

## BRUNO'S LOST LABOUR?

(Excavating Love's Labours Lost.)

It is generally believed that Shakespeare's comedy 'Love's Labours Lost' has no particular literary source, but I must challenge that. It can be asserted that the basic plot, revolving around a group of characters who vow to renounce romantic love, then, each in turn, fall for a beautiful lady. It can be found in Lyly's work 'Gallathea', and yet this was clearly not the model for Shakespeare's play. It is rather a generic, neo-Platonic device and we must hunt further, like archaeologists with trowels, for the historical roots of 'LLL'.

I believe that one can source the skeletal remains of an earlier play, written in Italian, but for an English audience, aimed particularly at Sir Philip Sidney and his friends and enveloping a particular knowledge of the Court of Henry of Navarre. I further believe that this earlier, short and quite intellectual comedy was written as a wedding present for Sidney by his Italian protégé Giordano Bruno.

The man who could link Shakespeare to an unpublished, private work by Bruno would be their mutual friend Florio, but there is the shadow of a doubt as to whether he entirely approved of what Shakespeare did with Bruno's play, as we shall see.

Shakespeare had more than one point of access to the work of Giordano Bruno, even though the two almost certainly never met. Bruno had left London long before Shakespeare could have arrived in the city, but there were links the young playwright could scarcely have resisted. Bruno was a legend in his own lifetime and published his most exciting and controversial works in London under the protection of his patron, Sir Philip Sidney, and protector, the French Ambassador Mauvissiere. It is worth a small digression here to explain these relationships. When reading their scholarly works it

would be easy to come away with a rather serious and reverent attitude to them both, especially Bruno, but these were two young Italians in London, enjoying the lavish hospitality of the nobility and revelling in their environment. It was at the French embassy that Bruno shared lodgings with the Ambassador's tutor (and, very probably Burleigh's spy) John Florio for more than two years. Bruno never bothered to learn English, perhaps because he could rely on his friend Florio to translate for him and he relates in his writings of their friendship and adventures together. 'La Cena de la Ceneri' – The Ash Wednesday Supper – in particular, where he describes their hair-raising journey to dinner in a leaky boat and how they sang rousing Italian songs to keep their courage up as they frantically baled fetid Thames water out of the boat. These two young men had fun together. Bruno dubbed Florio by the nick-name 'Elitropio' after the story in the 'Decameron' in which a foolish fellow believed the possession of a lump of this semi-precious stone, elitropio, could give the power of invisibility. His attempt to rob a bank ultimately revealed the awful truth, that his friends had duped him into believing his lump of stone would protect him by pretending they couldn't see him. I suspect Bruno's nickname implies what we can already infer from the historical facts, the French ambassador was well aware of Florio's real mission under his roof, but as a tacit supporter of Elizabeth's liberal, Protestant court, turned a blind eye and left the odd important paper on his desk quite deliberately. To Burleigh, it seemed Florio was highly successful in his mission, uncovering, for example, the habit of using the bungs in wine casks to conceal messages from French spies to the Embassy – the method Mary, Queen of Scots used some time later in the plot which led to her execution. We have the commentaries of Thomas Nashe ('The Unfortunate Traveller') to thank for the knowledge that it was Florio who uncovered this ploy, but whether he did so without a little 'help' from Mauvissiere himself is less certain. From what I have come to know of him, over many years of studying his character, Florio didn't

have a deceitful bone in his body and without Mauvissiere's complicity, he would certainly have made a frightful fist of spying on the French Embassy for Burleigh; no wonder Bruno found the situation laughable. By the end of 1585 the French Court had become very suspicious of Mauvissiere's leaky security and, quite rightly, doubted his true loyalties so they removed him from his post.

For his part, Florio generally referred to his friend Bruno as 'Nolano' – as did most of his friends, after Bruno's home-town Nola, not far from Naples and famous as a modern shopping centre today.

