

THE  
*CABALA*  
OF  
*PEGASUS*

Giordano Bruno

TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED BY

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# Acknowledgments

Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) stands judged and acknowledged today as a seminal thinker and an intriguing character in the evolution from Renaissance to modern world. Scholars variously identify him as Galileo’s precursor, modern science’s first martyr, Hermetic magus, and kabbalist mystic. Such wide-ranging interpretations of this philosopher underscore the complexity of his enigmatic persona and arcane thought; they also invite translations of his writings for the burgeoning body of nonspecialists captivated by his itinerant lifestyle, provocative work, and fiery demise. This translation, therefore, is intended both for general (albeit sophisticated and informed) readers and for cultural historians of the early modern period, inasmuch as Bruno scholars and Italianists will continue to read and cite the text in the original.

Following the examples of previous Bruno translators, we have inserted paragraph divisions into lengthy speeches and have subdivided some interminable periodic constructions into discrete sentences. We have tried to resist idiomatizing Bruno’s Italian, and this has been aided by the many unambiguously wry phrasings of the original text that would render such an attempt superfluous at any rate. Textual insertions meant to clarify intended subjects or objects, or to make a phrase more grammatically intelligible in English, have been placed within brackets.

This text provides the first full English-language translation of Bruno's *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo* and is well complemented by the recent English translation of Nuccio Ordine's *La cabala dell'asino: Asinità e conoscenza in Giordano Bruno* (Napoli: Liguori, 1987) by Henryk Baranski in collaboration with Arielle Saiber, *Giordano Bruno and the Philosophy of the Ass* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), as well as by Karen de León-Jones's *Giordano Bruno and the Kabbalah: Prophets, Magicians and Rabbis* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997). Any critical work on the life and writings of Giordano Bruno must depend heavily on the foundation editions and studies of Giovanni Gentile, Vincenzo Spampanato, and Frances A. Yates, and the influence of Gentile's learned edition of the Nolan's *dialoghi* is ubiquitous in this translation's commentaries, as anyone familiar with his work will immediately note. The source text for the following translation of Bruno's *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo*, then, is Giovanni Aquilecchia's 1958 revised edition of Gentile's *Giordano Bruno: Dialoghi italiani*.

For inspiration and for practical suggestions, Sid wishes to cite Jackson I. Cope, the *pedante* who sent him to read Bruno, and to whom he returned with grave reservations about the Nolan's emotional stability. He has retained those reservations, as well as a permanent gratitude and respect for the man who invited him to play the best game in town.

Other colleagues, including Thomas L. Berger, David Frederick, Richard S. Ide, Moshe Lazar, and Dorothy Limouze, have also offered advice and insights that have helped to shape this volume. What remains of the truly asinine, rather than the divinely foolish, must be credited to the translators rather than to them. We also wish to thank the director and staff of the Huntington Library for their generous assistance and their invaluable resources.

Sid thanks his most patient and discerning reader—his wife, Ramona Ralston, a scholar and a gentlewoman.

Madison expresses gratitude to his Harvard mentor Dante Della Terza, who first initiated him into the intricate tapestry and exalted rhetoric of early modern Italian thought; to two former research assistants, Brian O. Call (now at Yale) and Joseph Porter, who sought answers to seemingly unanswerable questions; and to his wife, Debra, who doubles as his favorite dance historian, and daughters, MariLouise and Laura, for their unflagging support and loving devotion.

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# Bruno's Design for the *Cabala*

## Authority and the Power of Words

To study Giordano Bruno is to consider a life of discord and paradox, dedicated to the forging of an ecumenical philosophy in which divergent perspectives and apparently self-negating claims might be reconciled into a transcendent vision of human aspiration. Before introducing his portraits of Oxford dons as impotent sophists in *La cena de le Ceneri* [*The Ash Wednesday Supper*, or *The Dinner of Ashes*] (1584), Bruno designates himself a member of a select group of philosophers “ne la medicina esperti, ne la contemplazione giudiziosi, ne la divinazione singolari, ne la magia miracolosi, ne le superstizioni providi, ne le leggi osservanti, ne la moralità irreprensibili, ne la teologia divini, in tutti effetti eroici” [in medicine expert, in contemplation judicious, in divination without equal, in magic miraculous, in superstitions provident, in laws observant, in morals irreproachable, in theology divine, in all effects, heroic] (44).<sup>1</sup>

Such self-aggrandizement, though typical of its author's attempts to generate authority, did little publicly to dispel the impression that he was “unsuccessful in human relations, devoid of social tact or worldly wisdom, unpractical to an almost insane degree” (Singer 1950, 3). Because of the intensity of Bruno's emotional and

intellectual vendetta against academicians, however, warnings like those of the interlocutor Maricondo in *De gli eroici furori* [*On the Heroic Frenzies*] (1585) proved far more influential than his extravagant self-praise: “Veggiamo bene che mai la pedantaria è stata piú in exaltazione per governare il mondo, che a’ tempi nostri; la quale fa tanti camini de vere specie intelligibili ed oggetti de l’única veritade infallibile, quanti possano essere individui pedanti” [We clearly see that pedantry has never been more glorified for controlling the world than in our own times, which creates as many roads to the true intelligible species and the qualities of the one infallible truth as there are individual pedants] (1116).

A potent emotional force does much to aid the cultural dissemination of a particular idea, as the extreme example of martyrdom demonstrates; yet it can also form an insulating barrier that resists analytical scrutiny. The individual disputants offering interpretations and options at the Council of Pandemonium in Book Two of *Paradise Lost*, for example, do not address the problem of free will because acknowledgment of its jeopardy or loss would signify the hopelessness of their situation. Bruno’s writing, particularly in the philosophical dialogues published in London (1584–1585), displays both the fervor and the frustration of an individual trying to make arguments designed to effect change on a culture-wide—even universal—basis. Scholars have argued that the emotional impact of overt condemnations of authority figures, particularly those associated with institutionalized learning, in late Elizabethan culture may have helped to ensure their survival in a wide range of antihumanist texts.<sup>2</sup> Giordano Bruno contributed the icon of the “menacing pedant” to other English cultural subversions via such vernacular dialogues as the *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo* (London [though stamped “Parigi”], 1585); yet his attacks on intellectuals and academia are ultimately idiosyncratic, and analysis of the man behind them must address the surprising potency of the emotion he transfers to this

icon. To forgo analysis of the complex of semantic causalities shaping any cultural belief is to take a teleological view of cultural coherence, where form subsumes content, where ideas rather than their derivations matter most. This has always been a danger with discussions of Bruno's life and works, and even a scholar as conscientiously thorough as Dame Frances A. Yates warns that no single analytical perspective "may ever serve to catch or to identify this extraordinary man" (1966, 307). Hence assessment of the contributions made by Bruno's *Cabala* to antihumanist<sup>3</sup> sentiments in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England should be pursued from perspectives both ideological and causal.

