

Fish, Crocodiles, Whales, Ossa, Pelion, and Olympus: Giordano Bruno's *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* as a Major Source for *Hamlet*

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One set of imagery (such as “limed”, “smells···rank”, “bosom black as death”)¹ surrounding Claudius identifies his secret identity as “coal” (and fossil fuels) in the allegory² in *Hamlet*. However, there is another set of images associated with him that identifies him as embodying one more huge non-human entity of high impact and era-transcending influence. For besides coal, Claudius symbolizes Christianity. (Ophelia has two identities, (material nature and the Divine Feminine, so it is not impossible for one character to have two). And so, with Claudius' death, Shakespeare predicts the end of Christianity as well as the end of fossil fuels.

I'll list some of the images that associate Claudius with Christianity below. But these images just confirm the idea. The real proof of this radical theory comes from

1 Marianne Kimura. “Stand and unfold yourself: Prince Hamlet Unmasked”. *Area Studies Tsukuba University*. 79-100. Number 35. March 2014.

[file:///C:/Users/%E6%9C%A8%E6%9D%91%E3%83%9E%E3%83%AA%E3%82%A2%E3%83%B3/Downloads/AST35-79%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/%E6%9C%A8%E6%9D%91%E3%83%9E%E3%83%AA%E3%82%A2%E3%83%B3/Downloads/AST35-79%20(1).pdf)

2 “Hamlet is Shakespeare; Claudius= coal; Ophelia= nature/ the Divine Feminine; Gertrude= Society, humanity; Horatio= those who agree with Shakespeare about coal; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern= those who investigate Hamlet from the standpoint within western or capitalist viewpoints.

the way that *Hamlet* closely follows Giordano Bruno's *Lo Spaccio della besta trionfante* (*The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*) (1584), even to the point where the thesis in *Lo Spaccio* that Christianity will fade away in the future when humans confront an existential environmental threat (a threat that has arisen due to Christianity), is also present (in allegorical form) in *Hamlet*.

Here are some images that link Claudius to Christianity:

1. Repetition of the word "father", "son" and other typical Christian imagery ("heaven", "impious", "world", "dearest") in Claudius' long speech to Hamlet.

Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,
To give these mourning duties to your father;
But you must know, your father lost a father;
That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound
In filial obligation for some term
To do obsequious sorrow. But to persevere
In obstinate condolment is a course
Of impious stubbornness. 'Tis unmanly grief;
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,
A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,
An understanding simple and unschool'd;
For what we know must be, and is as common
As any the most vulgar thing to sense,
Why should we in our peevish opposition
Take it to heart? Fie! 'tis a fault to heaven,
A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,
To reason most absurd, whose common theme

Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried,
From the first corse till he that died to-day,
'This must be so.' We pray you throw to earth
This unprevailing woe, and think of us
As of a father; for let the world take note
You are the most immediate to our throne,
And with no less nobility of love
Than that which dearest father bears his son
Do I impart toward you. For your intent
In going back to school in Wittenberg,
It is most retrograde to our desire;
And we beseech you, bend you to remain
Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son. (1.2.87-116)

2. References to Biblical episodes and religious words in Claudius' speech in Act 3.

Claudius: My offense is rank, it smells to heaven,/It hath the primal eldest curse upon't, /A brother's murder (3.3.36-38) (my emphasis); this alludes to Cain and Abel.

Claudius: Bow, stubborn knees, and heart, with strings of steel, /Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe (3.3.70-71) (my emphasis); this alludes to the birth of Jesus and the various Biblical figures who bowed to Jesus.

Claudius: And what's in prayer but this two-fold force, /To be forestalled ere we come to fall (3.3.48-49) (my emphasis); "the fall" alludes to the story of Adam and Eve.

3. Religious words, images and actions surrounding Claudius in the lines of others who address him (especially Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who are flat-

terers)

Guildenstern: Most holy and religious fear it is/To keep those many bodies safe/That live and feed upon your majesty (3.3.8-10) (my emphasis); refers to the Eucharist.

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/Fix'd on the summit of the highest mount" (3.3.15-18) (my emphasis); recalls various famous Biblical mountains such as story of Moses or Noah, etc.

Similarities Between *Lo Spaccio* and *Hamlet*

Lo Spaccio has been accurately described as "anti-Christian" (Gatti 157) (McClure 130), but, more than just being a philosophical work, it is a scientific work which scientifically (though in allegory) demonstrates what will happen in the future (Bruno's future, and our present) as a result of Christianity. To write *Lo Spaccio*, Bruno started with the premise of a human-centric civilization (Christendom, now known as the west) which evolves and then steadily gobbles up its planet's resources as it spreads, conquers and reproduces, and then, constrained by a lack of further resources, reaches an inflection point, materially speaking, with an existential environmental crisis. *Lo Spaccio* begins *in media res*, with the appearance of this existential environmental crisis, where a frail, dying and weak Jove cries out:

Indeed, we know from experience that the world is exactly like a spirited horse, who knows very well when he is mounted by one who cannot firmly manage him, and spurns the rider and attempts to re-move him from his back; and once he has succeeded in throwing him to the ground, comes to pay him in kicks. Behold! My body is drying up, and my brain is moistening; I am scabbing, and my teeth are falling out; my flesh is becoming gilded,

and my hair, silver; my eyelids are distending, my sight, contracting; my breathing is becoming short, my cough, stronger; when I am seated, I feel steady, but shaky when I walk; my pulse is irregular; my ribs are tightening; my limbs are becoming thin; my joints are swelling. (Bruno 100) (my emphasis)

Reading between the lines of the metaphor of the rider and the horse, what human society is facing at the point where Bruno's book opens (which is some real future point in actual time) is the danger of being thrown off the planet, of going extinct and utterly failing as a species. This corresponds to our time, as climate change, ocean pollution, the fragility and possible future failure of the vital oxygen-producing plankton, and other related ecological issues seem to portend a world which actively, though implicitly, seeks our extinction, exactly like a horse throwing us all off its back. Jove's own frail condition is another expression of this problem.

