

## ***Bruno's Dream: Murdoch's Intertextual Web***

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In the last paragraph of *Jackson's Dilemma*, Murdoch, perhaps in consciously valedictory mode, gives us the image of a spider in its web, which she probably saw as a metaphor for her own art as a spinner of fictions. *Bruno's Dream* is also a novel about webs: the spiders' webs that fascinate the dying arachnologist, Bruno, the web-like trap in which Nigel pinions the sleeping Will, and, of course, the complex webs of human relationships and deceptions which constitute the plot. However, Murdoch also weaves another web of allusion and parallelism - a web of intertextuality. Robert Irwin has pointed out some of its elements: Tolstoy, Plato, Wittgenstein and Weil. It is the aim of this paper to explore some of its even stranger connections.

The first is a clear series of allusions to Arnold Bennett's *Clayhanger*, a novel set in the Staffordshire Potteries, in which the eponymous hero, Edwin Clayhanger, ardently desires to be an architect, but his father forces him to go into the family printing business. Likewise, Bruno Greensleave wanted to study zoology, but his father had made him go into the family printing business. However, he poignantly combines aspects of Edwin with aspects of his father, Darius Clayhanger, in his last illness. Murdoch's three references to Wedgwood plates (also produced in the Staffordshire Potteries) make it clear that the parallel is not accidental.

The second thread involves a number of passages which allude more subtly to Bruno's namesake, the Renaissance philosopher and heretic Giordano Bruno. The parallel might seem a strange one given that Giordano Bruno apparently died fearlessly whilst Murdoch's Bruno has lost his faith and fears annihilation. However, Bruno in the *Eroici furori* gives us the Diana-Acteon myth as the ultimate symbol of the philosopher's quest for the divine gnosis and Murdoch's Bruno achieves his own moment of gnosis as he dies holding the hand of a woman called Diana. Moreover, Giordano Bruno's depictions of the infinite universe bear a close resemblance to a spider's web.

Thirdly, there are a series of allusions to Blake's poem 'The Fly'. Fourthly, the love-death polarity of the novel and the mysterious nature of the character Nigel can best be understood in relation to T.F. Powys's novel, *Mr Weston's Good Wine*. These four threads give us a continuum from the realistic, through the cosmological-philosophical, to the mystical and an awareness of them deepens our appreciation of this multi-layered novel.

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