The locus of his "menacing pedant" icon is Oxford University; though the few specific references to Bruno's presence there exist outside the university's records,<sup>4</sup> documentation of his presence and participation in debates there circa June 1583 has been exhaustively discussed by modern scholars.<sup>5</sup> Two of these references provide assessments of Bruno's emotional behavior during this period as well as clear indices to his previous history. His memory treatise *Ars reminiscendi* (London, 1583), which contains the *Explicatio triginta sigillorum* [*The Interpretation of the Thirty Seals*] and *Sigillus sigillorum* [*The Seal of Seals*], includes in some editions (see Boulting 1914, 82n2) the hyperbolic epistle *Ad excellentissimum Oxoniensis academiae Procancellarium, clarrisimos doctores atque celeberrimos magistros* [*To the Excellent Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, Its Most Illustrious Doctors and Renowned Teachers*]. In this purported introduction, the author employs the energetic language and imagery that also characterize his six Italian dialogues published in London (1584–1585); at the same time, he exhibits anxieties that may have been precipitated (as he later says) by abrasive or doctrinaire attitudes he encountered at the university, or conversely may simply be reoccurrences of conflict patterns experienced before he arrived in England. Bruno describes himself as

magis laboratae theologiae doctor, purioris et innocuae sapientiae professor, in praecipuis Europae academiis notus, probatus et honorifice exceptus philosophus, nullibi praeterquam apud barbaros et ignobiles peregrinus . . . praesumptuosae et recalcitrantis ignorantiae domitor . . . qui non magis Italum quam Britannum, marem quam feminam . . . togatum quam armatum . . . quem stultitiae propagatores et hypocritumculi detestantur, quem probi et studiosi diligunt, et cui nobiliora plaudunt ingenia. (2.2.76–77)

[doctor of a more difficult theology, professor of a pure and quite blameless wisdom, distinguished in the preeminent academies of Europe, a philosopher approved and honorably accepted, a foreigner nowhere except among the barbarous and ignoble . . . conqueror of the presumptuous and recalcitrant ignorant . . . who [prefers] the Italian no more than the British, male than female . . . someone in a toga than someone in armor . . . whom the propagators of foolishness and the hypocrites detest, whom the good and studious esteem highly, and whose mind the more noble applaud.]

It is tempting to read these descriptive images as no more than playful self-aggrandizement. But in the First Dialogue of the *Cabala*, Bruno's persona Saulino likens the overweening pride of pedants to that of the Genesis 11:1–9 account of “gli superbi e presumptuosi sapienti del mondo, quali ebbero fiducia nel proprio ingegno, e con temeraria e gonfia presunzione hanno avuto ardire d'alzarsi alla scienza de secreti divini e que' penetrati della deitade, non altrimenti che coloro ch'edificàro la torre di Babelle, son stati confusi e messi in dispersione, avendosi essi medesimi serrato il passo . . . alla sapienza divina e visione della veritade eterna” [the proud and presumptuous sages of the world, who had confidence in their own individual genius and with reckless and swollen presumption had the daring to raise themselves to the knowledge of divine secrets and the innermost parts of deity—no different from those who built the Tower of Babel—have been confused and scattered, themselves hav-

ing shut the passage . . . to the divine wisdom and vision of the eternal truth]. This implicitly argues that what is needed is the appropriate kind of direction toward unity from the appropriate kind of leader, placing Bruno again in the (to him, apparently, comfortable) role of messiah.

#### DOCTOR OF A MORE DIFFICULT THEOLOGY

The identification of Bruno with fierce self-assertion and individualism is a historical commonplace, as Rollo May demonstrates when describing prototypes of modern social ideologies: "One is Giordano Bruno (later to be burned at the stake by the Inquisition) whose idea of Creation as concentric circles with the self at center gave the original philosophical orientation for modernism" (1967, 58). It may be a surprise to readers, then, to discover that Bruno's hyperbole at times resembles bravado masking a fundamental insecurity, as in passages such as this response to an ignorant public in *De l'infinito universo e mondi* [*On the Infinite Universe and Worlds*] (1584): "Eccone, dunque, fuor d'invidia; eccone liberi da vana ansia e stolta cura di bramar lontano quel tanto bene che possedemo vicino e giunto. Eccone piú liberi dal maggior timore che loro caschino sopra di noi, che messi in speranza che noi caschiamo sopra di loro" (360) [Behold us, then, distanced from envy; behold us freed from the vain anxiety and foolish care of coveting from afar that significant good which we possess nearby and adjoining us. Behold us freed from the prevalent fear that they overwhelm us, even more than from the hope that we overwhelm them]. It could hardly be otherwise; Bruno was an intellectual fugitive for fifteen years before his 1591 arrest in Venice. A fustian rhetoric may have been as essential to his survival as his timely departures from one European cultural center after another, often narrowly ahead of the Holy Office's pursuit.

Sometime between the ages of fifteen and seventeen, Filippo Bruno of Nola was admitted as a probationer to the brotherhood of St. Dominic at Naples by its prior, Ambrogio Pasqua. To signal his covenant there, Filippo was renamed after Jordan of Saxony, who had succeeded founder Domingo de Guzman in 1221 as master of the order. Giordano took his vows in 1566, was ordained a priest in 1572, and sang his first Mass at San Bartolomeo in Campagna, electing thereafter to become one of the Preaching Friars of his mendicant order (P. Michel 1973, 13). Although Dominican intellectual beliefs were sympathetic with Aristotelian and Scholastic philosophy, particularly as expounded by their own brethren Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, Bruno opposed what he perceived to be the static determinism of his order's ideology. In later years he preached an eclectic synthesis of Monadism, Copernicanism, Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and elements of various occult philosophies.<sup>6</sup> His hermetic aspirations for humanity to seek (re)union with the Creator found consonance with the Neoplatonist passages of Augustine's *Soliloquies*, which are expressed as the individual's "task, when whole and perfect, it is to bear upward away from these shadows to that higher Light, which it befits not to disclose itself to those shut up in this cave" (1910, 41–42).