The underlined sentences from *Lo Spaccio* above must be quite important because they are, as Hilary Gatti notes (Gatti 142), exactly the ones Shakespeare chooses to paraphrase in the book *Hamlet* shows Polonius in Act 2:

Hamlet: Slanders, sir; for the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plumtree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with the most weak hams... (2.2.195-200)

Hamlet has many more similarities to *Lo Spaccio*. Here I will briefly list them:

- 1) There are similarities in the functions of Momus and Hamlet. In *Lo Spaccio*, Momus, the god of satire who had "spoken against the gods, and had argued,

as it seemed to them, too severely against their errors” (Bruno 95), is recalled from his exile when Jove and the other gods need help with their crippling physical infirmities and aging. Similarly, Hamlet appears after the ghost shows up portending doom and problems, since Horatio, though he is a “scholar” (1,1,42), cannot get the ghost to speak and suggests that Hamlet be consulted: “Let us impart what we have seen tonight unto young Hamlet” (1.1.169-170). Hamlet, as Gatti points out (135) is like Momus, a jester figure who spars with Claudius, imparting truths in the same way that Bruno describes the role of buffoons and jesters: “each one of whom is wont to impart more truths to the ears of a prince about his affairs than all the rest of the court put together” (Bruno 101-102).

- 2) Hamlet’s use of the word “fishmonger” to characterize Polonius is a subversive and derogatory reference to Christianity through being a reference to the fish constellation (“the Southern Fish” (Bruno 271)), removed from the sky and eaten by Jove and the Greek gods at the end of *Lo Spaccio* (where it refers to the end of Christianity).³ (The “Southern Fish”, also known as “Piscis Australis”, is one of the 48 constellations described by Ptolemy in his *Almagest* (A.D. 140), and is therefore associated here in Bruno’s book with Ptolemy’s earth-centric and incorrect model of the solar system. Also, Christianity is associated with a fish in well-known ways.) *Hamlet* also contains a reference to a fish being eaten. Hamlet insolently tells Claudius, “A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm” (4.3.27-28).

- 3) After Ophelia’s casket is lowered into the ground, grief-stricken Laertes leaps into Ophelia’s grave and cries that dirt should be heaped “Till of this flat mountain you have made/T’o’ertop old Pelion, or the skyish head of old Olympus”

3 https://www.academia.edu/39160576/_What_dost_thou_mean_by_this_Why_does_Hamlet_call_Polonius_a_fishmonger_

(5.1.253-5). Hamlet appears moments later and shouts that “millions of acres” of soil should be thrown on top of him and Ophelia “till our ground/ Singeing his pate against the burning zone/ Make Ossa like a wart” (5.1.281-3). In *Lo Spaccio*, Jove, confronting the impending death of his material body, mentions the same mountains: “Today’s feast renews in me the memory of the mood I was in when I struck with lightning and overpowered those fierce giants who dared to hurl Ossa on Pelion and Olympus on Ossa” (Bruno 98-99).

- 4) A few lines earlier, Hamlet asks Laertes to “show me what thou’ t do” to prove his grief (5.1.274) and taunts him “Woo’ t drink up easel [vinegar], eat a crocodile?” (5.1.276). There have never been wild crocodiles in Denmark or England, but they appear often in *Lo Spaccio*, where Bruno uses them to refer to pagan spirituality (sacredness of the earth):

From this you can infer how the wisdom of the Egyptians, which is lost, worshiped not only the earth, the moon, the sun, and other stars of the heaven but also crocodiles, lizards, serpents, onions. (Bruno 241)

A crocodile appears in a similar pagan religious reference: “against betrayal [the Egyptians] libated to menacing Jove in the crocodile” (Bruno 237).⁴

I have written about the idea that Shakespeare vastly preferred a sacred material earth to Christian theology, where no such idea is found. Thus Ophelia symbolizes the sacredness of material and the earth.⁵ This idea of material nature as sacred is also found in *Lo Spaccio* where Saul says: “*natura est deus in rebus*” (Bruno 235).

4 Two more references to crocodiles are found on page 99 of *Lo Spaccio*, with similar pagan religious connotations.

5 Marianne Kimura, “Shakespeare: pantheist, heretic, defender of the Divine Feminine”, *English Literary Review*. March 15, 2021.
http://repo.kyoto-wu.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/11173/3235/1/0060_020_002.pdf

5) In the Third Dialogue of *Lo Spaccio*, a “Cetus”, or whale, constellation appears, described as a “Great and terrible animal...discovered on the deep, turbulent and tempestuous sea” (Bruno 254). Similarly, in Act 3, Hamlet and Polonius discuss a whale-shaped cloud (another floating whale in the sky):

Hamlet: Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in the shape of a camel?

Polonius: By th' mass and t'is, like a camel indeed.

Hamlet: Methinks it is like a weasel.

Polonius: It is back'd like a weasel.

Hamlet: Or like a whale.