'Nolano' appears as a character in the opening dialogue of Florio's 'Second Fruits' as a bored friend, waiting endlessly for his dandy associate to dress up for a day out. 'I go like a man in a portrait' says Nolano, 'ever the same', while his friend debates tediously with his valet over which of his many fancy suits to attire himself in and boasts about his fine sword, 'made in Leadenhall Street' and his expensive, shiny boots. 'I have to shift every day' he mutters, to excuse his passion for fashion. So here we have a nice little sketch of the friendship between Bruno and Florio which allows us to see the camaraderie between two real, warm-blooded and very three dimensional young men, not just erudite and rather remote scholars from the past. This dialogue also tells us how important the friendship was to Florio. At one point Nolano quotes an old Neapolitan proverb, 'chi si contenta gode', which Florio would later adopt as his personal motto and translates here as, 'who lives content has all the world at will.' Was it one of Bruno's favourite sayings? Piecing together snippets which build a picture like this make historical research a real pleasure.

It was the English scholar of Renaissance studies, Dame Frances Yates, Florio's only biographer and who later became an expert on Bruno, who first sensed the presence of Giordano in 'LLL', especially

in the character of Berowne, with his cosmic dialogue on love, his impatience with pedants and his experience of the French Court.

We associate Bruno today mostly with his amazing mathematical ability to observe the universe, calculate that it was expanding (a theory only finally proved by the Hubble telescope), his speculation that other planets revolved around other suns and that one or two may sustain life as we know it on earth. He published books on the art of memory (try his technique if you can, it is extremely effective), and his philosophy, often in conflict with the Catholic Church, was both thought provoking and heretical – it led to his eventual arrest, torture and putting to death by being burned at the stake by the Venetian Inquisition in 1600; a dark day for all who loved him and an event marked, as scholars have noted, in Shakespeare's 'Hamlet'.

Bruno had travelled swiftly across Europe, one step ahead of the Inquisition, until he found refuge at the Court of Henry of Navarre. Under torture, years later, Bruno denied having been at Henry's court when the interrogators sought to persuade him to name conspirators to put Henry and his Protestant league on the throne of France. However, we know he must have been there because the Inquisitors then produced letters, exchanged by others at Henry's court, which refer to Bruno's presence. He could hardly deny it after that, and it is somewhat crucial to my case here, because a knowledge of the structure and personalities of that Court, and the secrets it held, lie at the heart of my premise that Bruno wrote the original play on which 'LLL' is based. The internal evidence suggests whoever wrote the original was privy to information available only to the few at Henry's court.

Bruno arrived in England in 1583, bearing a Royal letter of introduction from the French court, and immediately caught the attention of a man he'd met earlier in Europe, Sir Philip Sidney, who

attended, with the Polish Prince Alberto Alasco, the lectures Bruno gave to an unforgiving audience of Oxford Dons – ‘pedants’ as Bruno would call them, in the June of that year. Sidney sympathised with Bruno and offered him financial support and patronage for the remainder of his visit to England and arranged for him to be housed at the French embassy. Soon afterwards he was joined by a fellow Italian, who had come straight from Magdalen College at Oxford and may have attended those same lectures. John Florio, at the recommendation of Burleigh, had just been appointed tutor to Ambassador Mauvissiere’s talented daughter, bringing his own wife and their first daughter, Aurelia, with him. A friendship was soon forged under Mauvissiere’s hospitable roof.

Against this background, let us now consider ‘Love’s Labours Lost.’

The action is set at the court of Navarre as Bruno had recently left it; Henry is certainly the model for King Ferdinand, and the names of the Dukes match those who actually served Henry, Biron, Logueville and du Mayenne were real people in his court. More telling is the device of a meeting between the King and a Princess of France. The gaiety, the masques and so forth attending the business of a discussion about a dowry correspond with a meeting at Nerac between Henry and his estranged wife Marguerite de Valois, also a princess of France, where questions of a dowry involving Aquitaine were indeed discussed. A real degree of intimacy with the affairs of Marguerite is revealed in the story told of her sister, who, we are told by Shakespeare’s Princess ‘died for love.’ At the time her apparent suicide was carefully covered up, suicide being a mortal sin, and she was said to have died of an illness, but those in Court circles knew better, as, apparently, did the author of this play. This is not something Shakespeare could have known about, but Bruno probably did. Years later, Marguerite told the

story herself in her own memoirs but it is certainly a surprise to see it prefigured in L L L.