The Dominicans could not allow Fra Giordano the syncretist independence of his views: the "Hounds of the Lord" (derived from the pun *Domini canes Evangelium latrantes per totum orbem*, "The Dominicans / Hounds-of-the-Lord announce / bark the good news throughout the entire globe") had traditionally served the dictates of the Inquisition and referred to their founder after his death as the *persecutor haereticorum*; here we are reminded that the authors of the witch-smashing *Malleus maleficarum*, Jacobus Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer, were German Dominicans. Warned of charges related to his sympathy with the Arian heresy (itself a spiritual severance of Son from Father) and his consultations of heretical texts

(including those by humanists such as Erasmus), the Nolan<sup>7</sup> fled San Domenico in 1576, approximately eleven years after entering the monastery, to become his own father, to give birth to a more difficult theology than that professed by the Dominicans.<sup>8</sup>

DISTINGUISHED IN THE PREEMINENT  
ACADEMIES OF EUROPE

With more anger than self-parody, Bruno designates himself “Academico di nulla academia” [Academician of no academy] on the title page of his comedy *Il candelaio* [*The Chandler* or *The Light-Bearer*] (Paris, 1582) and includes as his motto “In tristitia hilaris, in hilaritate tristis” [In sadness happy, in happiness sad]. This introduction at once confirms his apparent desire to occupy an academic post—demonstrated by his previous and subsequent pursuit of lectureships at various universities—and his self-evaluation as an intellect superior to those directing the European academies. If his self-description is interpreted as a rationale, then his motto must function as metarationale, its paradox a semantic resonance of the psychic conflict implicit in rejection, in viewing himself as a displaced academician of no academy.

Before joining the Dominicans in June 1565, Bruno benefited from public and private study in Naples, attending lectures delivered by Vincenzo Colle at the Studium Generale and receiving tutelage from Teofilo de Vairano at the Augustinian monastery (Singer 1950, 10). The young Dominican’s erudition and impressive memory techniques (see Yates 1966, 199–319) earned him an audience with Dominican Pope Pius V in approximately 1571; refinements of his Lullist mnemonic systems published between 1582 and 1588 assured his general reputation throughout European academia. In spite of his accomplishments as scholar and theorist, however, the stubborn, volatile philosopher regularly alienated his students and

institutional patrons. At Genoese Noli, in 1576, Bruno attempted to instruct both adults and children, but his “impatience and his highly involved symbolic and allusive mode of expression must have made him a superlatively bad instructor of children, and it is no wonder that his pedagogic career was brief” (Singer 1950, 13). Undaunted, Bruno denoted his desire for recognition as an intellectual by boldly signing himself “Philippus Brunus Nolanus, sacrae theologiae professor, 20 May 1579” (Boulting 1914, 42) upon arrival at the Academy of Geneva.

The *Ad excellentissimum* introduction also depicts Bruno as a scholar-warrior, “conqueror of the presumptuous and recalcitrant ignorant,” and an incident during his stay at Geneva begins to codify his configuration of the “menacing pedant” icon, specifically suggesting why he attacks his targets in the London dialogues so vehemently and why he focuses his pedant portraits primarily on university doctors. On 6 August 1579, Bruno and printer Jean Bergeon were arrested; persuaded by Bruno’s philosophical rationale and forceful personality, Bergeon had published “certaines responses et invectives contre M.r de le Faye [Pastor Antoine de la Faye, respected professor of philosophy], cottans 20 erreurs d’iceluy en une de ses leçons” (Spampanato 1933, 33). On 13 August, Bruno was invited to appear and “to acknowledge his transgression in that he had erred in doctrine and called the pastors of the Church of Geneva pedagogues” (Boulting 1914, 46). He refused. Participating in the intellectual forum of the university environment, Bruno had attacked one lecture of one professor—yet had been unexpectedly censured by a coalition vindictive enough to incarcerate him for his criticism. His release on 27 August was secured after his publicly “recognizing that he had made a great error” (“reconoissant en ce avoyr fait grande faulte” [Spampanato 1933, 36]); this additional humiliation undoubtedly fueled rather than diminished his intellectual pursuits,

confirming for him that he simply had not yet found the Academy of his destiny.

At Toulouse from late 1579 to 1581, Bruno quickly took a doctorate of theology degree and lectured on Johannes de Sacrobosco's *Sphere* after students at the university chose him by election to occupy a vacant position in philosophy. Further demonstrating respect for his scholarship, a collection of his lectures on Aristotle's *De anima*, no longer extant, was published during his stay there. Though seemingly an ideal situation for him, general resentment expressed toward the controversial relaxation of religious restrictions on new faculty's participation in the sacrament may have contributed to Bruno's decision to leave Toulouse for Paris. Upon arriving, he displayed once again the conflicting impulses to protect his theories from unworthy intellects but also to seek general acclaim for them. At the heart of both motivations is Bruno's sensationalist epistemology. His earliest extant Paris publication, *De umbris idearum* [*On the Shadows of Ideas*] (1582), dedicated to Henri III, was couched in overtly kabbalistic figures and terminology to prevent popular access to, and dissemination of, his mnemonics system; at the same time, he was offering to lecture on the thirty divine attributes of Thomistic theology and was invited to share his memory techniques with the king. Henri III was a loyal supporter of occult philosophies, but other idiosyncrasies may have stimulated his interest in Bruno, including his indiscriminate superstition or his homosexuality. Expectations for the Nolan's art were high, and whether he "lent himself willingly to any imposture in his exposition of mnemonics, cannot be asserted. But it is certain that the public were led to expect from his method more than it could give" (Symonds 1887, 139). Soon his welcome in Paris was also exhausted,<sup>9</sup> and the philosopher dubiously distinguished in the preeminent academies of Europe followed the French ambassador, Michel de Castelnau, marquis de

Mauvissière, to England. Bruno must have expected an intellectual hero's welcome awaiting him there—when in fact his presence stirred up great controversy due to avid though theoretically inaccurate<sup>10</sup> pro-Copernican views (which he would reiterate in what he describes as a rhetorical victory over the Oxford doctors Torquato and Nundinio in *La cena*) and his reluctance to balance Aristotelian notions of essence and cause with Christian accommodation of them: “Speaking of the soul, he taught that nothing in the universe is lost, everything is in a state of transformation; therefore body, spirit and matter, are equally eternal. The body may dissolve, but becomes transformed; the soul transmigrates, and, drawing around itself atom to atom, it reconstructs for itself a new body. The spirit which animates and moves all things is One” (Boulting 1914, 39). Scorning the differences in intellectual atmosphere between medieval and Elizabethan Oxford, Bruno defensively insulated himself from criticism, rationalizing, for example, in the *Ad excellentissimum* that he and his ideas were considered foreign “nowhere except among the barbarous and ignoble.”