Polonius: Very like a whale. (3.2.376-382)

6) Hamlet's intense meditations on death (“the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer barrel?” (5.1.210-212)) in the graveyard are reminiscent of “Bruno's treatment of death, particularly in the *Spaccio*, as part of a process of continual mutation and transformation” (Gatti 153). I have proposed that Yorick represents Bruno in the allegory in *Hamlet*. When Hamlet tells Horatio that “he [Yorick] hath bore me on his back a thousand times” (5.1.185-6), it is a subtle homage to Bruno, whose books and ideas inspired Shakespeare.

7) The word “rogue”, used twice in *Hamlet*, subtly reference Bruno both times. The first occasion of the word “rogue” is when Hamlet is reading the book: “for the satirical rogue says here...” (2.2.196). Therefore the author of the book is this “rogue” — and this is a big clue, of course. The second “rogue” occurs when the grave digger refers to Yorick as “a mad rogue” (5.1.178).

8) The association of the old king to the sun, through the images of “Hyperion”, a pagan sun god who twice appears in connection with Hamlet's dead father, is echoed in the same way that Bruno praises the sun in his Explanatory Epis-

tle. Moreover, the end of fossil fuels would come through the way that the sun as energy outlasts fossil fuels. It is entirely possible that the references to "Hyperion", an older generation among the pagan Greek gods, in *Hamlet* also refer to older pagan religions, also praised by Bruno in *Lo Spaccio*:

To speak the truth, our land [Egypt, pagan ideas] is the temple of the world. But woe is me! The time will come when Egypt will appear to have been in vain the religious cultivator of divinity, because divinity, remigrating to heaven, will leave Egypt deserted. (Bruno 241)

Are their projects the same, however? Does *Hamlet* have the same message as *Lo Spaccio*? There is the significant apparent plot difference: *Hamlet* is a tragedy, which ends with many deaths, while *Lo Spaccio* ends happily, with Jove and the gods becoming healthy after they have consumed the fish. To really compare, we have to investigate the deeper message of *Lo Spaccio* and see if *Hamlet* also contains it.

Lo spaccio della besta trionfante and the Eye of Eternal Truth

Hilary Gatti proposes that *Lo Spaccio* "involves...the visualization of a new era, the arduous working out of a total plan of reform" (Gatti 120). Speaking of visualizing a new era, in the Explanatory Epistle of *Lo Spaccio*, Bruno doesn't hide his intention to use this book to make prophesies and predictions that are uncomfortable for people:

And since the number of fools and the perverse is incomparably larger than that of the wise and the just, it follows that if I want to consider glory and other fruits, to which the multitude of voice, gives birth, so far removed am I from the expectation of a happy outcome from my study and work that

rather I must expect a source of discontent and must esteem silence to be much better than speech. But if I take into account the eye of Eternal Truth, to which things are the more precious and renowned, the more they are, sometimes, not only known, sought after, and possessed by the fewest but also, besides, considered worthless, blamed, and attacked, it happens that the more I strive to cut the course of the impetuous torrent, the more vigor I see added to it by the turbid, deep, and steep channel. (Bruno 70) (my emphasis)

This concept of the “eye of Eternal Truth” means that Bruno asks us to judge his work from the vantage point of “eternity” (or, in our case, almost 400 years later). I propose that we should oblige him, especially considering that he sacrificed his life for this project.

Materials and Energy and Jove

Bruno makes it clear that he will base his book (which is indeed about reformation) by considering very basic physical, material and scientific relationships. The most fundamental one for us, according to Bruno, may be the one between the sun and the earth, and this relationship is discussed in the opening lines of the Explanatory Epistle:

He is blind who does not see the sun, foolish who does not recognize it, ungrateful who is not thankful unto it, since so great is the light, so great the good, so great the benefit, through which it glows, through which it excels, through which it serves, the teacher of the senses, the father of substances, the author of life. (Bruno 69)

In the Explanatory Epistle, Bruno sets up the book as an “arena” or “theater”

(Bruno 74), by which he means an allegory; he will use fictional, though well-known, characters: "Sophia represents Sophia, Saulino acts as Saulino, Jove as Jove, Momus, Juno, Venus and other Greeks or Egyptians, dissolute or grave, as what and whichever they are; and all can be adapted to the condition and nature that they are able to represent" (Bruno 74). In particular, Jove, who is roughly to be considered as representing the condition of the material world, is an important and central figure:

We here, then, have a Jove, not taken as too legitimate and good as a vicar or lieutenant of the first principle and universal cause, but well taken as something variable, subject to the Fate of Mutation; he however, knowing that together in one infinite entity and substance there are infinite and innumerable particular natures (of which he is one individual), which, since they are in substance, essence, and nature are one, likewise, by reason of the number through which they pass, incur innumerable vicissitudes and a kind of motion and mutation... Because of this, just as he, from one who was at first was not Jove, afterward was made Jove, so he, from one who at present is Jove, finally will be other than Jove. (Bruno 75)

This passage underlines the fundamental material aspect of Jove:

(Jove) knows that of the external corporeal substance (which is not producible *ex nihilo*, nor reducible *ad nihilum*, but rarefiable, condensable, formable, arrangeable, and "fashionable") the composition is dissolved, the complexion is changed, the figure is modified, the being is altered, the fortune is varied, only the elements remaining what they are in substance, that same principle persevering which was always the one material principle, which is the true substance of things, eternal, ingenerable, and incorrupt-

ible. (Bruno 75)

Here Bruno is brilliantly foreshadowing the Law of the Conservation of Mass, a rule of physics that was formulated by Antoine Lavoisier in 1789, some 200 years after Bruno wrote *Lo Spaccio*.