Other, very French details include, for example, these quotations from Berowne:

‘Abate throw at Novum and the whole world againe, cannot pricke out five such, take each one in’s vaine’ – and – ‘Nay then two treyes and if you grow so nice, Methegline, wort and Malmsey; well runne dice: there’s halve a dozen sweetes.’ (Quoted from the First Folio edition.)

Novum and Treyes were French dice games, fashionable in the 1570s and 80s, played sometimes for very high stakes among Nobles of the French Court, yet here they are referred to, with all their little rules and conventions, as if they were commonly known among the inns of London, played for a round of drinks, but they were not.

French and Italian puns are bandied with sophisticated ease. For example the Princess’ invitation to Boyet, ‘you can carve, break up this capon’ as she hands him a newly-arrived love letter. The word capon derives from an Italian pun, ‘policetta’ for a capon being so similar to ‘polizetta’, meaning a love letter or surreptitious message. To ‘carve’ means to flirt or make a gesture with the little finger, this appears to have had erotic significance in fashionable circles. The capon pun means nothing in English so it appears to have come across in translation, a joke for Italian speakers, not for us English to grasp. A fat hint that L L L has an Italian literary root. However, this is just the first archaeological layer to betray the play’s origins. Let us now pin down the date.

There is internal evidence in L L L to suggest a text of an earlier date, precisely late in 1583 because several events at the English Court of that year are reflected in the plot. French readers have long

recognised in the character of 'Moth' a parody of the French ambassador M. De Motha who was the go-between when the ambitious young Francois, Duc d'Alencon made his romantic bid for the hand of Elizabeth in 1581. The original Moth of Bruno's play therefore actually matches the dramatic character in Shakespeare's version of Boyet, while the 'Moth' of the old play was almost certainly just 'Boy'. Somewhere between the original text and the appearance of the 1598 Quarto of LLL, a diplomatic exchange has been made. By 1583 De Motha had been replaced, and though he would be freshly remembered, he could be safely mocked.

In Act II, Sc.1, Boyet is describing the young Nobles of the Princess and of Dumaine he says 'I saw him at the Duke Alencon's once'. From the text of the 1598 Quarto it appears the exchange of names may have occurred as a result of the proof-reading when the play was already set in type. It looks as though the 'slugs' of type for the parts of 'Boy' and 'Moth' have been literally plucked out and exchanged. Indeed if this activity caused the type to come loose in the frame it may also explain how two of the ladies' names get muddled in part of the Quarto too. Shakespeare could not afford to offend Elizabeth with this embarrassing reference to her doomed courtship with Alencon. Having come up with this quick solution to the problem of altering a character called something very like De Motha running back and forth to a Royal Princess with love letters, he then had to figure out a suitable new name beginning with 'Boy' – and so, I suspect, 'Boyet' was born. This play was performed before the Queen, we must remember, at the Christmas celebrations of 1597, Shakespeare had to tread a little more carefully than Bruno had done when writing a one-off comedy for a very knowing, courtly and above all, private audience back in '83.

In the Summer of 1583 there had been much excitement at the English court over the arrival of a delegation of dashing Russians, whose clothes, language and manners had provided an interesting diversion – an incident surely reflected in the play when the Nobles dress up as Russians to impress their ladies. Another element relating to this particular year is certainly the braggart, Don Adriano de Armado, who is described as ‘a Phantasime, a Monarcho.’ There was a famous, much-mocked Italian at Elizabeth’s Court who died sometime between the end of 1581 and early 1582. The picture of Armado surely reflects this verbose and courtly gentleman who made such an impact in his day that Thomas Churchyard commemorated him some months after his death in a poem called ‘Fantastical Monarcho’s Epitaph’ widely read, to much amusement and patently the model for Armado in L L L.

