The Brave New World of Giordano Bruno

A Tribute to Giordano Bruno
on the Eve of
The Four Hundredth Anniversary
of his Death and Martyrdom
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By
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PREFACE

The following is an adaptation of a speech originally presented before the Shakespeare Authorship Roundtable in Beverly Hills, California, December 4, 1999. It was my hope at the time to adapt my notes to a documentary for a general audience and include more on Bruno's life. Towards that goal, last year I filmed the events commemorating the 400th anniversary of Bruno's death during the week of February 17th on the Campo dei Fiori in Rome. I am pleased now for this opportunity to present an expanded version of my original talk as a first step towards realizing my goal.

It is important for those interested in Bruno to realize that it was only due to the generosity of rare inspired individuals that his work was published at all four hundred years ago; and it is only through the efforts of others, equally inspired, that his work survived and that he did not lapse forever into obscurity. On the eve of the new century, I expressed my hope that future generations will join with these patrons and scholars, past and present, to return Bruno to his rightful place among thinkers. When we are freed from the prejudice, superstition and fears Bruno struggled to undo, I feel sure our thoughts will soar again to the heights he believed all enlightened men and women could attain.

As he wrote to Mauvissiere in his dedication to *On the Infinite Universe and Worlds*:

> **When the end comes, you will be esteemed by the world and rewarded by God, not because you have won the love and respect of the princes of the earth, however powerful, but rather for having loved, defended and cherished one such as I... For those with fortunes greater than yours can do nothing for you, who exceed many among them in virtue, since what you receive from others is a testimony to their virtue; but all that you do for others is the sign and clear indication of your own.**

Julia Jones
December 4, 2000

BRUNO'S MAIN WORKS REFERENCED IN THIS PAPER

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Gli heroici furori (Gli heroici), **London 1585**
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De triplici minimo et mensura ad trium speculativarum et multarum activarum artium principe libri (De minimo), **Frankfurt 1591**
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ADDITIONAL SOURCES

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Singer, Dorothea Waley. ***Giordano Bruno: His Life and Thought: With Annotated Translation of His Work, On the Infinite Universe and Worlds.*** **Henry Shulman, Inc., New York, 1950.**
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Shakespeare, William. ***Hamlet*****. 1600-01**

The World is something which is past finding out.

- Giordano Bruno, London, 1585.

BRUNO AND SHAKESPEARE

The original intention of my talk was twofold. Always my primary goal has been to return Bruno and his ideas to their rightful place in today's world. The purpose of the Roundtable is to examine the authorship question surrounding the Shakespeare canon. It is my belief that these two are intrinsically bound together – that in fact Bruno cast a long shadow over Shakespeare – and that a closer look at the world and times of the two men will reveal that many of the plays, and their author's fate, were tied to the now little known heretic renegade-monk, Giordano Bruno, and the 'dangerous' ideas he left swirling in English minds long after his whirlwind visit of 1583-1585.

I also believe that a new kind of inquiry into the authorship is needed, one that will examine the ideas in the plays alongside those of late 16th Century Europe. For lacking the original manuscripts, the ideas are all we have to tie us to the author. Our current inquiry strains credulity, has discredited the issue, and has made no inroads on scholarship. As for the Roundtable, we've rehashed our own fixed theories so many times we have become, among ourselves, as close-minded as the Stratfordians.

Thus it was my intention to stimulate a new approach to the plays and, at the same time, create a tribute to Bruno on the eve of his martyrdom by revealing the tremendous but little known impact he had on his times – an impact so great that the author of the plays could not have failed to be influenced by him. Without a systematic rereading of every play (which should still be done) I was able to support my theory when I discovered Hilary Gatti's remarkable book, *The Renaissance Drama of Knowledge* (Routledge, London 1989) which chronicles the story of Bruno in England, including his effect on Shakespeare.

I have chosen not to footnote this paper at this time, but most of the Bruno-Hamlet, Bruno-Hariot connections are found in Gatti, except when noted. Much of my understanding of Bruno's cosmology I own to the work of Ramon Mendoza. The wording, synthesis, and most of the observations are my own. There are other sources still to be examined. At the back of Gatti's book she lists over thirty-one books since 1846 that have explored the relationship between Bruno and Shakespeare – in particular, *Hamlet*. In fact, the Bruno-Hamlet connection is so great I've chosen to focus on that play alone which, upon examination, is steeped in Bruno and his ideas; in addition, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, dated 1600-01, appeared on the scene soon after Bruno was burned at the stake.

THE NOLAN

To give you an idea of the impact of Bruno on his times, I'd first like to give the briefest biographical sketch in keeping with what's relevant and necessary; then I'll try to present a picture of the *status quo* that Bruno challenged; then Bruno's ideas; and finally we'll look at *Hamlet* itself.

Relevant and necessary

First, although from a common background, Bruno was extremely well-educated. He was born Filipe Bruno in 1548 in Nola, a small town outside Naples, a territory of Spain. Devoted to his homeland, Bruno spoke of it often and adopted it throughout his life much like a surname, referring to himself as *The Nolan* wherever he went and signing his works *Jordanus Brunus Nolanus*.

At the age of fourteen he left home for Naples and joined the Dominicans, the zealous order of Spain known as the 'Hounds of the Lord' for their role in the inquisition and their ruthless 'defense' of the faith. It was a mistake for a curious mind, but in those days it was the only way a boy from a modest background could get an education. Talking the name Giordano with his vows, he studied in the great libraries of St. Thomas Aquinas and became fluent in Latin, Greek, and early Church history; he also mastered the medieval art of memory and was called to Rome for an audience with the Pope to display his 'rock-star' memory and mastery of the art.

He was ordained in 1572 in spite of a growing reputation for having 'unconventional ideas' and being a rebel spirit. Complaints were filed in a mild attempt to frighten him into obedience until a copy of the writings of the arch-heretic and humanist, Erasmus, found hidden in the privy, causing a hasty exit. He sought refuge in Rome but a hundred and thirty charges of heresy were lodged against him and he was forced to flee for good, first Rome, then Italy; he was excommunicated and pronounced a heretic by the Church.

For the next fourteen years he wandered Europe, never spending more than two years in one place. He lived by lecturing and tutoring, mostly on the art of memory. He obtained a doctorate in philosophy at Toulouse where he taught until religious civil war broke out and drove him north to Paris. There he came to the attention of Henri III and served as his tutor until his outspoken lectures at the university on infinity and other worlds caused an uproar. Henri sent him packing – but not without a letter of recommendation to his ambassador in England.

Bruno arrived in England in April 1583. For several months he attempted to lecture at Oxford. During a debate on June 11th, his attacks on Aristotle and his defense of the immortality of the soul set off near-riots and he fled again: this time to London where he remained safely tucked away as house guest (some might say 'house-arrest-guest') of the French Ambassador, Michel de Castelneau, Lord Mauvissiere. Two years later in November 1585, Mauvissiere was recalled to France and Bruno left with him, never to return.

During his brief stay in London, Bruno wrote six of his greatest works. All were published by J. Charlewood in London and dated 1584 or 1585. A play, *Il candelaio*, dated 1582, was probably written in Paris before he came to London, but its influence

is marked in *Hamlet*.

Although Bruno usually wrote in Latin, *Il candelaio* was written in Italian and all of his English works were written in Italian and used the dialogue form of Lucretius, similar to Plato. Of these, three are dedicated to Mauvissiere and two to Sir Philip Sidney.