Continuing his scientific inquiries, Bruno next considers what makes materials different from each other. Bruno, first describing the dissolution and deaths of various things, wants to consider the basic differences in the generation of various materials:

(Jove) knows well that of the incorporeal substance nothing is changed, is formed or deformed, but there always remains only that thing which cannot be a subject of dissolution, since it is not possible that it be a subject of composition; and therefore, either of itself or by accident, it cannot be said to die; because death is nothing but the divorcing of parts joined in a composite, in which state all of the substantial being of each part remaining (which cannot be lost), that accident of friendship, of accord, of complexion, union, and order ceases.

He knows that spiritual substance, although it has familiarity with bodies, must not be considered as really coming into a composition or mixture with them; because this [composition] is brought about, body with body, a part of matter fashioned in one way, with a part of matter fashioned in another. But there is one thing, an efficient and formative principle from within... to keep and maintain the composition of an animal. It winds the beam, weaves the cloth...restrains tempers, gives order to and arranges and distributes the spirits, gives fibers to the flesh, extends the cartilage, strengthens the bones...gives breath to the lungs, succors all, within, with vital heat and radical humidity in order that the said hypostasis may be composed...

(Bruno 75-76) (my emphasis)

The phrase “vital heat” points to Bruno’s sensitivity to the concept of energy, which was nascent, but not well developed, at the time. In fact, it was Bruno (in his book *De immenso et innumerabilibus* (1591)), who proposed that the Earth turns toward the heat and light of the sun:

The Earth, in the infinite universe, is not at the centre, except in so far as everything can be said to be at the center. In this chapter it is explained that the Earth is not central amongst the planets. That place is reserved for the Sun, for it is natural for the planets to turn towards its heat and light, and accept its law. (Bruno quoted in Michel 181)

Scholars of Bruno widely recognize that, in *De Immenso*, Bruno came up with a “thermodynamic theory of planetary motion” (Gatti, *Essays on Giordano Bruno*, 51). This was radical for his age. Copernicus’ earlier heliocentric model of the solar system, while also radical, was not based on thermodynamics.

Although *Lo Spaccio* has been widely, and not incorrectly, seen as a critique of religion and a work of philosophy, I think it can more deeply be called a scientific work, which uses deep insights into materials and energy. I propose that *Lo Spaccio* uses thermodynamics and game theory (neither of them named as such because such language and concepts did not exist in the 1500s) to trace out the social behavior of humans, who are predictable biological organisms, through centuries of time, until a threshold is reached. “Christian” means, to Bruno, a subconscious game-plan or strategy used by a society to replicate within, and enroll others from the outside, in order to gain cooperation, material rewards, and feed its own material growth. The religious myths which Christian society told itself are “truths”, were fashioned or evolved for convenience at the time and would be believed according only so long as they provided a payoff.

Game theory, the “payoff”, collective resource exploitation

In Lo Spaccio, Bruno shows us that religion (in particular Christianity), an expression of human material culture, belongs materially to game theory and thermodynamics, and is analogous to a hurricane swirling through the air and gathering force, spinning faster and more widely, then dissipating its energy when finite resources constrain it until it dwindles away. Christianity is seen to be something akin to an evolutionary ‘swirling’ thermodynamically dissipative tool to provoke, compel and condition humans, who are social/hierarchical/spiritual/emotional animals, to behave in certain ways that propel, aggregate and conglomerate material resource exploitation in a collective way. The underlying effect of Christianity is to support and encourage collective and relatively speedy dissipation of energy and materials.

Lo Spaccio should therefore be considered a Renaissance forerunner to works such as *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (1989), *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process* (1971) and *The Limits to Growth* (1972), works which analyze energy/material dissipative trends to draw conclusions about the future, and which see human populations as just a small part of a broader ecological setting within a community of other-than-human, as well as human, beings. In *Lo Spaccio* western civilization is examined and played out through to its eventual inevitable material outcome.

Let’s also establish what game theory is and note that it is used to analyze both the formation of “coalitions” and the “struggle for survival”:

game theory, branch of applied mathematics that provides tools for analyzing situations in which parties, called players, make decisions that are interdependent. This interdependence causes each player to consider the other player’s possible decisions, or strategies, in formulating strategy. A solution

to a game describes the optimal decisions of the players, who may have similar, opposed, or mixed interests, and the outcomes that may result from these decisions.

Although game theory can be and has been used to analyze parlour games, its applications are much broader. In fact, game theory was originally developed by the Hungarian-born American mathematician John von Neumann and his Princeton University colleague Oskar Morgenstern, a German-born American economist, to solve problems in economics. In their book *The Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* (1944), von Neumann and Morgenstern asserted that the mathematics developed for the physical sciences, which describes the workings of a disinterested nature, was a poor model for economics. They observed that economics is much like a game, wherein players anticipate each other's moves, and therefore requires a new kind of mathematics, which they called game theory. (The name may be somewhat of a misnomer—game theory generally does not share the fun or frivolity associated with games.)