NO MORE MALE THAN FEMALE,  
SOMEONE IN A TOGA THAN SOMEONE IN ARMOR

Though there can be little doubt that Bruno's negative social experiences exacerbated his eccentric behavior and responses, he worked as an author to erase the causal relationships between his personal experience and his textual revelations. Even within the document that so clearly communicates it, the shallowly repressed anger of the *Ad excellentissimum* is couched in pseudo-equanimity by a series of rhetorically balanced clauses (for example, the Nolan is someone “who [prefers] the Italian no more than the British”) that pretend to deny the very antitheses they clearly represent. Two of these clauses (declaring that the author no more respects “male than female” or

“someone in a toga than someone in armor”) further reflect the complex social and psychological dynamics that produced personal conflict for Bruno.

The nomadic structure of Bruno's life was antithetical to formulating emotional relationships of any duration; nevertheless, he “made no secret of the admiration which the beauty of women excited in his nature” (Symonds 1887, 132). This proves difficult to reconcile with Sophia's positive anticipation in the *Spaccio della bestia trionfante* [*Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*] (London 1585) of a return to the golden age's *legge naturale*, or natural law,

per la quale è lecito a ciascun maschio di aver tante moglie quante ne può nutrire et impregnare; perché è cosa superflua ed ingiusta, ed a fatto contrario alla regola naturale, che in una già impregnata e gravida donna, o in altri soggetti peggiori, come altre illegitime procacciate,—che per tema di vituperio provocano l'aborso,—vegna ad esser sparso quell'omifico seme che potrebbe suscitare eroi e colmar le vacue sedie de l'empireo. (Gentile 1958, 583)

[by which it is permissible for each male to have as many wives as he can feed and impregnate; because it is a superfluous and unjust thing and entirely contrary to natural law that upon an already impregnated and gravid woman, or upon other worse subjects, such as others illegitimately procured, who for fear of disgrace induce abortions, there should be spilt that man-producing semen, which could give rise to heroes and fill the empty seats of the empyrean. (Imerti 1964, 96)]

The exaggerated valuation of male procreative prerogative is complemented here with a profound devaluation of women, who are meaningful only as receptacles for the propagation of “heroes”—like the persecuted philosopher himself. Bruno is simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by the contemplation of women; and additionally verifying his virtually systemic rejection of Dominican values, discussion of celibacy as a response to female stimuli is noticeably absent. The female characters of the *Candelaio*<sup>11</sup> represent

little resolution of Bruno's ambivalence toward women: "A strain of masochism accompanies man's hedonism" in relationships with women, and the comments of female characters like Carubina on the subject of love ultimately "record the perversion of something initially attractive" (Barr 1971, 361). Although it might be tempting to speculate about the impact of maternal love (or lack thereof) on Bruno's childhood gender role formulation, all that is known for sure about Fraulissa Savolina is the *fralezza*, frailty, of her name. In testimony before the Venetian Inquisitors, he identified her simply as "mia madre Fraulissa Savolina" [my mother Fraulissa Savolina] who "è morta" [is dead] (Spampanato 1933, 79).

The "someone in a toga than someone in armor" clause would seem at first glance contradictory, as the soldier, a conventional sign of anti-intellectualism, is balanced rhetorically with his opposite, clad in the university toga—though Bruno's documented misadventures in academia help to reconcile the author's assertion that there is no antithesis between them. It also suggests the degree of his militant anger at those who opposed his intellectual agenda, displayed for example in *La cena*, the first of his London dialogues, with a verse "To the Malcontent" warning, "Since you have confronted me with injustice, / I shall stretch and pull your skin all over; / And should my body too fall to the ground, / Your shame will be recorded in hard diamond" (Jaki 1975, 42). Brandishing the invective typical of his subsequent dialogue attacks on pedants, Bruno concludes the *Ad excellentissimum* epistle with a curse on the "diluvii asinorum stercora malis aureis" [floods of evil golden manure from asses] who have infiltrated the university environment until "nunc cuilibet stulto et asino liceat in nostras positiones hic vel alibi" [now any fool and ass is allowed into our positions here and elsewhere] (2.2.78). This oxymoronic "golden manure" alludes to the Ciceronian ornamentation of the Oxford rhetoricians (see Yates 1982, 137), gilding their stubborn resistance to his ideas. Intrusion upon his

objectives (“our positions”) forced the philosopher into a warrior posture, so he appropriated its archetypally male authority in order to battle the childish, irreverent professors. As with his mother Fraulissa, virtually nothing is known about Bruno’s own father, Giovanni, except his profession: “Uomo d’arme”—soldier. Whether externally or internally imposed, the oppositions of male versus female and man-of-action versus man-of-contemplation fueled Bruno’s intellectual foment and torment.

WHOSE MIND THE NOBLE APPLAUD

On 10 June 1583, following a visit with Queen Elizabeth and her court that had begun in April, the Polish palatine Albertus Alasco, accompanied by Sir Philip Sidney at the request of the university’s chancellor, the earl of Leicester, arrived at Christ Church, Oxford. During his stay through 13 June, dramatic performances and fireworks displays were arranged for the palatine’s entertainment in the evenings, while tours and disputations were conducted each day.<sup>12</sup> Although there is no specific record among Oxford historical accounts that Bruno participated in the Alasco disputations, two outside sources document such an occasion. George Abbot’s *The Reasons VVhich Doctovr Hill Hath Brovght* reports, “When that Italian Didapper, who intituled himselfe *Philotheus Iordanus Brunus Nolanus, magis elaborata Theologia Doctor, &c* with a name longer then his body, had in the traine of Alasco the Polish Duke, seene our Vniversity in the year 1583, his hart was on fire, to make himselfe by some worthy exploite, to become famous in that celebrious place” (1604, 4<sup>v</sup>). Abbot documents the zeal, if not the particulars and the ultimate result, of Bruno’s participation in the debates. To the detriment of the Nolan’s reputation, however, Abbot also reports two occasions on which the doctor of theology was allegedly caught plagiarizing from Marsilio Ficino’s *De vita coelitus*

*comparanda*. Thus Bruno's passion to be recognized by Oxford—that is, by medieval Oxford, haven of freethinkers such as Roger Bacon—for his pioneering spirit and syncretic approach to knowledge was manifested during his tenure at the university even in irrational and irresponsible responses. The philosopher's own description of the debate in *La cena de le Ceneri* awards him a significant victory:

E se non il credete, andate in Oxonia, e fatevi raccontar le cose intravenute al Nolano, quando pubblicamente disputò con que' dottori in teologia in presenza del prencipe Alasco polacco ed altri della nobiltà inglesa. Fatevi dire come si sapea rispondere a gli argomenti; come restò per quindici sillogismi quindici volte qual pulcino entro la stoppa quel povero dottor. (Gentile 1958, 133)

[And if you don't believe it, go to Oxford and make them recount to you the things that happened to the Nolan when he publicly disputed with some doctors of theology in the presence of the Polish prince Alasco and others of the English nobility. Make them tell you how he knew to respond to their arguments; how for fifteen syllogisms fifteen times that poor doctor stayed without knowing which way to turn.]