The portrait of the character Dumaine also suggests an earlier date. He is based on the Duc du Mayenne who was on good terms with Henry of Navarre at the time Bruno witnessed his court in the early 1580s, when they were young men in their mid-twenties, but by the time Shakespeare was writing ‘Love’s Labours Lost’, Mayenne was embroiled in the religious wars against Henry following the murder of Mayenne’s brother in 1588, the pair did not make an uneasy peace again until 1596. If Shakespeare was truly composing an original work in the 1590s based on Henry’s Court, with all this inside information, was he nevertheless somehow unaware of these well-known circumstances, or are we actually are looking at borrowed plot lines from an earlier date, reproduced regardless of the intervening recent events?

The next layer of literary archaeology concerns Sir Philip Sidney, Bruno’s patron and, it would appear, a personality strongly reflected in L L L, but from markers dated to the 1580s and very much a reply to his own criticism of stage comedy. There is every indication that the original author knew Sidney’s work well but who also wanted to



deliver a few messages, (would Shakespeare address Sidney after he was dead?) We can see what Bruno had to say to his patron in dedications of other works to Sidney, such as his passionate sonnet series 'De Gli Eroici Furori' (1584). In this he admonishes those who spend their energies writing romantic Petrarchan sonnets to beautiful women when they might better use their time in study, the very theme of LLL. Sir Philip's 'Apology for Poetry', written in 1581, circulated only in manuscript to his friends at the time, calls for a better quality of stage comedy. He says:

'I speak to this purpose, that all the end of the comical part be not upon such scornful matters as stirreth laughter only, but mixed with it that delightful teaching which is the end of poetry... for what is it to make folks gape at a wretched beggar and a beggarly clown? .. but rather a busy loving courtier, and a heartless threatening Thraso; a selfwise-seeming schoolmaster; an awry-transformed traveller; these if we saw walk in stage names, which we play naturally, therein were delightful laughter and teaching delightfulness.'

Now, recall how in LLL we meet all these characters, how Berowne describes 'The Pedant, the Braggart, the Hedge-Priest, the Foole and the Boy', and how the selfwise-seeming schoolmaster, Holofernes, describes that awry-transformed traveller Armado as 'vain, ridiculous and thrasonical'. It is as if the play directly answers Sidney's plea.

People who have to study this play for performance or exams have long wondered at the repeatedly emphasised epigram delivered by Costard and Armado in the scene where Costard trips and breaks his shin, about 'the fox, the ape and the humble-bee' who have to be made up to the number four by the addition of a goose. Certainly it reflects the four Noble courtiers who each in turn fall in love, even Berowne succumbing to play the silly goose and make ti four. However what could this epigram be about and why is it made so much of as if it were a huge joke? I believe the source for this joke

was originally a particular source of laughter and flattery to the earlier patron. There is a little epigram of Sidney's own composition which appeared in a manuscript commonplace book between two poems of his own:

'the silly bird, the bee, the horse, the ox that tills and delves,  
They build, bring honey, beare and draw, for others; not themselves.'

This is an expansion of a favourite motto of Sidney's about the industry of bees which he often quoted and was his personal motto: 'sic vos non vobis' (thus you are honoured, not for yourself – i.e. but for the part you play in the greater scheme of things.) Its real significance here though is that he used this epigram in a court masque of his own composition in 1581 which bore the title 'The Four Foster Children of Desire'. Now we can see the joke, Costard is winking at Sidney asking 'who do these four love-sick fools remind you of Sir but your own 'foster children of desire?'

Berowne is the hero of LLL and the relationship between Berowne and Rosaline seems to pick up on Sidney's sonnet sequence 'Astrophil and Stella', look here, for example:

King           What zeal, what furie, hath inspir'd thee now?