Game theory has been applied to a wide variety of situations in which the choices of players interact to affect the outcome. In stressing the strategic aspects of decision making, or aspects controlled by the players rather than by pure chance, the theory both supplements and goes beyond the classical theory of probability. It has been used, for example, to determine what political coalitions or business conglomerates are likely to form, the optimal price at which to sell products or services in the face of competition, the power of a voter or a bloc of voters, whom to select for a jury, the best site for a manufacturing plant, and the behaviour of certain animals and plants in their struggle for survival.⁶ (my emphasis)

6 <https://www.britannica.com/science/game-theory>

Also, I note that thermodynamics and game theory are fundamentally related:

Behavior in the context of game theory is described as a natural process that follows the 2nd law of thermodynamics. The rate of entropy increases as the payoff function is derived from statistical physics of open systems. The thermodynamic formalism relates everything in terms of energy and describes various ways to consume free energy. This allows us to associate game theoretical models of behavior to physical reality. Ultimately behavior is viewed as a physical process where flows of energy naturally select ways to consume free energy as soon as possible. This natural process is, according to the profound thermodynamic principle, equivalent to entropy increase in the least time.⁷

In *Lo Spaccio*, Bruno proposes that Christianity is nothing more than a subconscious mind tool, a sort of haunted house, evolved by humans to induce collective action, through subconsciously removing barriers, including moral ones, to economic growth. In this way, Bruno implies that Christianity (which evolved from other religious mythologies) is largely, or even only, a shadowy expression of the maximum power principle applied to social mammals, as humans are. Of course, Bruno was always, as usual, way ahead of his time and this principle was not put into words until just a few decades ago:

...the maximum power principle ... states that systems which maximize their flow of energy survive in competition. In other words, rather than merely accepting the fact that more energy per unit of time is transformed in a process which operates at maximum power, this principle says that sys-

7 Jani Anttila and Arto Annala, "Natural games"

<https://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/1103/1103.1656.pdf#:~:text=Behavior%20in%20the%20context%20of,statistical%20physics%20of%20open%20systems.>

tems organize and structure themselves naturally to maximize power. Systems regulate themselves according to the maximum power principle. Over time, the systems which maximize power are selected for whereas those that do not are selected against and eventually eliminated. (Gilliland 1978, pp. 101–102)⁸

In his book, *The Acentric Labyrinth*, Ramon Mendoza characterizes Bruno's ontology in a way that shows how it could certainly be compatible with the maximum power principle:

The cornerstone of Bruno's ontology is his insight...it is the essence of matter to be self-propelling, to evolve, and to bring forth from within itself all the forms it is capable of adopting. Matter is self-organizing and self-metamorphosing. In order to organize into ever new forms and structures, it does not need external pushes and pulls, nor does it need a God or a demiurge to put order into its native chaos. Matter is in and by itself supremely energetic and resourceful. (Mendoza 119)

In *Lo Spaccio*, Bruno sets up his theoretical model of the rise and fall of Christianity based on the following assumptions:

1) Humans, the players in this game, will anticipate and surmise that the Christian church and its member cultures widely support and propel conversion of new populations, plus territorial expansion and colonialism, leading to more and more resources falling into the sphere of countries governed by governments entangled with Christianity.

2) Since humans are biological creatures who reproduce, they will expand

8 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maximum_power_principle

their populations through reproduction and increase their consumption of resources (the “payoff” in game theory). The cycle continues with subsequent generations as they can also anticipate and surmise that people will join Christianity since they have a vested material interest as well.

3) The Earth, a finite place, has finite material resources and reaches an inflection point where it cannot tolerate more destruction, and goes into crisis due to the rapacious, destructive and human-centered telos.

4) The generation of humans coming of age in the ‘wrecked earth’ crisis age of human civilization has no more incentive to join the ‘game of Christianity’ because resources have all largely been exploited. As a result Christianity goes into decline. A corollary of (4) is that humans who joined in with Christianity incurred some costs; they give up some of their independence and ability to think and engage with the cosmos, the planet and society on their own. When the material threshold is reached on the planet and the ecological crisis starts, then Christians will abandon Christianity as they will re-connect with their natural ability to reason, think and use their conscience, which Bruno calls “synderesis” (Bruno 79); Bruno asserts that synderesis is an in-born quality in humans: “a certain light that resides in the crow’s nest, top sail, or stern of our soul” (Bruno 79).

5) As Christianity goes into decline and people perceive that the costs of joining it are not equal to the diminishing payoffs, they stop joining it, not everyone at once, but according to Bruno, with the more “wise” leaving sooner and the “lowly” and “ignorant” leaving later (Bruno 258). A bumpy ride, with conflict and even danger, is hinted at, but eventually Christianity “is digested by time” (Bruno 258). Bruno asserts several times in *Lo Spaccio* that, as a result of Christianity disappearing, the material world will be healed (or headed for healing).

The basic action of the book is summarized in the Explanatory Epistle:

[Jove] is sometimes bent because of the strength that is failing him,

both driven and spurred on by the fear of Fatal Justice, superior to the gods, which threatens us.

The day, then, on which is celebrated in heaven the Feast of the Gigantomachy (a symbol of the continuous war, without any truce whatsoever, which the soul wages against vices and inordinate affects), [Jove] wants to effectuate and define that which, for some space of time before, he had proposed and determined; just as a man, in order to change his way of life and customs, is first invited by a certain light that resides in the crow's nest, top-sail, or stern of our soul, which light is called synderesis by some, and here, perhaps, is almost always signified by Momus.

He, then, proposes to the gods, that is, he exercises the act of ratiocination of the internal council, and goes into consultation regarding what is to be done....Then is expelled the triumphant beast, that is the vices which are wont to tread upon the divine side; the mind is repurged of errors and becomes adorned with virtues, because of love of beauty, which is seen in goodness and natural justice, and because of desire for pleasure, consequent from her fruits, and because of hatred and fear of the contrary deformity and displeasure. (Bruno 79) (my emphasis)

Jove's decrepit condition and failing strength corresponds to the "wrecked earth" stage (4) described above. "Synderesis", or natural conscience, is "almost always signified by Momus" (Momus is an outsider, someone who by definition doubts and disbelieves Christianity) because in Bruno's model, Christianity also by definition, interrupts or disables natural conscience. The conventional thinking about religion is that a person is 'converted to Christianity' and becomes a 'believer', but in Bruno's model, Christianity's real psychological effects fly under the radar of conscious awareness and it disrupts natural conscience (something people are born with, according to Bruno), somewhat like a wildflower meadow can be

disrupted temporarily by pruning, cutting, spraying herbicide, or developing with a parking lot or building.