In the bombastic emotion of this account, fact merges with fantasy, fustian becomes *persuasio*. Bruno interprets his performance as heroically inspired and enacted, his victory as complete. Nevertheless, he feels compelled to continue his scathing satirical attacks on university doctors as authority figures, employing them to reinforce his self-esteem. Reflected consciously or unconsciously in the hyperbole, neologisms, and abstractions of his own works, he most frequently targets the elaborate, Latinate grammar of the schoolmen as the quintessence of their design to overawe and dominate the unlearned.<sup>13</sup> Given previous patterns of frustration, including the Dominican rejection of his attempts to develop a syncretic philosophy, that predisposed him to react defensively, we can readily see why

Bruno responded so strongly to the disappointments—which may have varied from public embarrassments to simple lack of acclaim—associated with the Oxford experience. We can also see why he includes, as a separate agenda, his “anti-pedant” campaign in the works composed after he returned to London.

Bruno's attack was empowered by a genuine zeal, and the emotional intensity of his anger is displayed in his depictions of pedants not merely as wrongheaded but as cruel and vindictive. His goal of subversion is not disguised in the least; either he is seizing the martyr's image to strengthen his own self-conception (and to evoke the sympathy of readers), or his “extraordinary vanity” has remained largely undiminished by “his disappointment over being so little appreciated” (Pellegrini 1941–1942, 310). Writing to Gian Vincenzo Pinelli about Bruno in a letter dated 6 June 1586, Jacopo Corbinelli declares it “Basta che in Inghilterra ha lasciato scismi grandissimi in quelle scuole” [Sufficient that he has left huge schisms in those schools in England] (Yates 1983, 117).<sup>14</sup> The anti-Aristotelianism and affirmation of Cabalism of the *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo* are reflective of its author's vendetta against the Oxford university doctors specifically, and against all pedagogues generally.<sup>15</sup>

## The Wisdom of Asininity

Even within the corpus of writings by an author as eccentric as Bruno, the *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo* must be considered an unusual piece of literature. Interpretive difficulties for readers and translators begin with the work's title—literally, “the cabala of the Pegasean horse,” though textual elaboration reveals in time that by this “Pegasean horse” Bruno means in fact the ass, icon of “saintly asininity,”<sup>16</sup> a secular variation on the simple Christian faith designated “learned ignorance” in Nicholas of Cusa's *De docte ignorantia*: “The greatest and profoundest mysteries of God, though hidden from the wise,

may be revealed to little ones and humble folk living in the world by their faith in Jesus” (1962, 88). The asininity that Bruno singles out for praise in the *Cabala*—and that he encourages his readership to affirm (by accepting his doctrines)—is a simple, unquestioning attitude that facilitates, rather than precludes or impedes, faith. The text is also “Pegasean” in that the interlocutor Onorio, who appears in the work’s second dialogue and retains the ability to recall his many previous incarnations, which include an ass and Aristotle—the two being intimately related, suggests Bruno—was once reincarnated as Pegasus. The text is itself a “Pegasean” messenger, celebrating and authorizing its creator, winging its way into the hands of the reader. Even the *assonanza* of the title (*cabala / cavallo*) is a punning reference to the arcane significance of the ass to Bruno’s personal agenda of intellectual freedom.

There are structural symmetries within the *Cabala* that can be enjoyed purely as literary games, though they also serve the practical function of pointing the reader to central authorial concerns.<sup>17</sup> To evoke consideration of the relation between authority and wisdom, the author praises the dialogue’s dedicatee, the nonexistent Bishop Don Sapatino of Casamarciano, for being able by virtue of knowledge and title “entrar per tutto, perché non è cosa che vi tegna rinchiuso” [to penetrate the whole, because there is nothing that can restrict you] (837); conversely, the learned Ass of the dialogue appended to the *Cabala* proper, “L’Asino Cillenico del Nolano” [The Nolan’s Cillenican Ass], is denied access to the Pythagorean Academy until Mercury himself arrives to deliver the gods’ will that the Ass “possa entrar ed abitar per tutto, senza ch’alcuno ti possa tener porta o dar qualsivoglia sorte d’oltraggio o impedimento” [may enter and reside anywhere, without anyone able to bar the door to you or to give any sort of insult or impediment] (923). Employing passive voice in the dedicatory epistle that fails to disguise the source of his anguish at personal rebuffs, Bruno demands that a man’s

intellect be recognized as his credentials: "Se è dottor sottile, irrefragabile ed illuminato, con qual coscienza non vorrete che lo stime e tegna per degno consigliere?" [If he is a shrewd, resolutely superior, and enlightened doctor, with what conscience will you refuse to esteem him a worthy counselor?] (843).

Similarly, when the validity of the Ass's argument for being accepted into the Pythagorean Academy is ignorantly denied, he cries, "Credete ch'io abbia fatto questo per altro fine che per accusarvi e rendervi inexcusabili avanti a Giove?" [Do you believe that I've done this for any other purpose than accusing and rendering you unpardonable before Jove?] (921). Bruno also intersperses three sonnets through the *Cabala*, and typical of his ass wordplay throughout, all three are in the style of the *sonetto caudato / codato*, or "tailed" sonnet.<sup>18</sup> Onorio's asininity is Pythagorean in literally every sense, even when this leads to amusing contradictions. The reader learns in the Second Dialogue that Onorio was an ass in a former incarnation, making him pejoratively Pythagorean thanks to the vicissitudes of the philosopher's doctrine of metempsychosis. Far more positively, however, Bruno's sense of a mathematically formulaic method of approaching the deity (for example, in *De magia mathematica* [1590]: "Ascendit animal per animum ad sensus, per sensus in mixta, per mixta in elementa, per elementa in caelos, per hos in daemones seu angelos, per istos in Deum seu in divinas operationes" [3:493]) matches S. K. Heninger's description of the Pythagorean secret society open to men and women, which "held out to its members the hope of divine perfection" through a program of mathematics instruction, followed by "a study of physics and the investigation of primary principles, and finally promised knowledge of the deity" (1974, 22).<sup>19</sup> Onorio, even etymologically, is the perfect meeting place for these divergent Pythagorean directions. Although *onos* is Greek for "ass," Giovanni Gentile adds that Bruno may be employing *rio* to signify "wicked" ass, or *rio* may simply function as a

“suffisso derivativo” (1958, 882n1). The name proves wonderfully encompassing in its ambiguity, inasmuch as Onorio has been previously incarnated as Pegasus; he has also been the asinine (that is, inflexibly stubborn) philosopher Aristotle, who professed ideologies and doctrines that Onorio eventually confesses never to have understood.

