was in fact where the real-life Bruno went, within a year of leaving England.

It is certainly possible that Bruno and Marlowe met during the mid 1580s, and that they discussed religion and that Bruno either told Marlowe about Nicholas of Cusa's writings on non-Christian religions or recommended that the playwright read them. As a Dominican monk Bruno had studied subjects and texts outside those allowed by his superiors, and was forced to escape his monastery when accused of heresy. His writings indicate that he had an interest in non-Christian religions, especially those of ancient Egypt.

At his trial before the Inquisition, Bruno was accused of anti-Trinitarianism, echoing the charges against Marlowe. He may thus have been another of Marlowe's sources for information about Islam, and his life story may also have inspired the playwright to use controversial religious themes in his dramas. Whether or not Marlowe held heretical views, he was certainly accused of them. Religion and the conflict it can cause is a subject in most of his surviving plays.

Sir Walter Raleigh too may have been one of Marlowe's sources of information about the Middle East, as he had an interest in the Turks and their religion. Although his monograph, *The life and death of Mahomet, the conquest of Spaine together with the rysing and ruine of the Sarazen Empire*, was published posthu-

mously in 1637, it is conceivable that his research went back many years and that it was discussed at the School of the Night gatherings.

Marlowe may also have had access to the *Koran*. The 12th-century Latin translation by Robert of Ketton (upon which Nicholas of Cusa based his study), was published in Basle in 1542.

Other publications, in Latin and English, also describe the beliefs of the Turks. Marlowe used some of these as sources for his Tamburlaine plays, but there are many more. They fall into several categories: accounts of Englishmen being captured by Turks after being shipwrecked or attacked by pirates, travelogues by both adventurous and religious pilgrims to the Holy Land, accounts of battles, and trade/diplomatic communications.

All of these resources, along with allusions to Turks in English literature and plays, not only provided Marlowe with information, but also a frame of reference for his audience. They would have recognized the threat that Turkey posed to Western Europe, and had no reason to interpret the characters and events in *Tamburlaine, Part II* in anything but in a literal way. Therefore, Tamburlaine's burning of the Koran is a sign of Christian power and victory. Mahomet does nothing to prevent it, although challenged by Tamburlaine to intervene. Marlowe again emphasizes Mahomet's inaction in the next scene, where the King of Amasia sees him in the sky, armed and ready to assist Callapine in his battle with Tamburlaine. Mahomet is therefore able to come to earth and interact with humans, but is unable or unwilling to stop Tamburlaine's affront.

The final three lines of Tamburlaine's speech during the book burning—

Seeke out another Godhead to adore,
The God that sits in heaven, if any God,
For he is God alone, and none but he

—further clarify the Protestant Christian theme. By burning the Koran and publicly challenging Mahomet to stop him, Tamburlaine shows that Mohammedanism is powerless. He advises his soldiers to reject this heretical belief, which relies on a prophet who is now in Hell, and to turn to God himself. By exhorting his followers to accept God directly, Tamburlaine negates all the sects that plagued Elizabethan England: Roman Catholics, who relied on the intercession of priests, saints, and the Virgin Mary; anti-Trinitarians, who held that Jesus was separate from God the Father; and Puritans, offended by the very fact that God was even mentioned on stage.

In summation, *Hamlet* seems to show that its author was well aware of Giordano Bruno's ideas, and of his close association with the Northumberland Circle. Oxford of course was also closely linked to Burghley, Walsingham, and the ultimate fate of Mary, Queen of Scots. None of these things can even be remotely claimed on behalf of William Shakspeare.

Notes

¹ Julia Jones, "The Brave New World of Giordano Bruno."

² BL Harleian MS 286, fol.102

³ *Gli heroici furori*, 17

⁴ (http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Christopher_Marlowe) 1 May, 2011:

⁵ <http://rtjournal.org/vol4/no2/dailey2.html>

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