Bruno's existence and influence in England is well-documented by Gatti, especially his connection to Ralegh's School of Night and the Earl of Northumberland's Circle: Hariot, Warner, Hill, Florio, Sidney, Fulke Greville, Ralegh, Watson and Marlowe. And if there was any doubt before, according to Gatti seven of Bruno's works were recently found in the Ninth Earl's libraries, and one, *Gli heroici*, had been heavily annotated by the Earl himself.

In addition to evidence of Bruno's presence and station in London society, we have other evidence of his life (far more evidence than we have of the legendary Stratford man.) We have Bruno's handwriting. Original manuscripts of his work exist all across Europe – from the Warburg Institute in London to the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici in Naples and its newly founded Centro Internazionale di Studi Bruniani, to the Nordoff collection in Moscow. No one denies his existence or his influence with the exception of the Church, who denied even burning him until 1846 – almost 250 years after his death!

No thinker has ever been more controversial in his time, more outspoken, more fearless, more persistent, or more suppressed than Bruno. He is still, in this new century, on the Index of Forbidden Books. Respected Catholic theologians and scholars still rail against him; and the Pope and Church formally refused to issue an apology or ask for forgiveness for his death this year – a routine Church ritual upon entering a new millennium.

And yet there is no mystery about who wrote his works. His followers continued to credit him with his ideas long after his death; no one stole from him or plagiarized him while he lived; and his Frankfurt publisher honored even his requests for dedication while he languished in prison for seven years as an arch-heretic. After his death many, inspired by his ideas, kept silent; but while he lived, there was no question he was here!

Throughout this paper, I'll be quoting often from his work. In view of that, I need to point out that Bruno was not just a man of words and that he had a special aversion to what he called "pedants" and "grammarians" – "ABCD-arians" – and he satirized them liberally. For his ultimate concern was with *works* not *words* – with *deeds,* and with how men and women treat one another in the real world and what they *do*, not what they believe — or profess to believe: their *"words, words, words"* to quote Hamlet.

COSMOLOGY, RELIGION AND POLITICS

We live in a world of phenomenal, unprecedented, ceaseless change. We think nothing of it; in fact, we'd find it strange if things didn't change. But it hasn't always been this way. For almost two thousand years, from the time of Aristotle to Copernicus, the structure of the universe had been Claudius Ptolemy's earth-centered model. From 1543, with the publication of Copernicus' *De revolutionibus orbium*

coelestium (*On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*), until the end of the 16th Century, four main cosmologies began vying for attention with Ptolemy. The following is an overview.

Ptolemy and the Aristotelian Right-Wing of King Claudius (c. 350 B.C.)

Close your eyes and imagine...

Earth is the center of the cosmos. Moon, sun and planets revolve around us, each carried along on its own hard crystalline sphere. Beyond these, at the outermost edge of the universe, lies the eighth sphere of stars rotating *slowly* around Earth – a reasonable conclusion if you study the night sky. Beyond this last sphere lies the abode of God and his angels.

The four *sublunar* elements – earth, water, air, and fire – exist only below the moon; the *supralunar* elements (everything above the moon, including planets and stars) are made up of a substance unknown on earth called the *quintessence:* the *fifth essence.* This quintessence was a substance both eternal and unchanging.

Reaching out towards the quintessence from the heaviest, basest element, earth at the center, the spheres ascended in order from water, to air, to fire, with the element of fire being last, highest, and thus nearest to the quintessence.

The Copernican Left and the Usurper Sun (c.1543)

Copernicus switched Earth and sun. That's it. Everything else remained the same. Earth turned on its axis around a fixed central sun while earth, planets, and stars moved on the same fixed spheres at the center of a finite universe. He had sketched out his plan as early as 1514, but kept it from the public until 1543 when, legend has it, his *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* was brought to him on his death bed; he died on May 24th of that year

Thomas Digges, Preacher-Fundamentalist (c.1578)

Copernican. Subcategory. Digges agreed with Copernicus but sanitized him for the masses, making the outer sphere of stars a "covrt of coelestiall angelles devoid of greefe and replenished with perfite endlesse ioyet" – a "sphaericall altitude without ende." Digges thus proposed a hallmark-greeting card vision of infinity that never challenged and, in fact, reinforced the prevailing beliefs of Church and status quo; furthermore, the infinity he introduced was 'spherical,' hence bounded; hence, not infinite. What's more significant however is that Digges' stars remained *quintessential* stars: that is, they were not *of this world* – and not made of the same substance as the earth, sun and planets. Bruno's were.

Bruno's Stars

Bruno totally rejected Aristotle and the prevailing idea of the quintessence. Bruno's stars were made of *fire* and other elements *of this world.* Everywhere he went, he dared to preach that there was no ethereal abode of God *apart from the world as we know it.* In this way, he echoed Christ's "The kingdom of God is about you even now," and banished heaven as a place; for if earthly matter goes on forever, where is heaven? And

what did he replace heaven with? Infinite space stretching into an infinity filled with *earthly* matter, homogenous and eternal.
Bruno's stars were stars of matter, stars of fire.

Doubt 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.)

Tycho Brahe's Independent Isolationism (c. 1572)

Tycho Brahe, Danish court astrologer, was the first and greatest astronomer of the age. He spent his life working obsessively day and night in his subterranean observatory, Uraniborg, on the island, Hven, off the coast of Denmark – a grant from the Danish King whose nearby castle, Helsingor, is echoed in Hamlet's Elsinore. And yet, with the entire treasury of Denmark and every instrument known to science at his disposal, Brahe never accepted even Copernicus. Instead, he developed a convoluted world-view to keep the earth at center. Sun and moon revolved around the earth while the five known planets kept a solitary trajectory and revolved around the sun. Strange indeed.

Stranger still, a portrait of Tycho Brahe ended up with Thomas Digges and shows the famed astronomer framed by a stone portal. On either side of the portal, heraldic shields bear the names of Brahe's ancestors: Erik Rosenkrantz and Sophie Gyldenstierne.

Peter Usher has written a remarkable article, "Hamlet's Transformation" that was published in the *Elizabethan Review* in which he attempts to make the connection between Brahe, Digges, and the Stratford Man, but ends up essentially proving Gatti's thesis on Bruno and *Hamlet*.

Bruno's Radical Worlds-Without-End (c. 1582-1600)

Bruno chose to walk among these giants of the cosmological pantheon as a philosopher, first endorsing Copernicus' sun-centered model and praising him as the herald of a new age, then going far beyond him to proclaim boldly, as a philosopher (based on no more than the scant teachings of a few ancient philosophers and his own intuition and inner-visions) these, to him, absolute truths:

The universe is infinite
with matter as we know it extending throughout;
the universe has no borders or 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,
right, nor left but all is relative
for there is no center;
all is turning and in motion,
for endless 'vicissitude-and-motion' is the principle of life;

earth turns around its own axis even as it turns around the sun,
as the sun turns, too, around its own axis

Bruno first presents these ideas in his three early cosmological dialogues: *La cena de la ceneri (The Ash Wednesday Supper), De la causa, principio et uno (Cause, Principle and Unity)*, and *De l'infinito universo et mondi (Of the Infinite Universe and Worlds)* – all, as noted, written in his native Italian during his stay in England and published in England from the latter half of 1584 through 1585. As such, all were well-positioned to affect the author of the Shakespeare plays.

In several of these works, Bruno calls his own character Philoteo or Teofilo, and the cast of characters always includes one or more Followers and a Pendant. Bruno also wrote poems that he placed throughout his works, and his last and greatest work, *De Immenso,* is rhymed Latin verse.