Momus was a sign of unbelief in Christianity (McClure 10), and synderesis naturally emerges as Christianity recedes: thus “Synderesis” is fundamentally connected to “Momus” (“signified by Momus”), by Bruno. The ending of Christianity in Bruno’s model is akin, in the allegory of the wildflower meadow, to wildflowers returning to the meadow as it ceases to be sprayed, asphalted over or mowed. and nature takes over. Christianity, in Bruno’s model, only temporarily suppresses “synderesis” while resources suffice.

Lo Spaccio begins with the stage where synderesis returns (symbolized by the arrival of Momus) and proceeds to the last stage (5), which we can call ‘post-Christianity’, where Christianity is no longer normalized. The “triumphant beast” in the passage above is, of course, Christianity, which needed its ‘triumphalism’ (its certainty that it was the one true faith leading triumphantly to heaven) in order to prevail socially as an excuse, psychologically and politically (by legitimizing rulers), as this was the main dynamic for conversions. Thus Shakespeare makes King Claudius a symbol of both coal and Christianity, because state power was bound up in resources and religious power as well.

After the Explanatory Epistle, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* comprises three dialogues, in which characters such as Saul, Sophia, Jove and Momus discuss the problems and issues they face.

At the beginning of the First Dialogue, Bruno brings out Jove, the Greek god, but, as I’ve observed above, Bruno’s Jove is decrepit, and far from the robust Casanova-type Jove of the Greek myths. This is where the above lines that Shakespeare chose to paraphrase in *Hamlet*, as well as the metaphor about the rider being thrown off a spirited horse, are found. As I note above, this corresponds to our time, as ecological issues seem to portend a world which actively, though implicitly, seeks our extinction, exactly like a horse throwing us off its back. Jove’s

frail own condition is another expression of this same problem.

It becomes clear that the other gods are facing similar aging issues: "Does [Vulcan] perhaps still have some vigor left necessary to lift his heavy hammer?", and Venus has wrinkles (Bruno 101). "You see then, dear sister, how treacherous time subdues us, how we are all subject to mutation", is the message (Bruno 102).

What to do about this? The answer is to conduct cosmological reform (replacing the bad constellations in the sky/heavens with good ones), which symbolizes changing the "religious" (which is a moral) outlook.

So, first, the gods recall Momus, the exiled God of Satire, "who had spoken against the gods, and had argued, as it seemed to them, too severely against their errors" (Bruno 95). Momus has been banished to the "star which is at the tip of Callisto's tail" (Bruno 95). This little detail about the exact location of Momus's exile seems to have been invented by Bruno, and it's significant that in Greek mythology Callisto was a hunting companion of the goddess Artemis/Diana, since Bruno uses the goddess Diana in *Gli Eroici Furori* as his main symbol of the Divine Feminine (sacred material nature). (And Shakespeare likewise uses the goddess Diana as one of the main images when he describes the heroines in his plays, including Ophelia ("the chariest maid is prodigal enough if she unmask her beauty to the moon" (1.3.36-7)). As for Callisto, we are told:

Callisto was a daughter of the Arkadian King Lykaon and a hunting companion of the goddess Artemis. There were several contradictory versions of her story but ancient writers all agreed on a number of details:—that she was seduced by the god Zeus, transformed into a bear, bore a son named Arkas (Arcas), and was hunted down as a beast and placed amongst the stars as the constellation Ursa Major.⁹ (my emphasis)

9 <https://www.theoi.com/Heroine/Kallisto.html>

Thanks to his location in a star associated with a companion of the goddess Artemis, Bruno's Momus carries with him an implicit association with the Divine Feminine (sacred material nature), that most heretical of topics in Christianity (since the Christian deity is only spirit, with no material or nature included—of course, because exploiting material resources means that making them sacred in any way would hinder the pace and efficiency of their exploitation).

Momus is a buffoon, an outsider and an iconoclast, who knows the power and skills of a “buffoon”, implying that Momus, at least in *Lo Spaccio*, is associated with artists and performers, who “speak in a kind of jest” through symbolism and metaphor:

Momus still knows that once one of these buffoons (each one of whom is wont to impart more truths to the ears of a prince about his affairs than all the rest of the court put together, and because of whom, most often, those who do not dare to talk, do speak in a kind of jest, and cause to be moved and do move proposals)....(Bruno 101-2)

Momus, a relatively “obscure and uncelebrated Greek god” (McClure vii), whose name comes from the Greek noun *μῶμος* meaning ‘blame’ or ‘censure’¹⁰, first appeared in the writings of Hesiod in the eighth century BCE. By the 1580s, Momus had become “a medium for dangerous challenges to religious belief and a literary trope for challenges to literary and intellectual authority” as well as the “intersection” of “these two roles” (McClure vii). George McClure writes that

in his incarnations in the early modern period...Momus simultaneously

10 <https://aesopsfox.blog/2017/06/05/the-troll-of-ancient-greece-momus/>

signaled the emergence of the Agnostic in the theological realm while reifying the Critic in the literary realm. (vii)

Bruno's Momus, "speaking in a kind of jest" can therefore generally be thought of as representing books and ideas which spread disbelief in Christianity (the triumphant beast) or agnosticism about it. (Prince Hamlet can also be considered such a character, in light of the fact that he fights Claudius.)