My Love (her mistress) is a gracious Moone.

She (an attending Starre) scarce seene a light.

Berowne   My eyes are then no eyes, nore I Berowne

O but for my love, day would turn to night.'

A little later the King exclaims: 'By heaven, thy love is black as ebony' and a series of jokes follow about Berowne's love with her 'two pitch balls' for eyes and his insistence that black should be the new model for beauty. Much has been made of a possible relationship between this and the so-called 'dark lady' of the sonnets, and we

should remember that the first black-eyed beauty of English sonnet-writing was indeed 'Stella', described here at Sonnet 7 of Sidney's sequence, mark the similarity to the dark lady of Shakespeare's sonnets:

When nature made her chief work, Stella's eyes,  
In colour black, why wrapped she beams so bright?  
Would she in beamy black, like painter wise,  
Frame daintiest lustre, mixed of shades and light?  
Or did she else that sober hue devise,  
In object best to knit and strength our sight,  
Lest if no veil those brave beams did disguise,  
They sun-like should more dazzle than delight?  
Or would she her miraculous power show,  
That whereas black seems Beauty's contrary,  
She even in black doth make all beauties flow?  
Both so and thus she minding Love should be  
Placed ever there, gave him this mourning weed,  
To honour all their deaths who for her bleed.

(AUTHOR'S NOTE: It is not only the black-eyed beauty which rings a bell, but the repeated rhetorical questions that mark the similarity between Sidney's 'Stella' and Shakespeare's 'dark lady' sonnets. Was Shakespeare's dark lady just a poetic muse, and not a real lover at all? I am inclined to think so when I track back her roots

in this way. Shakespeare's sonnets, in common with Sidney's, are about the misery of being 'blanked' by the object of his infatuation, a favourite poetic subject going all the way back to Petrarch and an experience many of us can relate to, so I have never been tempted to waste much time searching for a 'real' dark lady in Shakespeare's life and am especially hostile to the idea that she might have been Florio's wife, an absurd idea when one considers she was probably already dead by the time those sonnets were written, not to mention a decade older than William and even more senior to the Earl of Southampton, with whom some suggest she was also involved, for no evidential reason at all. I believe the 'dark lady'; 'Rosaline' and Sidney's 'Stella' represent the evolution of an imagined heart-breaker, black-eyed, raven-haired and possibly black-hearted too, but essentially a beautiful creature of poetic conceit. Poets, unlike painters, do not require a real model for their work. The search for Shakespeare's real 'dark lady' is, in my view, almost certainly a fool's errand.)

In LLL, Berowne's sonnet is accidentally delivered to Jacquenetta. When it is read aloud, we see no reference to the colour black. However when he is caught out by his friends, he is already carrying another paper, a second sonnet to his love, which we, the audience, are not invited to share. Compare the imagery of Sidney's sonnet with the comments in the play though. Like Sidney, Berowne says her glance could dazzle and blind:

'What peremptory Eagle-sighted eye dares looke upon the heaven of her brow that is not blinded by her majestie?' In the Sidney sonnet the other image is of Nature, proving her supremacy in matters of beauty, presenting black, 'this mourning weed' to Beauty as an honour; Berowne says: 'O if in blacke my Ladies browes be deckt, it mournes that painting usurping haire should ravish doters with a false

aspect'. It is as if this sonnet of Sidney's to his Stella belongs in the play.

If you are familiar with Sidney's sonnet cycle you can soon observe strong similarities between 'Stella' (in reality Sidney's poetic muse Lady Penelope Rich) and Rosaline, who promises to tease and torment poor Berowne with her disdain. Just like the 'dark lady'.

Bruno's dedication to 'Eroici Furori' was careful to exempt noblewomen like Penelope Rich from his diatribe against Petrarchan sonnet-writing, such ladies being celestial and inspirational, he swiftly interjects, not wishing to imply criticism of his patron, and this of course is reflected in the play when Berowne enthral his friends this his discourse on the hollow nature of a study of knowledge that is not informed by an experience of love.