The following unrhymed verse (Dorothea Waley Singer's translation) appears in *De l'infinito.* It is decidedly free-form and 'modern' for the 16th Century.

Naught standeth still, but all things swirl and whirl
As far as in heaven and beneath is seen.
All things move, now up, now down,
Whether on a long or a short course,
Whether heavy or light;
Perchance thou too goest the same path
And to a like goal.
For all things move till overtaken,
As the wave swirleth through the water
So that the same part
Moveth now from above downward,
And now from below upward,
And the same hurly-burly
imparteth to all, the same successive fate.

Essentially this is the picture. Back then, all were trying to decide, for the fate of the world and the destiny of future Man, the following:

- **What is at the Center of the universe of spheres?**
- **What goes around what?**
- **And whether the outer sphere is of this world, or whether it goes all the way up and stops at Heaven.**

And Bruno comes along and says:

There is no center, there are no spheres, and... there is no Heaven!

Imagine yourself on the path of the familiar. Copernicus is like tripping. You fall down. With Bruno you look up and see you've fallen at the edge of a great precipice and you're starring down into... a vast chasm. Space. Endless, infinite space. Eternity.

DREAMERS OF THE RADICAL CHIC

In reality however the challenge went much deeper. For although much was made of earth as the center, the reality was that earth was a stand-in for man whose vested interest made himself the center; and man – as the Bible makes clear – was created not only to replenish the earth but to "subdue" it, for he has "dominion" over "every thing that creepeth" on it and over "every living thing that moveth..." (Genesis 1:26-28)

Looking back today at the fray Bruno threw himself into, we might say that it wasn't about earth, or scripture, at all. Earth and scripture were, in a way, only metaphors for "who was in charge" in the ultimate king-of-the-hill game played by patriarchal authorities intent on maintaining *Man's* centricity – not earth's. Copernicus, for all the uproar, never challenged this man-centered patriarchal world-view justified in Genesis; he merely offset it. Bruno, in fact, demolished it – or tried to.

Bruno's world-view meant that men could no longer do what they wanted to the planet and its creatures. We are, he said, mere specks in the grand design – and no more important than rocks or ants! This message – of Bruno, of Victor Hugo, of Whitman, Thoreau, Melville, and countless others – has threaded its way down the centuries, woven into the mind's fabric of a few dissidents, a few disgruntled prophets, philosophers and writers; it has been savored by an esoteric few for brief moments, then set aside as one might close a book or stop a daydream when the harsh getting-and-spending light of day calls for real-world action – based on what? An illusory credit card, the biblical carte blanc issued when time began that humans have twisted into some kind of manifest destiny that is, in fact, running out – because it never really existed.

But Bruno's unpopular message – and the reality – is that we are only a small part of a much larger whole, and every part, no matter how small, is equal in life's design.

DREAMER REALISTS AND THE COSMIC MIND

Ramon Mendoza in his brilliant book *The Acentric Labyrinth* sets forth the ultimate consequences, even now, of Bruno's cosmological vision that banished the geocentric, anthropocentric false world view:

> **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 of all its cherished centers. Riding on its speck of dust, humankind drifts aimlessly along the endless pathways of the labyrinth of universes – a labyrinth with no center and no edges, no beginning in time, and no end.**

Mendoza then 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 centers, all the more manifest and inspiring: the boundlessness and almost unlimited power of the human mind.**

I think, in a way, the Renaissance saw this. And for a time it shone through.

Rudolf Theil says 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. Intuitively he realized that the Sun was only a star, one among millions of other stars.**
>
> **This second upheaval, even more revolutionary than the first, was in Bruno's time pure prophecy; many generations were to pass before it could be incontrovertibly demonstrated. And yet it sufficed to have put it into words; the idea took permanent root in the minds of all astronomers... Thus, the strictest of sciences accepted for seven generations a belief whose author was never recognized as a scientist, and scarcely ever mentioned. Science bowed to the word of a prophet.**

In fact, it wasn't until 1929 that the Sun was no longer seen as the center of the universe when Hubble established that the fuzzy spiral nebulae were not clouds of gas but were distant galaxies of billions of stars — "island universes" like our Milky Way.

As recently as June 28, 1998, the front page of the *New York Times* featured a color rendering of our sun, planets, and the star Gliese 876. The caption reads, "A New Planet Almost Next Door," and goes on to say that the discovery of a planet orbiting a star near our sun means that "planets outside the solar system may be more common than previously believed."

Bruno saw this – *intuitively* – over four hundred years ago!

But Bruno's cosmology was the least of his offenses, although he died for it. Central to his theory of an extended cosmos of earthly matter lay his radical theories on matter itself – theories that I think were far more threatening to the authorities than his cosmological vision. And this perhaps was the area where Bruno would have had the greatest impact, had he prevailed.

For to Bruno, matter was divine; and inherent in his notion of the divinity of matter was his notion of unity – of a Maximum made up of discreet Minimums that ultimately reconcile in the One. Thus, in discussing his ideas, I'll begin with his vision of Unity.

EVERYTHING IS ONE

In *De la causa*, Bruno's character, Theofilo, says:

> **All things are in the universe and the universe is in all things; we in it, and it in us, therefore all things concur in perfect unity.**

In a way, all of Bruno's insights can be traced back to his overriding belief, even

obsession, that the great reconciler and leveler was *not death but unity*. This manifested in his thought as firm opposition to the gnostic, dualistic world view of Plato and Aristotle as well as to ecclesiastical Trinitarianism (the three in one) that dominated mainstream Christianity from the Fourth Century on.

Much of his thinking on unity was derived from the pre-Socratics and the Stoics, and Nicholas of Cusa, especially his doctrine of the "coincidence of contraries." Basic to this was Bruno's creed that "in God – in the Maximum – all opposites are reconciled."

Bruno extended this to all, including the devil and evil, for it was his profound belief – shall we now call it naive, stupid – that the Good, or God, was the only thing that was not *diametrically opposed* to anything since it was, as he termed it, the Maximum. To Bruno, this benevolence – this force – was more powerful than any devil or evil and, ultimately, in the long run (whether 'infinity' or 'eternity') this Good would overcome evil, the devil would be "saved" (in Christian parlance) or, more accurately, "nullified" since: *in God, all opposites are reconciled*. This is the only reasonable conclusion to draw from his world-view which refused to accept a God that was less than total abundance, since, as Bruno's reasoned, it is impossible for the Creator to be <less than> anything.

Bruno also wrote in *De la causa*:

> **There is nothing that should alarm us. For this unity is sole and stable and remains for ever. This oneness is eternal. Every aspect, every face, everything else is vanity, is as nothing - nay, all that is outside of this One is nothing.**

Now Shakespeare plays a lot on "one" and "nothing" – the Shakespearean Zero. In this respect, the Brunian One is more like the Shakespearean Zero than the numerical One of Pythagoras. Rather, it is the "One in All" of Parmenides, or the Dao of Confucius. It is everything and nothing in that it contains All and is indivisible.

At any rate, Bruno's unity, which posited an ultimate reconciliation of all contraries, was a broad, across-the-board unity that pervaded all his thinking and wore many faces: religious, social, moral and ethical, as well as physical, or metaphysical.