The second dialogue of the *Cabala* is a mélange of diverse ontologies, idiosyncratic condemnations of philosophical tenets, and gnostic assertions about physics and physical reality. With typical Brunist syncretism, Pythagorean metempsychosis combines with the monadist conviction that “di medesima materia corporale si fanno tutti gli corpi, e di medesima sustanza spirituale sono tutti gli spiriti” [all bodies are made from the same corporeal matter, and all spirits from the same spiritual substance] (890) to produce Onorio’s conclusion that “l’execuzione della giustizia divina” [the execution of divine justice] prescribes “cotal modo di resuscitazione . . . secondo gli affetti ed atti ch’hanno exercitati in un altro corpo” [precisely such a revivification, according to the emotions and actions they have exercised in another body] (891). Bruno’s anti-Aristotelianism, prominently adopted after his disastrous intellectual debut at Oxford University, the very *fons Aristotelis*, is evident in Onorio’s remarks about the egregiously uninformed opinions on physics and metaphysics he disseminated while incarnated as Aristotle. His condemnatory remarks culminate in the pronouncement, “Son fatto quello per cui la scienza naturale e divina è stinta nel bassissimo della ruota” [I am the tool by which natural and divine knowledge is stuck on the lowest point of the wheel] (893–894).<sup>20</sup> Bruno joins his voice to popular attacks on Skepticism and Pyrrhonism that accused their proponents of the puerile dismissal of others’ epistemological theories, and of espousing doubt about the security (Skeptics) or even possibility (Pyrrhonians) of knowledge, angrily charging that “per non pregiudicar alla lor vana presunzione

confessando l'imbecilità del proprio ingegno, grossezza di senso e privazione d'intelletto" [by not risking their vain presumption, confessing the imbecility of their own mind, their coarseness of sense and privation of intellect], they finally "donano la colpa alla natura, alle cose che mal si rappresentano, e non principalmente alla mala apprensione de gli dogmatici" [lay the blame on nature, for the evil things they represent, and not principally on the bad understanding of the Dogmatics] (905).<sup>21</sup>

As Augusto Guzzo and Romano Amerio observe in their edition of Bruno's vernacular *dialoghi*, the text appended to the dialogue proper, "The Nolan's Cillenican Ass," is "una satira dell'ordine dottorale" [a satire of the doctoral order] (1956, 541n1). A talking Ass applies for admission to the Pythagorean Academy, and although the school's representative acknowledges the miraculous capabilities of this prospective student and the Ass is properly deferential in making his application, he is ultimately denied entrance on the basis of his appearance. This amplifies earlier physiognomic theorizing by Onorio that animals are inferior to humans solely by virtue of the fact that "non hanno tal complessione che possa esser capace di tale ingegno; perché l'universale intelligenza . . . per la grossezza o lubricità della material complessione non può imprimere tal forza di sentimento in cotali spiriti" [they don't have a constitution ample enough for such genius, because the universal intelligence . . . due to the bulk or lewdness of their material constitution, cannot inculcate so much power of understanding into such spirits] (887). Unlike his *pedanti* characters, university-trained intellectuals who approach thinking and discourse syntactically (as grammar-school pedagogues) rather than epistemologically, Bruno portrays himself and his philosophy as absolutely unbiased by any specific ideology or methodology. Although this ensures that a work like the *Cabala* will prove exciting and innovative in its theses, it also means that there are certain textual intricacies that remain virtually inscrutable to

the reader. But it would not be a truly Brunist Kabbalah if this were not so.

## The Kabbalah as Model and Metaphor for the *Cabala*

The Brunist persona Saulino lectures on the Sefirot early in the first dialogue of the *Cabala*, detailing the dimensions, the intelligences, the spheres, the spirits (*motori anime*), and the “quattro terribili principi” (866) that introduce a kabbalistic system derived primarily from Cornelius Agrippa’s *De occulta philosophia* (Yates 1964, 137–141, 259–261; Santonastaso 1973, 500; cf. de León-Jones 1997, 31–36).<sup>22</sup> Bruno is obviously attracted by Agrippa’s attempts, like those of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Ficino, “to establish the unifying core of the revelations given by God and to use it to recover the full understanding of man’s [godlike] nature” (McKnight 1989, 75) as established in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. This is because the ten physical emanations of God (the infinite creative force that Bruno refers to as *ensofico*, derived from the Hebraic *’en-sof* or *Ain Sof*), the Sefirot, represent the “*Adam kadmon*, or archetypal man” and “form the highest of four worlds, the world of emanation, *aziluth*. From this world evolve successively the world of creation, *beriah*, the world of formation, *yetrizah*, and the world of making, *asiyah*” (Blau 1944, 12; see also Scholem 1987, 130; and Sheinkin 1986, 191). Bruno’s commitment to achieving enlightenment through the reconciling of opposing forces and ideologies, through making the impossible possible, recognizes in the Sefirot a guide and a possible means to those ends. Alfonso Ingegno, in *La sommersa nave della religione: Studio sulla polemica anticristiana del Bruno*, notes that the Nolan’s attraction to Jewish mysticism parallels his shift away from the Christian perspective of the church militant (1985, 25), enabling

him to focus on a synthesis of ideologies that emphasizes the individual's godlike potential.