The environmental crisis and its impact

Let's look at the place in *Lo Spaccio* that corresponds to the number (3) in the list above, where the gods cryptically describe the Earth going into an environmental crisis. Bruno uses a whale (constellation) to symbolize this crisis, perhaps because a whale is enormous compared to humans and causes splashing, waves, and uncontrollable phenomena and effects. In the Third Dialogue, Sophia says to Momus, "that great and terrible animal of yours (Momus) presents itself to us" (Bruno 254). Momus replies and brings up Ninevah, the city threatened by complete destruction by the god in the Bible:

"Cetus," said Momus, "if it is not that monster which served as a galley, carriage or tabernacle for the prophet of Ninevah, I do not know what bad omen it may be, although I am one of the greatest secretaries of the celestial republic

.... And because when this animal is discovered upon the deep, turbulent, and tempestuous sea, it announces its [the sea's] future state of tranquility, if not on the same day, on one that is to come later, it seems to me that it must have been, in its class, a good prototype of the tranquility of the spirit."
(Bruno 254)

It is then Jove's turn to add his observations about this cetus constellation:

“It is well,” said Jove, “that this sovereign virtue called Tranquillity of Mind should appear in heaven if it is that virtue which strengthens men against mundane instability, the constant waves, and the insults of Fortune, keeps them removed from the responsibility of administration, keeps them little eager for novelties, makes them little troublesome to their enemies, little burdensome to their friends and in no way subject to vainglory, not perplexed because of the variety of misfortunes, not irresolute in their encounters with death”. (Bruno 255)

The contrast between Momus' “great and terrible animal” upon the “deep, turbulent and tempestuous sea” and the calming effect this creature has on people, as described by Jove, is notable. But as Jove represents the material world, his comments reflect material circumstances, and people belong to the category of material as well. In economic and environmental crisis, people will find themselves extremely constrained by their material circumstances. So they will be rather calm (while, of course the turbulence is the crisis itself, which would be quite difficult).

In *Lo Spaccio*, this passage about the whale is followed a few lines later by the famous “blasphemous” (McClure 130) passage about Orion, who is “clearly depicted as an analogue to [Jesus] Christ” (McClure 130):

Neptune then asked: What will you do, oh gods, with my favorite, with my handsome darling, I say with that Orion, who (as the etymologists say) causes the heaven to ‘orionate’ from fright?”

Here Momus answered: “Let me make a proposal, oh gods. ‘A macaroni,’ as the proverb in Naples says, ‘has fallen into the cheese.’ This is because he [Orion] knows how to perform miracles, and, as Neptune

knows, can walk over the waves of the sea without sinking, without wetting his feet, and with this, consequently, will be able to perform many other fine acts of kindness. Let us send him among men, and let us see to it that he give them to understand all that I want and like them to understand: that white is black, that the human intellect, through which they seem to see best, is blindness, and that that which according to reason seems excellent, good, and very good, is vile, criminal, and extremely bad. I want them to understand that Nature is a whorish prostitute, that natural law is ribaldry, that Nature and Divinity cannot concur in one and the same good end, and that justice of the one is not subordinate to the justice of the other, but that they [Nature and Divinity] are contraries, as are shadows and light." (Bruno 255)

As Bruno explains in the Explanatory Epistle summary, people, because they have a natural "light....called synderesis" (Bruno 79) start to question the dogma of the Christian church.¹¹ Reading between the lines of the Orion passage above, Jesus is revealed to be, after all, only a later Orion (another god with a name change, trotted out for a new civilization), who has been deployed to make people conform to what someone else "wants and likes them to understand". In the process of being Christians, people have ignored their own intellects and consciences ("synderesis"), but now, with the enormous economic/environmental crisis, Christianity cannot deliver the goods and resources which were keeping people quiescent and enrolled in the 'game of Christianity'. Moreover, in the face of the existential crisis symbolized by the boisterous whale, people, for their own survival, need to use their full mental capacities and wits and face the material world with

11 [A TikTok video with 524 likes as of August 18, 2022, has the following lines: "Why did God need to sacrifice himself to himself to save us from himself? THIS DOESN'T F—KING MAKE SENSE."](#)

honesty and sensitivity, with their “synderesis”. This is how synderesis emerges.

Bruno also perceives that people who benefit sooner from leaving the game of Christianity will be the “noble, wise and truly good men, who are few”, while the “lowly” and “ignorant” make the majority (“a multitude”) and will resist with deeply rooted “rascalities” (Bruno 258). Minerva cautions that to counter these “lowly” people, “my wisdom does not suffice without the point of my lance” (Bruno 258), but Jove answers: “Wisdom is sufficient, indeed sufficient, oh my daughter, against these last things, which in themselves grow old, fall, are devoured and digested by time” (Bruno 258). Minerva then says, “we must resist and repel them in order that they do not destroy us through violent means before we reform them” (Bruno 258).

So Christianity “will grow old, fall and be digested by time”, but not until after a political struggle occurs.

Hamlet, Lo Spaccio, the Gigantomachy and the Death of Ophelia

The ‘Very like a whale’ conversation takes place in Act 3, scene 4 before Hamlet confronts his mother and asks her “to ravel all this matter out” (3.4.186), as if Shakespeare asks us, also, to puzzle out his meaning and recognize his role and his position in history.