In *De la causa,* he writes:

> **Everything is one and the knowledge of this unity is the purpose and term of all philosophies and natural contemplations.**

Natural contemplations and philosophies, yes. Notice he doesn't say 'theologies'. The fact is, Bruno's pre-Socratic monism clashed, not just with gnostic Christianity but with every dualistic (monotheistic) orthodoxy, including Orthodox Judaism and Islam. To Bruno's monist creed, All Gods are One; God himself a unity, and the doctrine of the Trinity, a degradation of divinity. All religions are, or rather ought to be, One.

Ultimately, values too must resolve as one, the same or "relative"; hence religious wars and fanatics, national boundaries, all forms of jingoism and separatism, were viewed as abominations grounded in blindness and ignorance, leading to persecution,

intolerance, and man's unending inhumanity to man.

Thus, in his *Cena*, speaking of Columbus and the helmsmen-explorers, Bruno shows little mercy – and a remarkably modern view – when he makes an attack on the concept of manifest destiny, colonial expansion and conquest:

> **Teofilo: How do we honor these helmsmen who have discovered how to disturb everyone else's peace; how to violate the native spirits of diverse regions and mingle together that which nature hath wisely kept apart; how, with violence, to propagate new follies and plant unheard-of insanities where before they did not exist – so that he who is strongest comes to conclude he is the wisest. They devise new ways, instruments and arts for tyrannizing and murdering one another other...**

And elsewhere:

> **Teofilo: How easily it becomes a custom for our people to deem it an offering to the gods, when they have subdued, slain, conquered, and murdered the enemies of our faith; no less than others, when they have done the same to us. And with no less fervor and conviction do the latter thank God for having the light (through which they expect eternal life) than do we render thanks for not being in their blindness and darkness.**

*** * ***

To sum up then what can only be the tip of the iceberg of the great, vast and sweeping radical ideas of Bruno – radical even for our times – let us move on, bearing in mind these three principles of his:

- **Everything is one.**
- **In God all opposites are reconciled.**
- **Matter and spirit are one.**

MATER, MATERIA AND NATURE

The prevailing view on matter – central to Aristotle's system which still clings to us today – holds that matter is chaotic and base, most of all, passive, and that only through the nobility of form is it redeemed, defined, dignified, or has any meaning.

There is a scene in the movie *The Name of the Rose* (book by Umberto Eco, screenplay by Andrew Birkin and Gerard Brach) where an Old Monk points to the Virgin Mary and whispers to Sean Connery's young novice:

Monk: She's beautiful, is she not? When the female, by nature blurred, becomes sublime by holiness, then she can be the noblest vehicle of Grace.

Why? Because matter without form is base, fickle and changing; and it is only through the constancy of form (Ideal Form, the eternal, unchanging principle) that matter is redeemed. What's wrong with this picture?

Giordano Bruno, one hundred and eighty degrees opposed to Aristotle, the Church, and thousands of years of history says that *form is transitory, ever changing, and dependent upon the eternal principle of matter for its being.*

Let us reflect on this reversal closely to shed more light on its radical implications.

In *De la causa*, Bruno's character says:

> **Teofilo: Forms have no being without matter. It is out of her bosom they come forth and into it they are gathered. Hence matter, which always remains identical and fertile, ought to be recognized as the sole substantial principle, as that which is and which forever remains. And forms, all of them together, are to be taken only as varied dispositions of matter which come and go...**

And later:

> **Teofilo: Matter, deprived of form ... is not as ice that lacks warmth, or the abyss that is deprived of light; but is like a pregnant woman that lacks offspring, which she has yet to bring forth and draw out of herself, like the earth in this hemisphere at night is without light, which in its ceaseless movement it has power to regain.**

Later, his disciple Dicson says:

> **Dicson: Matter, which unfolds what it holds folded-up, should be called a thing divine, the best parent, generator, and mother of natural things...**

And later, in Bruno's 16th century version of "a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle," he says:

> **Teofilo: Since matter doesn't get anything from form, why do you believe it desires it? It doesn't desire those forms which daily change on its surface; for every well-ordered thing desires that from which it receives perfection. What can a corruptible thing give to an eternal thing?**

In regard to the history of women, let me briefly return to the ecclesiastical authority of *The Name of the Rose* when the young novice asks Sean Connery about Aquinas's views on the love of women? The reply:

> **Connery: Of Woman Thomas Aquinas knew precious little, but the scriptures are very clear. Proverbs warns us, "*Women take possession of a man's precious soul*," while Ecclesiastes tells us "*More bitter than Death is Woman*."**

The Boy interrupts:

> **Boy: Yes— but what do you think, Master?**

And Connery replies:

> **Connery: I find it difficult to convince myself that God would have introduced such a fowl being into creation without endowing her with some virtues.**

Throughout Bruno's treatise on matter, he is playing on this convention of the medieval notion of equating passive, deprived matter with the ecclesiastical notion of depraved sensual woman, thus identifying the Aristotelian system with a life-denying morality.

If you saw the movie *Stigmata* you heard this theme loud and clear. At one point the main character turns to the priest (played by Gabriel Bryne) and accuses him – and all priests – of being "dead from the neck down."

What we're getting at here is a cosmological insight that has ramifications throughout both religion and everyday life down to our present day.

*** * ***

Relative to Bruno's opposition to what can best be described as the divorce between Spirit and Matter, Ramon Mendoza notes:

> **Bruno's defeat was not only a personal one. It was also a severe setback for European culture and civilization. A long overdue correction of the trail blazed by dualistic Platonism – and its most popular form, Christianity, which Nietzsche called 'Platonism for the masses' – was foiled for centuries to come. The birth and development of a sound philosophy of nature was rendered virtually impossible, and the inveterate conception of an extra-cosmic omnipotent, providential, and benevolent pure Spirit, totally detached from the matter it created, was indelibly stamped on Western minds and allowed to continue, for a very long time, to inspire our art and literature, and to provide the principal foundation for our ethical and social behavior.**

This, again, is the biblical carte blanc that says the coffee table is more important than the Rain Forest – an attitude that underscores the root cause of differences ranging from the radical unrest of the WTO riots to the polite politics of Washington spin doctors – differences still lurking, still unresolved, at the heart of the core-beliefs of many in today's world.

Bruno however doesn't stop with chastising the divorce between spirit and matter. He goes further and takes his thesis into an extreme form of radical feminism that rivals even modern-day writers like Mary Daly, author of *Gyne-Ecology*.

This is Bruno at his Radical Feminist best...

A STORM IN THE HOUSE AND THE SHIPWRECK OF MAN

In 1583, in *De la causa,* Bruno uses satire to expose the prevailing conventions of his day when his Pedant, POLIINNIO, a dramatic-type Shakespeare derived from him (e.g. his Polonius) and used often, holds forth on women and matter:

> **<u>Poliinnio</u>: Not without some important cause did the senators of the realm of Pallas decide to collocate on an equal footing: Matter and Woman. For they had been brought to that transport of frenzy by their experience of the creature's**

flat inflexibility – and here there occurs to me a precise rhetorical flourish. Woman is a chaos of irrationality, a wood of wickedness, a forest of ribaldry, a mass of uncleanliness, with an aptitude for every perdition. Where lay the destruction of Troy? In a woman. Who was the instrument enfeebling the strength of Samson? A Woman!

After a long list of blighted females, he goes on:

Poliinnio (continuing): Tell me the cause of your fragility? Because my mother conceived me in sin. How, O ancient first-made man, being gardener of paradise and cultivator of the tree of life, did you turn so wrong-headed as to precipitate yourself – with all the human seed – into the deep gulf of perdition.