Saulino's explanation that certain Talmudists teach that "l'asino è simbolo della sapienza nelli divini Sefirot, perché a colui che vuoi, penetrare entro gli secreti ed occolti ricetti di quella, sia necessariamente de mistero d'esser sobrio e paziente, avendo mustaccio, testa e schena d'asino" [the ass is symbolic of the wisdom in the divine Sefirot, because whoever wishes to penetrate its secret and occult quarters must be necessarily sober and patient by profession, having the whiskers, head, and back of an ass] makes explicit his manipulation of kabbalistic tradition's erudite decoding of holy texts. The archetype of scholarly patience represented by the kabbalist who reviews every meaningful permutation of a text promotes Bruno's program throughout his Italian dialogues of trying to examine ideology, philosophy, and even natural phenomena from new perspectives. In addition, his veneration of Jewish methodology also allows him to reassert the importance of syncretism and cultural tolerance while attacking the scholarly perspective of the universities, which suggested all knowledge and wisdom of significance in the ancient world to have been derived from the Greeks, Persians, and Romans:

Così perseverì nel tuo pensiero ad aver l'asino ed asinità per cosa ludibriosa; quale, qualunque sia stata appresso Persi, Greci e Latini, non fu però cosa vile appresso gli Egizii ed Ebrei. Là onde è falsità ed impostura questa tra l'altre, cioè che quel culto asinino e divino abbia avuto origine dalla forza e violenza, e non più tosto ordinato dalla ragione, e tolto principio dalla elezione.

[So you persevere in your thinking about treating the ass and asininity as something for mockery; though whatever the state may have been for the Persians, Greeks, and Latins, it wasn't necessarily something vile for the Egyptians and Hebrews. There where there is falsehood and deceit, among the others,

that divine asinine cult had its origin via force and violence, and was not rather ordered by reasons and based on the principle of choice.]

The formal connection of kabbalistic lore to the literature of the ass is also made explicit through interlocutor Sebasto's accusation that the Hebrews stole the mysteries of the Sefirot and the ass from the Egyptians,<sup>23</sup> and Bruno's exercise of arcane Hebraic wisdom in the *Cabala* is revealed shortly thereafter to be more metaphorical than technical. After outlining three varieties of asinine ignorance, Saulino concludes that "come tre rami, si riducono ad un stipe, nel quale da l'archetipo influisce l'asinità, e che è fermo e piantato su le radici delli diece sephiroth" [like three branches, they converge at a single trunk—in which asininity influences from the archetype and which is resolute and planted upon the roots of the ten Sephiroth] (876). This grafting of Nicolas of Cusa's learned ignorance with the Kabbalah's second of the Sefira, Chokmah (Bruno's *Hocma*), which connotes wisdom (*sapienza*) in the tradition, is a necessary product of Bruno's argument that new insights can be derived only from the merging of wisdom and foolishness, knowledge and ignorance. To achieve this, individuals must resolve the paradox (by employing a kabbalistic reading of the *Cabala*) of arriving "a quella vilissima bassezza, per cui fiano capaci de piú magnifica exaltazione" [at that most vile baseness by which they are made capable of more magnificent exaltation] (879).

At the same time, Bruno does not explicate a detailed methodology for applying the facets of the Kabbalah and its tradition of intellectual scrutiny to the pursuit of knowledge. Saulino quickly moves from discussing the symbolic resonance of the ten Sefirot to consideration of the symbolic significance of the twelve tribes of Israel and to the twelve signs of the zodiac. Consistent with the theme of learned ignorance, then, Bruno's attraction to Jewish mysticism for the purpose of the *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo*'s discussions

of enlightened asininity may have much more to do with his ultimate philosophical objectives than with any personal belief in the value of kabbalism. While he derived much if not most of his specific kabbalistic system from Cornelius Agrippa, it is important to recall that Agrippa himself expresses deep skepticism about it in chapter 47 of *On the Vanitie and Vncertaintie of Artes and Sciences*: “this Iewishe Cabala is nothing else but a certaine most pestilent superstition, wherewith at theire will they doo gather, deuide, and transpose the woordes, names, and letters dispersed in the Scripture,” to “vnbinde the members of the truthe” in order to construct “communications, inductions, and parables” (1984, 138). If the polysophist Bruno diverges from his usual close association with Agrippan methodology and philosophy in this instance, the rationale is more likely to be found in his aim to provoke reconsideration of conventional assumptions and to instigate change than in a personal shift in metaphysical belief.

#### NOTES

1. All citations of Bruno's Italian works are from either Giovanni Gentile's edition *Giordano Bruno: Dialoghi italiani* (1958) or Isa Guerrini Angrisani's edition *Candelaio* (1976) and are followed in parentheses by page references. All citations of Bruno's Latin works are from F. Tocco and H. Vitelli's edition *Opere Latine Conscripta* and are followed in parentheses by references to the volume, part (where relevant), and page number(s): for example, (2.2.76–77). All translations are ours unless otherwise noted.

2. On the conceptual structure of the resistance to humanism, see Jonathan Dollimore (1984, 249–253); cf. Hiram Haydn's notion of the “Counter-Renaissance.” For Bruno's contributions to antihumanism, specifically his rejection of conventional humanist pedagogy and assumptions, particularly through the *Cabala*, see Ordine (1986, 203–221), Puglisi (1983, 17–22), and Sondergard (1994, 282n40).

3. The insinuation of such condemnations into Elizabethan literature, and particularly into the drama, has been discussed at length in two Bruno studies: Hilary Gatti, *The Renaissance Drama of Knowledge* (1989), and Sidney L. Sondergard, “Bruno's Dialogue War on Pedantry: An Elizabethan Dramatic Motif” (1986).

4. In George Abbot ([1604, F4v–F5]; also cited in McNulty [1960, 302–303]); in N. W.'s preface to *The Worthy Tract of Paulus Iovius* (Daniel 1896, 4:7); in correspondence between Thomas Hariot to Sir William Lower (cited in Badaloni [1955, 300–301]; Singer [1950, 67–68]); and in Gabriel Harvey marginalia (cited in Moore Smith [1913, 156]; Yates [1964, 207n2]).

5. Giovanni Aquilecchia (1963, 3–15) discusses the Harvey marginalia; Boulting (1914, 81–88); Elton (1902, 1–36); Imerti (1964, 7–9); Limentani (1933, 317–354) demonstrates the profound difference between the Oxford Bruno expected and the institution he actually encountered; McIntyre (1903, 21–26); McNulty (1960, 300–305); Pellegrini (1941–1942, 303–316) challenges the assumption that Bruno was invited by Oxford to dispute; Traister (1984, 15–16); Weiner (1980, 1–13) speculates on the antagonism that Bruno's Francophile attitudes probably generated; Yates (1964, 205–234) and (1982, 134–152, 175–178). The most recent reconsiderations of documents relevant to the Oxford visit are those of Ernan McMullen (1986, 85–95) and John Bossy (1991, 22–27).