In my proposed date of composition, which I think is pretty clear for the original of this play; Sidney's work was available only in manuscript form, circulated among his friends, which would certainly have included his protégé Bruno. At this point in our historical tale, William Shakespeare was a Stratford lad, planning his escape to a more exciting life, innocent of the poetry of Sidney and likely unaware of the inner politics of the French court. He needed source material to produce LLL, and I think this little wedding gift was the inspiration for his later play.

Sidney married Frances Walsingham's daughter in the late autumn of 1583, an occasion when anyone who enjoyed his patronage or friendship would have to come up with a suitable gift. We know Bruno wrote comedies of all kinds for his supporters in France, though only one of them, 'Candelaio' was ever published. We can also see his dry sense of humour in his dialogues and in Florio's portrayal of him in 'Second Fruits'. When Bruno wrote to entertain it was also to inform, as the roots of this play suggest.

We know that Sidney's uncle, the Earl of Leicester, kept his own playing company and had, in the 1570's, employed Florio to teach 'Leicester's Men' Italian and perform classic Italian stage comedies for overseas guests. Their little thank-you verses to Florio are printed at the front of his 'First Fruits' under the arms of Leicester. It is therefore easy to imagine a scenario in which Bruno would write an Italian comedy and his friend Florio would re-assemble the old team of 'Leicester's Men' to perform it during the three days and nights of revels at Walsingham's country estate which celebrated the wedding. It would have been a question of 'borrowing back' some of the original team who had since been recruited by Walsingham to play in 'The Queen's Men', but what could be easier in this situation where all the parties were about to be linked by this significant marriage? I imagine Sidney's boyhood fencing tutor Richard Tarleton must have been very happy to take the original 'Costard' role, for example, an agreeable way to please his young master: the Nobleman who would agree to be Godfather to his son, a high honour for a commoner. The easy relationship between Sidney and Tarleton, and the way it cut across social boundaries, is something of a legend.

The next layer to examine in this 'dig' is Florio's involvement in the original production, its apparent translation into English, the many quotations from his 'First Fruits' to be found in it (including Shakespeare's eventual title) and how it came to be made available to William for adaptation to suit a broader, later audience, which is, I believe, its true pedigree. There is something curious, even inappropriate, about the English rustic elements plastered over the continental courtliness of the basic plot and characters. What has 'greasy Joan', scouring her pots and pans, to do with the likes of Berowne and Rosaline? It's a weird, almost clumsy cocktail isn't it?

Over the years, past scholars have wondered if Shakespeare modelled his 'self-wise seeming schoolmaster' Holofernes on his hapless friend Florio, but I consider that to be too simplistic. I doubt that either Shakespeare or Bruno would have set out to deliberately ridicule Florio, but I have a suspicion he might have had a hand in the creation of that character himself and incorporated a few elements from his own work into the dialogue. Holofernes, for example, quotes from 'First Fruits' a popular proverb about the beauty of Venice, as if, like the character in Florio's dialogue, he had visited the city himself, although clearly he has not and is merely being pretentious. I feel confident Florio contributed to the original script, offering ideas about events at Court which he had witnessed, such as the Russian visit, and pointed Bruno to such material as the Churchyard poem about the fantastical Monarcho. Bruno had not been in England very many months and would have needed some research support to write a comedy that would entertain an English audience. This is where we begin to see Florio the collaborator at work, just as we see him in Shakespeare's plays, supporting a talented author with ideas, vocabulary, sweet proverbial speeches, raw, real and literary materials as well as a sense of historical protocol in dramatic structure. Florio was a great supporter of Sidney's appeal for 'right tragedies and right comedies' defined by classical tradition. A conventional view I suspect Shakespeare did not always share. (Look at the way 'Romeo and Juliet' turns on the sixpence of a duel scene from comedy to tragedy or the startlingly dark outcome of 'Lear', overturning the 'happy ending' of its original source story that everybody knew. Shakespeare, in common with the film director Hitchcock, understood that while convention has its place, sometimes audiences love to be shocked.)