And more:

Poliinnio (continuing): 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, or copulation with it, replies in these words to *natura naturans*, or rather in this sentence: "*The woman that he gave me*" – that is, matter – "*she, she deceived me*" – that is, she is the cause of my sin— [breaking off] Oh, 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?

Yes, he is very much like Polonius. And you'll find in Hamlet, by the way, that the play on the word "matter" ("What is the matter, my Lord" and so forth) occurs frequently throughout.

Now Gervase, another follower, arrives and asks Poliinnio, "What's up?" The reply:

Poliinnio: I came upon a passage of Aristotle in the first book of the *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 ... inadequate, curt, amputated, rusty, tares, vermin, plague, disease, death....

He goes on. And on. Gervase interrupts, cautioning him to "beware the wrath of the Thracian women" but Poliinnio persists, saying:

Poliinnio: I say that a man without woman is like one of the intelligences. He is, I say, a hero, a demigod, who doesn't take a wife.
Gervase: And he is like an oyster, a mushroom also, and a truffle.
Poliinnio: Whence the lyric poet has divinely said: nothing is better than a bachelor life. Woman is an obstacle to quiet, a continual damage, a daily war, a life-prison, a storm in the house, the shipwreck of man. And the man from Biscay properly confirmed all that when, stirred to impatience and anger at his horrifying fortune and the raging of the sea, turned on the waves with a grim face: "Ah sea, sea," he cried, "if only I could marry you off!"

Gervase then digresses to praise Madam de Mauvissiere – the wife of Bruno's host and patron – and their infant daughter, after which Poliinnio returns to his rant.

Poliinnio: To return to our theme, woman is no more than a matter. If you don't know what woman is because you don't know what matter is, then study a little the Peripatetics, who, by teaching you what matter is, will teach you what woman is.

> **Gervase: I see plainly that with that Peripatetic brain of yours, you have grasped little or nothing of what Teofilo said yesterday about the essence and potency of matter.**
> **Poliinnio: But I hold fast to this point: I censure the appetite of both matter and woman, the cause of all evil, suffering, defect, ruin and corruption. Don't you believe that if matter were to be satisfied with its present form, no alteration or suffering would have dominion over us – we'd never die; we'd be incorruptible and eternal?**

Gervase replies:

> **Gervase: And if it had been satisfied with the form it had fifty years ago, where would you be today? What would you say, Poliinnio? If it had stopped dead in the form it had forty years ago, would you be so adulterous, uh, I mean so adult, so perfect, so learned?**

Essentially he's saying, "You'd still be wearing diapers!" But to sum it up:

Bruno defined all reality as a unitary process in which *matter* is the primary content and the inexhaustible source of form. Matter is thus the dynamic that produces the infinite universe of infinite forms, infinite species and infinite individuals that emerge over time; and, by the same token, it also produces the infinite capacity of the mind and imagination to comprehend this infinity of the whole. For to Bruno, matter and soul, or spirit, were but different aspects of an intelligent unitary nature. Years later, just before his arrest, he would write in *De minimo*:

> **By birth and growth the spirit-architect expands into this mass of which we consist, spreading outwards from the heart. Thither again it withdraws, winding up the threads of its web, retiring by the same path along which it advanced, passing out by the same gate through which it entered...**

WHEN TRUTH IS A LIAR

Bruno's theories on matter and women, along with his overriding theory on unity, extend into his theories on the cosmos, which some might say precedes them. Bruno would probably say they're all One.

In *De l'infinito universo et mondi* – Bruno's first work on what he calls the "hurly-burly" –Bruno's follower, Elpino, leads him:

> **Elpino: There are then innumerable suns, and an infinite number of earths revolve around those suns. . .**
> **Philoteo: That is so.**
> **Elpino: Why then do we not see the other bright bodies which are earths circling around the bright bodies which are suns?**
> **Philoteo: We do not discern the earths because, being much smaller, they are**

invisible to us.

In addition, Bruno describes for his followers – and the world of 1584 – the nature of these heavenly bodies when his follower says:

> **Elpino: They therefore err who describe the outer surrounding bright bodies as certain *fifth essences*, certain divine corporeal substances of a nature contrary to that of the bright bodies which are near to us...**

And Bruno as Philoteo replies:

> **Philoteo: Certainly.**

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

Later, another of Bruno's followers, Fracastoro, asks Burchio, the Pedant in *De l'infinito*:

> **Fracastoro: Why have you said there is much-difference between those distant celestial bodies and these which are close to us?**
>
> **Burchio: Those are divine, these compound of matter.**

Fracastoro then delivers a lengthy refutation to the dualism – divine vs. base matter – underpinning the Gnostic/Christian cosmos, and Burchio replies with what can only be called the essential Pedant's Lament of the times:

> **Burchio: Where then is that beautiful order, that lovely scale of nature rising from the denser and grosser body which is our earth; to the less dense which is water; and on to the subtle which is vapor; to the yet subtler which is pure air; on to the subtlest which is fire; and finally to the divine which is the celestial body? From the obscure to the less obscure; to the brighter; and finally to the brightest? From the dark to the most brilliant; from the alterable and corruptible to liberation from all change and corruption...**

The key here is that Bruno felt that change and corruption are just fine!

> **... from the heaviest to the heavy; thence to the light; on to the lightest; and finally to that which is without weight or lightness? From that which moves toward the *center*, to that which moves from the *center*, and then to that which moves around the *center*?**

And Bruno replies:

> **You would like to know where is this order? In the realm of dreams, fantasies, delusions...**

Would you have placed a ruined king on a heath as a madman with the elements

raging about him before this was written?

Later, Bruno's follower goes on to say:

> **Fracastoro: I deny this order, this disposition that the earth is surrounded and contained by water, water by air, air by fire, fire by the heaven. Because I say there is but one singular container that comprehendeth all...**

He is destroying the hierarchies!

> **... the famous and received order of the elements and of the heavenly bodies is a dream and vainest fantasy since it can neither be verified by observation of nature nor proved by reason, or argued, nor is it either convenient or possible to conceive that it exist in such fashion.**
>
> **But we know that there is an infinite field, a containing space which embraces and interpenetrates the whole. In it is an infinity of bodies similar to our own. No one of these, more than another, is the center of the universe, for the universe is infinite and therefore without center or limit...**
>
> **Thus, there is not merely one world, one earth, one sun, but as many worlds as we see bright lights around us which are neither more nor less in one heaven, one space, one containing sphere... So that the heaven, the infinitely extending air – though part of the infinite universe – is therefore not a world ... but is the womb, the receptacle and field within which all move and live, grow and change, changing the face of a single being through countless forms...**
>
> **Burchio: In this way, you would put the world upside down.**

And the reply:

> **Fracastoro: Would you consider him to do wrong who would upset a world which is upside down?**

Doubt Truth to be a liar. . .

And the Pedant comes back with:

> **Burchio: Would you then render vain all efforts, study and labors wherein so many great commentators, paraphrasers, glossers, compilers, epitomizers, scholiasts, translators, questioners and logicians have puzzled their brains? Whereon profound doctors, subtle, golden, exalted, irrefragable, angelic, cherubic and divine, have established their foundation?**

This is a good Pedant.

Regarding his irrefragable firmamenticians and philosophisers, he goes on to say:

> **Burchio: Should we cast them all at your suggestion into a cesspool? The world will indeed be ruled well if the speculations of so many and such worthy philosophers are to be cast aside and despised.**

Enter Rosencrantz.