Gatti further points out that the speech used by Hamlet in Act 3, scene 2 to praise Horatio contains “striking similarities” (Gatti 156) to the speech of Jupiter in praise of the calm spirit. So the action in *Hamlet* seems to be following the flow of events in *Lo Spaccio*, and moving towards a crisis, which is symbolized by the death of Ophelia, the environmental crisis that is in *Lo Spaccio* symbolized by Jove’s frail and dying body.

In the Explanatory Epistle Jove chooses “The Gigantomachy” (Bruno 79) as the day to start the battle for his life. And so in the First dialogue, he explains that “Today’s feast renews in me the memory of the mood I was in when I struck with lightning and overpowered those fierce giants who dared to hurl Ossa on Pelion

and Olympus on Ossa" (Bruno 99). Moreover, in *Lo Spaccio*, this myth has a special and significant connotation relating to the prediction of an important inflection point for humans in the future (Bruno and Shakespeare's future) and this connotation is retained in *Hamlet*.

The phrase "Gigantomachy" sometimes refers to (and in the case of *Lo Spaccio* it does refer to) the Greek myth of the "Aloadai" which concerns the piling up of Mts. Ossa, Pelion and Olympus:

THE ALOADAI (Aloadae) were two giants who attempted to storm the home of the gods by piling three mountains—Olympus, Ossa and Pelion—one on top of the other.

Ares tried to stop them but was defeated and imprisoned for thirteen months in a bronze urn. Artemis later raced between them in the guise of a deer. They both cast their spears but missed and instead struck each other dead.

Curiously the pair were also attributed with introducing the cult of the Mousai (Muses) to Mount Helikon in Boiotia.

The Aloadai giants were depicted in ancient art as a pair of youthful hunters with caps and hunting spears. They were sometimes confounded with or included in lists of the Gigantes who waged war on the gods.

The name Aloadai, was derived from the Greek verb *aloaô* meaning "to crush" or "thresh." Individually they were named "nightmare" (Greek *ephi-altês*) and "doom" (from *oitos*) or "horned-owl" (Greek *ôtos*).¹²

In *Hamlet*, as I noted above, references to stacking up Ossa, Pelion and Olympus are found in the scene in which Ophelia's funeral takes place. After

12 <https://www.theoi.com/Gigante/GigantesAloadai.html>

Ophelia's casket is lowered into the ground, grief-stricken Laertes leaps into Ophelia's grave and cries that dirt should be heaped "Till of this flat mountain you have made/T' o'ertop old Pelion, or the skyish head of old Olympus" (5.1.253-5). Hamlet appears moments later and shouts that "millions of acres" of soil should be thrown on top of him and Ophelia "till our ground/ Singeing his pate against the burning zone/ Make Ossa like a wart" (5.1.281-3). In *Lo Spaccio*, Jove mentions the same three mountains as he confronts the impending death of his material body. Jove's crisis, like Ophelia's death, allegorically indicates that nature has reached a tipping point and has a look of death (i.e. climate change, ocean acidification, and plastic pollution, etc.). The myth of the Aloadai, about piling Ossa, Pelion and Olympus in order to reach the gods is about challenging the gods (which is to say, establishing a new paradigm.). Therefore, shortly after Ophelia's funeral, Horatio sees through the false Claudius ("Why, what a king is this!" (5.2.63)). Up until that point, Horatio has not been as completely shocked and infuriated by Claudius as Hamlet is.

The allegory implicit in the denouement of *Hamlet* is clear: The death of Claudius means that fossil fuels cease to be used and Christianity also dwindles away. Gertrude's death means the end of society depending on fossil fuels and Christianity. The death of Prince Hamlet probably means that Shakespeare's centuries-long battle against fossil fuels and Christianity (through his works) at last comes to a drawn out, attenuated end. As Gatti points out (120) the last words of Hamlet, "the rest is silence" (5.2.358) strongly echo the last words of the Explanatory Epistle in *Lo Spaccio*, "There is the termination of tempestuous traivails; there the Bed; there, Tranquil Repose; there, Secure Quiet" (Bruno 88).

The fact that Jove and the gods in the last lines of *Lo Spaccio*, do not die at the end, but healthily aver that they are "dying of hunger" (Bruno 272) before they consume the "Southern Fish", after which "they festively left the conclave" (Bruno 272) implies that humans recover, after they use science to help heal the planet. On

a similarly tentatively positive note, Horatio is left alive to tell what he knows and offer help to Fortinbras, who is poised to take over the Danish kingdom. Moreover, earlier, another speech of Horatio's casts more light on Shakespeare's real intentions. In Act 4, scene 5, Gertrude first describes Ophelia's "speech":

Gertrude: ...her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
The hearers to collection; they yawn at it,
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts,
Which as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,
Indeed would make one think there might be thought,
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily. (4.5.7-13) (My emphasis)

Horatio then replies: "Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds" (4.5.14-15)

Similarly, Shakespeare uses "winks" and "nods" to gesture to his secret source, Bruno's highly heretical book. Especially the startlingly similar imagery: fish, crocodiles, whales (both in the sky), the Aloadai, Mts Ossa, Pelion and Olympus, and the passage of Hamlet's book, closely duplicate the imagery, expressions and themes in *Lo spaccio*.

Horatio's earnest tone of concern in his line "dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds" then takes on a shadowy and darkly sardonic meaning. From his grave, Shakespeare tersely and cleverly validates my dangerous conjecture at the same time. My dangerous conjecture is just this: *Hamlet*, a celebrated and iconic work originating in the west, is mainly based on one of the most heretical books ever written, a book penned by a man burned alive in public for his iconoclastic ideas.

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