It would be some years yet before Florio's first dictionary appeared in print, but he was already assembling the work and I think it is to him we can attribute the word-play on vocabulary in LLL, the many

versions of 'guerdon' or 'remuneration', the definitions of sky and earth and the proverbs which litter Holofernes' lines. In 'First Fruits' we find one of the prattlers in the dialogues saying it is 'a labour lost to speak of love' when so much has been said already. The bones of the title are right there. No less a scholar than Jonathan Bate has described this play as 'Florioesque' and with good reason.

Florio justified passing on 'good things' to the next generation in his 'World of Wordes' : 'good parts imparted are not empaiied: Your springs are first to serve yourself, yet may yeelde your neighbours sweete water; your taper is to light to you first, and yet it may light your neighbours candle.' For my part I certainly believe Florio gave light to Shakespeare's candle.

There is plenty of evidence that Florio and Shakespeare were a literary item, and among it is a particular reference to 'Loves' Labours Lost.' The playwright Ben Jonson, who called Florio his literary 'father' and the aid to his muse, created a character for his play 'Every Man Out of his Humour' which welded the two together for all time. People have certainly noticed this character has something of Shakespeare about him for he quotes a parody of the Bard's new family motto, but instead of the rather grand 'Nothing Without Right', Jonson transcribes it as 'nothing without mustard', referring to the mustard yellow of the new Shakespeare family arms. What few notice is the significance of the name of this character, 'Sogliardo'. Just as Bruno was known as Nolano, (the man from Nola) we can see that this refers to Florio's home town of Soglio, so we have 'the man from Soglio' apparently talking like Shakespeare.

A year after Florio's death his old friend William Vaughan wrote of the Italian scholar in his 'Golden Fleece' and put into his mouth a long litany of complaints and grumbles, such as tailors' bills and the stink of tobacco. In it, Florio complains of 'beef sans mustard' and



rhymes it with ‘a shin and sowre Custard’, taken from that scene in L L L where Costard falls and breaks his shin.

I can only suppose that there’s a limit to how much good-natured mockery a man can take before the joke wears a little thin. At the end of the day there is little doubt that William Shakespeare owed a great deal to John Florio, and so do we.

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Source materials:

All the extracts from the play are First Folio.

Apart from original work by Bruno, Sidney, Florio and Shakespeare, other books and papers consulted are as follows:

Frances A Yates: John Florio. Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, The Importance of John Elliot’s Ortho-epia Gallica (an off-print from Review of English Studies 1931.)

John J Kessler: Giordano Bruno, the Forgotten Philosopher.

Katherine Duncan Jones, her notes to Sidney’s work and various other biographical materials. This is one of my favourite scholars of the renaissance literary scene, do read anything you can find of hers, especially about ‘ungentle’ Shakespeare – she shares our view that Nashe was the true author of the ‘Groatsworth’ letter and had the courage to de-bunk the myth that a new painting of Shakespeare had been uncovered when clearly the young man in the portrait concerned is dressed as a nobleman and is wearing a lace collar which probably cost more than New Place.

Jonathan Bate – all his Shakespeare output is worth reading.

Thomas O Jones: Renaissance Magic and Hermeticism in the Shakespeare Sonnets.

H G Wright: The First English Translation of the Decameron.

Notes to Bruno's work by Isa Guerrini Angrisani.

W m. Vaughan: The Golden Fleece (1626)

Abel Lefrank: Sous le Masque de William Shakespeare.

Columbia Encyclopaedia: for notes on the Duc du Mayenne.

Plus of course, my father's many pages of notes on this subject whose references sometimes elude me!

The Sidney epigram quoted can be found in the Harley Manuscripts, 7392, f38.