> **Rosencrantz: The cess of majesty**
> **Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw**
> **What's near it with it; or it is a massy wheel**
> **Fixed on the summit of the highest mount,**
> **To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things...**

('Ten thousand' was the number assigned to the stars in the outer sphere.)

> **... are mortised and adjoined, which when it falls,**
> **Each small annexment, petty consequence,**
> **Attends the boist'rous ruin. Never alone**
> **Did the King sigh, but with a general groan.** ***(Hamlet, III.iii)***

Hamlet will also throw into confusion the Renaissance manifesto in Pico's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* that begins: "What a great miracle is Man ... a being worthy of reverence and honor..." when he says:

> **What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in facultie, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel ... and yet to me...**
> **[and here is the Fall] ... what is this quintessence of dust? (*Hamlet*, II.ii.)**

The notion of the q*uintessence* and *dust* are, of course, inherently incompatible; although in Bruno's world, where everything is reconciled, they are ultimately compatible. However this juxtaposition of the lowest, *dust*, and the highest, q*uintessence*, are a singularly Brunian construction of opposites encompassing both maximum and minimum – a "Brunian quintessence" if you will.

Mendoza quotes German philosopher Ernst Bloch's description of the effect of Bruno's devastating insight on the times. Bloch asks us to "relive what this meant":

> **... the roof of the heavens was pulled off, the world-onion with the seven skins exploded, along with the remote lanterns that shone on us through the stars. . . an infinity of the cosmic Maximum dawned on the world, or so it seemed, as it had never been experienced before, except by mystics, when they immersed themselves in the infinity of God.**

DREAMING IN THE ROCKS

Mendoza has said that Bruno was not a mystic. He was not a mystic in the contemplative sense as we know it. He was, however, a mystic in the ecstatic sense. And it is impossible not to attribute some mystical sensibility to Bruno's overriding view of the life-force as "animating" everything.

This well-thought out view was a forerunner of our modern theory of atoms and electrons – minute particles all 'animated' – 'organic' or 'electro-magnetic' or whatever the scientific *concept du jour* would say – "endowed with a kind of life" in Bruno's words, and swirling by means of some self-motivation in space. And

although this view was rooted in logic for Bruno as well as Teilhard de Chardin, Hugo and others, it was also found in, and confirmed by, what was called in the Renaissance, "magia"; as such, it is the forerunner to today's New Age ideologies and, at the same time, of what Mendoza calls the " third scientific revolution".

> **Creation is not instantaneous; it is an ongoing process. The universe has a life history. Instead of sliding into featurelessness, it rises out of featurelessness, growing rather than dying, developing new structures, processes and potentialities all the time, unfolding like a flower.**

That isn't Bruno. It's Mendoza quoting Paul Davies' *The Cosmic Blueprint: New Discoveries in Nature's Creative Ability to Order the Universe*. 1988. In *De la causa,* Dicson, Bruno's follower, asks:

> **Dicson: I seem to be hearing something very unusual. You hold perhaps that not only the form of the universe, but all forms of natural objects whatever are soul?**
> **Teofilo: Yes.**
> **Dicson: All things are then animated?**
> **Teofilo: Yes.**
> **Dicson: But who will agree with you on this?**
> **Teofilo: Who with reason can disprove it?**
> **Dicson: Common sense tells us that not all things are alive.**
> **Teofilo: Common sense isn't the truest sense.**

When truth is a liar . . .

> **Teofilo: Let a thing be as small and diminutive as you like, it still possesses in itself a part of spiritual substance which, if it finds a suitable subject, becomes plant, becomes animal, and receives the members of one or other of the bodies that are commonly called animate; for spirit is found in all things and there is not the least corpuscle that doesn't contain internally some portion that may become alive which, if they are not living creatures, are still organisms, if not according to the perceptible presence of animation and life, yet they are animate according to a sort of primordial activity of animation and life.**

And later:

> **Teofilo: Thus while form changes place and circumstance, it itself cannot possibly be annihilated, since spiritual substance is no less real than material. So only outer forms change and are destroyed, since they are not things, but are "of things"; they are not substance, but accidents and circumstances of substance.**

And Bruno's Follower replies:

> **Dicson: If any part of substance were to be annulled, the whole world would be emptied out.**

OF MEN, STARS AND ANTS

Other ideas that need to be touched on are Bruno's notion of the Maximim (his God, his Infinity) and the Minimum (the Monad); his belief in Metempsychosis; his refusal to believe that death was anything more than change and transformation, hence his denial of heaven, hell and purgatory as actual places; his belief in life on other worlds and, perhaps, other planes; his pre-Adamite theory – which was one of the reasons cited for his burning. There are many others.

In his theories on the Minimum, Bruno credited the discrete and separative function of form as being coequal with matter in creating the multiplicity that comprises the finite *things of this world*. Again reversing Aristotle, Bruno held the Maximum to be infinite, while the "things of form" – all the way down to the least of forms – which he called the Monad – were finite in their divisibility.

Furthermore, throughout his writings, when dealing with the "least of things" Bruno showed no less respect and awe than he did when dealing with the "greatest."

He wrote:

> **You do not come any nearer to proportion, likeness, union, and identity with the infinite by being a man than by being an ant, by being a star than by being a man; for you do not draw any closer to that being by yourself being a sun or a moon than by being a man or an ant. Because to the infinite, these things are indifferent.**

His views on metempsychosis were rooted in Lucretius and his own observation of the self-renewing power of Nature which showed him that death was nothing but a kind of change and transformation, and nothing to be feared. He wrote:

> **A time will come – a new and desired age – when the Gods shall lie in Orcus, and the dread of everlasting punishment shall vanish from the world.**

In *De la causa*, he makes it very clear:

> **Teofilo: We have an intrinsic formal principle incomparably superior to that imagined by the Sophists who posit "corruptible substances"... so it is not surprising that all are so greatly terrified of death and dissolution, like men who feel the loss of their being is imminent. Against this madness nature cries out in a loud voice and assures us that neither bodies nor soul need fear death, since matter and form alike are absolutely constant principles.**

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

Queen Gertrude says to Hamlet:

> **Do not forever with thy veiled lids**
> **Seek for thy noble father in the dust.**
> **Thou knows't 'tis common; all that lives must die**

Passing through nature to eternity.

Echoing Ovid, Bruno writes:

> **Teofilo: Don't you see that what was seed becomes stalk, and what was stalk becomes corn, and what was corn becomes bread – that out of bread comes chyle, out of chyle blood, out of blood the seed, out of the seed the embryo, and then man, corpse, earth stone, or something else in succession – on and on, involving all natural forms?**
>
> **Gervase: I see that easily.**
>
> **Teofilo: There must then exist an unchanging thing which in itself is not stone nor earth nor corpse nor man nor embryo nor blood nor anything else in particular, but which, after it was blood, became embryo, receiving the embryonic being; and after it was embryo, received the human being and became man.**

Later, Hamlet asks:

> **Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of**
> **Alexander till it find it stopping a bunghole?**
>
> **Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust; the dust is earth; of earth we make loam; and who of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer barrel?**
>
> **Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay,**
> **Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.**
> **O, that the earth which kept the world in awe**
> **Should patch a wall t'expel the winter's flaw!**

And later in the same scene, talking to King Claudius:

> **Hamlet: Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service— two dishes, but to one table. That's the end.**
> **Claudius: Alas, alas!**
> **Hamlet: A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.**
> **Claudius: What dost thou mean by this?**
> **Hamlet: Nothing but to show you how a king may go to process through the guts of a beggar.**

HAMLET IN A NUTSHELL

There were four main cosmologies, and then there was Bruno; and as we see in *Hamlet*, it was not just science: the whole world was "bowing to the word of the prophet."

Let's set aside the fact that Shakespeare's source (Saxo Grammaticus' *Amleth*) was

derived from the Icelandic, *Amlodhi*, a world monomyth known in 16th Century Europe that dealt with the precession of the equinoxes and the movement of the world's axis around the pole star. (Georgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend in *Hamet's Mill: An Essay on Myth and the Frame of Time*).

I will only mention again in passing the castle of Tycho Brahe's patron, Helsingor, and its similarity to Hamlet's Elsinore; Brahe's ancestors, Rosenkrantz and Gyldenstierne; the king in *Hamlet*, Claudius, and his likely namesake, Claudius Ptolemy; Wittenberg where Hamlet and Horatio studied and where Bruno and Marlowe's Dr Faustus were both doctors of philosophy, where Luther nailed his challenge to ecclesiastical world order on the cathedral door, and the place considered the academic seat of the Copernican system in Europe; and I will only mention in passing the famous line with strong Brunian overtones made by Hamlet: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

In passing also, Bruno's two most famous pedants appear in Shakespeare: Poliinnio echoes Polonius and, more important, an exchange between Polonius and Hamlet mirrors a scene in *Il candelaio* whose pedant, Manfurio, is thought by most scholars to have inspired Shakespeare's Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* (1599-1600) the play that preceded Hamlet. Thus we have Poliinnio/Polonius and Manfurio/Malvolio.

Again in passing, throughout the play there are many references to the sun— a sun breeding maggots. Keep your daughter from the sun, Hamlet warns Polonius; and his first line in the play, after his aside, is to tell the king, "I am too much in the sun." Bruno's contemporaries in England called him the "Priest of the Sun." Was it because he used Copernicus as his springboard to the stars, or because he saw divinity in nature reflected in the sun-worship of Egyptian Hermeticism, or because he loved light and often referred to his 'divine sun' using it as a central motif throughout his work?

Bruno opens his great *De la causa* with this exchange between himself, Filoteo, and his follower, Eliotropio, his pseudonym for his friend, John Florio:

> **Eliotropio: It's as with convicts grown used to the gloom: when they are freed from the dungeon of some dark tower and go out into the daylight. In the same way, many men who've been trained in vulgar philosophy, and others as well, become scared and bewildered: unable to sustain the new sunlight of your clear concepts, they are thoroughly disturbed.**
>
> **Filoteo: The fault is not in the light, but in the sight. The more beautiful and excellent the sun, the more detestable and harshly unwelcome it will be to the eyes of night-witches.**

Later Eliotrope says:

> **Eliotrope: But the creatures born to look upon the sun, arriving at the end of hateful night, will thank the goodness of heaven and, preparing to receive in the rounded crystal of their eyes the rays they have so desired and hoped-for, will adore the East...**

And last but not least, we see the themes of memory and remembering, dear to Bruno,

in the play.

For throughout his fourteen-year exile, Bruno distinguished himself and often supported himself as tutor to the nobility at the highest courts of Europe on the Art of Memory, writing works on the imagination and the mnemonic arts. In *Hamlet*, as Gatti shows, the theme of memory and remembering is deeply embedded in the play. In fact, the entire action is kicked off when the Ghost of Hamlet's father intones:

Remember me...

And Hamlet replies:

Ay, thou poor ghost, whilst memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe. Remember thee?
Yea, from the table of my memory...

Later, remembering back, Hamlet says:

"Adieu, adieu, remember me."

And at the end, Hamlet's last concern is not with dying or with the Christian afterlife – it's with how he's going to be *remembered* in this life; for his last request to Horatio is "... report me and my cause aright to the unsatisfied."

And later he pleads with Horatio:

Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw they breath in pain,
To tell my story.

And then there is Hamlet's poem to Ophelia – a perfect module of pure Brunian thought:

The stars ARE fire

The sun DOES move

And...

Truth IS a liar (in an out-of-joint or "upside down" world)

And even the last line...

But NEVER doubt I love.

... echoes the manifesto of ecstatic love Bruno wrote for Sir Philip Sidney in *Gli heroici*.

*** * ***

I have tried to keep speculation to a minimum. On the other hand, these other points Gatti makes also bear consideration:

Polonius: What is the matter, my Lord?
Hamlet: Between who?
Polonius: I mean the matter that you read, my Lord.

In other words, what is the book that he's reading? The answer?

The book Hamlet is reading is Bruno's play, *Il Candelaio!* And how do we know this? In Bruno's play a Gentleman asks the pedant, Manfurio:

Gentleman: What is the matter of your verses?
Manfurio: Letterae, syllabae, dictio et oratio, partes propinquae et remotae.

. . . which translates, "Letters, syllables, diction, power of speech, the parts related directly or indirectly to the whole." Less formally, "Words, words, words."

Polonius: I mean what is their subject matter, their theme?
Hamlet: Slanders, sir; for the satirical rogue says here...

And who is the satirical rogue?

The satirical rogue is Momus – Greek God of Satire – a central character in Bruno's infamous *Lo spaccio (The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*) – the book said to be most responsible for his burning.

> **"... my body is wrinkling and my brain getting 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."**

That isn't Hamlet; it's Bruno's Jupiter in *Lo spaccio* describing his old age. Hamlet, referring to the book he's reading in the scene, says to Polonius, as follows:

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

Thus we know that Shakespeare has included Bruno's book, *Lo spaccio*, in his great play, and that it is in fact the book Hamlet is reading.

It is at this moment in the play that Tycho Brahe's two "ancestor-henchmen" – Rosencrantz and Guildenstern – arrive and trigger a further series of allusions to Bruno.

- **The Minimum and the Maximum**

> **Hamlet: Oh, God I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space were it not that I have bad dreams.**

- **Ambition**

This is a theme always associated with Bruno and with Marlowe's Dr Faustus for whom some believe Bruno was the inspiration.

> **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 of so airy light a quality that it is but a shadow's shadow.**
> **Hamlet: Then are our beggars' bodies, and our monarchs and outstretched heros are the beggars' shadows.**

The last line above, referencing "beggars' shadows," can only be explained by a scene in Bruno's *Lo spaccio* where Poverty and Riches leave the heavens and the character, Momus, sees one shadow between them. In Bruno's book, the shadow, called Ambition, moves away from Poverty to envelope Riches, thus undoing both.

A close study of Bruno's lengthy passage shows there is absolutely no way Hamlet's line about "beggars' bodies" makes any sense without the passage from *Lo spaccio*.

Bruno and Hamlet are both saying that when all is leveled, when the Shakespearean Zero falls at the end of day, everything is equal. Everything is One. Poverty is no longer poverty; and kings and riches, overshadowed by the fear of what seemed farthest from them – a beggar's shadow! – become one with their opposites in that ultimate place where *all are reconciled*.

- **Memory, dreams and the imagination**

In *Hamlet* – as well as throughout the entire Shakespeare canon – the Ramist/Lull controversy on dreams, memory, images and the imagination is a constant theme – a theme which Bruno fueled with the publication of his first book in France in 1582, *De umbras ideum (The Shadow of Ideas)* – before he ever set foot in England. This controversy I think is one of the key places to look for vestiges of the author of the plays – since no one in England was able to remain neutral on the issue.

- **Predestination**

A brief overview...

Another great controversy that raged at the end of the 16th Century, perhaps the equivalent (and maybe even the forerunner) of our "cold war" between capitalism and communism, was the issue of what constitutes *efficacious grace*, what justifies salvation; in essence: "what saves." The debate pitted Jesuit against Dominican in a fierce bid for papal approval, and Pope Clement VIII made it his mission to resolve the issue in time for the new (the 16th) century. What "saves" had split Protestant from Catholic earlier with Luther, but later it crept further into the ranks of both camps, factioning endlessly like an unchecked cancer cell. The issue lay at the heart of Bruno's ultimate rejection of Protestantism that championed *predestined* grace and held works in contempt. God alone saved. Men, of their own free will, can do nothing. We are born predestined. Calvin upped the ante and said only *some* are predestined to be saved. And so it went.

On the front page of that same strangely Brunian *New York Times* of June 26, 1998 – adjacent to the article "A New Planet Almost Next Door" – is the headline, "Vatican Settles A Historic Issue With Lutherans." The article begins:

> **"In a decision intended to resolve an issue that split the Western Christian world nearly 500 years ago, the Vatican said yesterday that it would sign a declaration with most of the world's Lutherans affirming that Roman Catholics and Lutherans share a basic understanding of how human beings receive God's forgiveness and salvation.**
>
> **The document, approved last week by the Lutheran World Federation, declares that Catholics and Lutherans have found an essential common ground on the issue of "justification," the action by which a human being is made worthy of salvation.**
>
> **The Reformation leader Martin Luther held that justification comes solely through faith in God, while the Catholic Church taught that a person's good works play a role.**
>
> **Now, through the declaration, Catholics and Lutherans agree that divine forgiveness and salvation come only through God's grace and that good works flow from that. The consensus, while acknowledging that serious differences remain between the two churches on the issue, represents a new appreciation for basic elements in each other's teachings along with recognition of beliefs they share. The declaration is a result of years of biblical scholarship, inter-church dialogue and a renunciation of age-old stereotypes..."**

Age-old stereotypes, yes; but perhaps it would have been more accurate to say, *ageless*. For here we have – on the authority of our own *New York Times* – the still heated issue that Gatti shows Hamlet agonized over four hundred years ago in his soliloquy on Fate:

<u>Hamlet</u>: We defy augury.

Free Will. Faustian. We are in charge of our fate and not at the mercy of the Protestant doctrine of predestination sweeping the 16th Century.

<u>Hamlet</u>: There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow.

Matthew 10:29. A passage particularly dear to Calvin. Protestant. Predestination – and double-predestination.

<u>Hamlet</u>: 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.

<u>Bruno</u>: For everything that is, is either here or there, either near or far, either now or to come.

These are Bruno's concluding words to an unidentified woman named Morgana in his dedication to *Il candelaio*. They speak to his abiding belief in the immortality of the soul and the on-going principal of metempsychosis working throughout all life.

<u>Hamlet</u>: The readiness is all.

Matthew again: Be ye also ready.

Thus, contrary to the standard interpretations of this famous passage in the play – a passage that has been used to argue Shakespeare's beliefs as Protestant, Catholic, or Reformation, whoever wrote *Hamlet* actually appears to be toying with – or even mocking – the Reformation concept of providence and predestination by weaving into it a Faustian nod to Will – "we defy augury" – and Bruno's own strange and out-of-joint-with-the-times philosophy that would say, our ultimate 'fate' lies in the power of nature that – very simply – "unfolds" in its own time and place.

Bruno was burned at the stake in February 1600. *Hamlet* is dated 1601. It was probably written soon after Bruno paid the ultimate price for his ideas – for what he called the *nuovo filosofia* (the new philosophy) or *filosofia Nolana* – the philosophy of the Nolan.

WHO'S THE FOOL NOW

Among Thomas Hariot's own papers, in his manuscript of his work, *L'infinitis (The Infinite)*, he comments on Bruno's ideas as expressed in his works on the Minimum and Maximum, published in Frankfurt in 1591, the last year of Bruno's freedom. These last works of Bruno, written in Latin and considered his greatest, are known as *The Minimum* (*De triplici minimo et mensura), The Monad (De monade numero et figura, de minimo magno* & *mesura)* and his great Latin poem *The Immense and Innumerable Worlds (De innumerabilibus, immenso,* & *infigurabili; seu de universo* & *mundis*). Copies of these works were found in The Earl of Northumberland's libraries, Hariot's patron, so we know Hariot had access to them.

On one page of Hariot's own copy of *L'infinitis*, he has written *"Minimum"* and beside it— *"that which will kill men by piercing and running through"*; underneath this, he writes "*Maximum – that which will press men to death*." At the bottom of another page of particularly anguished reasoning by Bruno, he has written these three enigmatic lines:

Much ado about nothing.
Great warres and no blowes.
Who is the foole now?

Indeed, who is the fool now?

IN FINITO

Regarding the authorship mystery, I believe we need to reevaluate the plays in the light of Giordano Bruno and his remarkable ideas, and who not only held these ideas but proclaimed them loudly as a "new philosophy" – so that he was never able to remain for more than two years in any one place until, at the end, he was imprisoned for eight years in darkness before choosing to burn at the stake. If we want to pour our hearts, time, and research into coward candidates and claim whoever wrote these masterpieces hid for the sake of a name, a title, even a life – that will continue to be our blindness.

The alternative is to see the plays as reflections of a radical, new and 'dangerous'

philosophy brought forth at a time when, as Shakespeare's Cleopatra lamented, the soldier's pole had indeed fallen; a time when "young boys and girls were level now with men, and there is nothing left remarkable beneath the visiting moon"; a time when "the crown of the earth" had melted – and kings and madmen stood equal on the stage of life in the center of what? Nothing but the raging elements.

The king, the madman and the prophet are indeed like the lunatic, the lover, and the poet in a world where visions are more real than truth.

> **I believe and understand that beyond and further beyond that imagined-border of the sky, there are and always will be further regions and physical worlds – stars, earths and suns – all absolutely sensible and each according to their own laws, although we cannot see them because of their great distance from us. But they are real...**
>
> **-** ***La cena de la ceneri*****, 1583.**

THE WINDS OF ROME

Bruno was imprisoned eight years in darkness before being burned. Perhaps the most perfect expression of his ultimate and radical optimism is expressed in these words he wrote shortly before his betrayal:

> **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 February 17th, 1600 – during festivities to celebrate the new century – he was led to the stake on the Campo dei Fiori (the *Field of Flowers*) and burned as an offering to the new century. The following is the actual account from the *Register of the Archives, The Brotherhood of Pity of St. John the Beheaded,* February [17], 1600:

> **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 brethren 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.**

As an impenitent heretic, he was denied burial and his ashes were scattered to the winds of Rome. He had written:

We recognize a noble image, a marvelous conception, a supreme figure, an exalted shadow, an infinite representation of the represented infinity, a spectacle worthy of the excellence and supremacy of Him who transcends understanding, comprehension or grasp. Thus, is the excellence of God magnified and the greatness of his kingdom made manifest. He is glorified not in one, but in countless suns; not in a single earth, a single world, but in a thousand thousand, I say in an infinity of worlds.

- ***De l'infinito,*** **1584**

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 either here or there, either near or far, either now or to come. Be happy, then, if you can, keep well, and love him who loves you.**

- ***Il candelaio,*** **1582**