6. Bruno reminds the pedant Prudenzio in *La cena de le ceneri* of the many "sciences" predating Aristotelianism: "Prima che fusse questa filosofia conforme al vostro cervello, fu quella degli caldei, egizii, maghi, orfici, pitagorici ed altri di prima memoria, conforme al nostro capo; da' quali prima si ribbelorno questi insensati e vani logici e matematici, nemici non tano de la antiquità, quanto alieni da la verità" (41) [Prior to this philosophy that suits your brain, there was that of the Chaldeans, Egyptians, Magi, Orphics, Pythagoreans and others of early memory, that suits our head—from which these insane, vain logicians and mathematicians rebel, not so much enemies of antiquity, as of the truth]. For analysis of Bruno's magical theology, see Couliano (1987, 87–106, 157–162); Howe (1976, 39–85); Thorndike (1941, 5:573, 6:426–428); and Yates (1964).

7. Though a tacit acknowledgment of his past, this title was frequently employed by Bruno to designate his identity as philosopher and became a favorite "dramatis persona" (Maiorino 1977, 317). Whether to shield his family from persecution or simply to deny its existence, Bruno apparently never returned to Nola.

8. A description of the potency of this magical theology is given to the interlocutor Tansillo (i.e., the poet Luigi Tansillo, a friend of Bruno's father, whose verse the philosopher occasionally quotes and whose style he imitates) in *De gli eroici furori*: "Piú possono far gli maghi per mezzo della fede, che gli medici per via de la verità: e ne gli piú gravi morbi piú vegnono giovati gl'infermi con credere quel tanto che quelli dicono, che con intendere quel tanto che questi facciono" (1035) [The magi can do more by means of their faith than the physicians by way of their truth; and in the most grave maladies the infirm come to benefit more from believing what the former are saying than by understanding what the latter are doing].

9. Bruno refused an ordinary professorship offered him at the University of Paris "because in order to hold it he would have had to attend mass," though Henri III subsequently awarded him "an extraordinary professorship" without this obligation (Whittaker 1884, 237). Thorndike reports, "At Paris on May 28–29, 1586, he was said to have orated publicly against the errors of Aristotle, to have challenged anyone to answer, and then to have cried even louder that the victory was won. But when a young lawyer answered him and dared Bruno in turn to reply, he remained silent. The students present, however, would not let him leave until he had promised to answer him on the morrow, but he failed to appear" (1941, 6:423–424). John Bossy speculates that Henri III may have sent Bruno to London because it is "likely that he had found Bruno's presence in Paris embarrassing and invited him to go to England until the embarrassment had blown over" (1991, 14).

10. Bruno's frequent appeals to verification via empirical data explain, for example, the presence of the myriad diagrams and charts found throughout his Latin and vernacular works. However, his interpretation of such data or structures is as often metaphorical (and wildly inaccurate) as literal. See Jaki (1975, 106–109, 119–123, 163–167) and his comment that Figure 9 marks "A pathetic conclusion to a pathetic book" (1975, 166n69) for examples of the discrepancies between Bruno's explanations of his diagrams and the physical laws that render them untenable. For speculation on the reasons behind Bruno's "frequently shocking mathematical reasoning" (Westman 1977, 34), see Westman (1977, 34–41).

11. The comedy is dedicated to the deceased Lady Morgana B., and her function parallels Sophia's in the *Spaccio*: existing on an idealized, transcendent plane, the woman is in position to act as advocate to the gods for the philosopher and his ideas. Authorial ambivalence exists even here, however, inasmuch as Bruno is addressing a *dead* woman, and Sophia / Wisdom serves as the mouthpiece for antifeminist attitudes expressed in the *Spaccio*. Yet Bruno's ironies are not limited to the feminine gender: Prudenziò, the ridiculous pedant of *La cena*, is called "more prudent than prudence itself, for you are prudence *masculini generis* [of male gender]" (Jaki 1975, 53). In response to apparent misogyny in the *Eroici furori*, see Sondergard (1986, 106–107).

12. See Binns (in Gager 1981, 7, 9); à Wood (1786, n.p.); and Yates (1964, 206–208, 210). Following his highly publicized, lavishly celebrated sojourn at Oxford, Alasco was invited to the relative seclusion of John Dee's Mortlake estate, as is reported in Dr. Dee's dialogue *A True & Faithful Relation* (1659, 4, 30, 33). Bossy believes that Bruno may have been among the company that visited Dee on 15 June (1991, 23).

13. See McIntyre (1903, 25) and Yates (1982, 134–142). In the *Cabala*, Bruno's interlocutor Coribante, a pedagogue, obfuscates his responses with regular infusions of pedantic Latin. In general, such characters infuriate, rather than

impress, other interlocutors with their frequently macaronic Latin because it is employed to make unnecessary, obtuse (and occasionally inaccurate) references. See Ciliberto (1978, 151–179; 1986, 24–59); Puglisi (1983, 17–22).

14. Compare the letter from Alberico Gentilis to John Hotmann that—without specifically mentioning Bruno—describes having heard “from the greatest of men assertions strange, absurd and false, as of a stony heaven, the sun bipedal, that the moon doth contain many cities as well as mountains, that the Earth doth move, the other elements are motionless and a thousand such things” (Singer 1950, 43).

15. This is best demonstrated by tracing the development of the “menacing pedant” icon in the London dialogues and by noting how their emotional structures may have assisted these portraits’ dissemination through Elizabethan literary culture. See Appendix B, “Antipedantry in Bruno’s London Dialogues.”

16. See Gentile (1958, 835n1). Considerable interest has been expressed in recent criticism concerning the centrality of the literature and lore of the ass to Bruno’s work generally and to the *Cabala* in particular. The foundation texts for such study are Vincenzo Spampinato, *Giordano Bruno e la letteratura dell’asino* (1904), and Nuccio Ordine, *La cabala dell’asino: Asinità e conoscenza in Giordano Bruno*, translated as *Giordano Bruno and the Philosophy of the Ass* (1987). See also Ciliberto, “Asini e pedanti: Ricerche su Giordano Bruno” (1984); Ordine, “Giordano Bruno et l’âne: Une satire philosophique a double face” (1986); Santonastaso, “Il cavallo pegasò di Bruno” (1973), and chapters 7–9 of de León-Jones’s *Giordano Bruno and the Kabbalah* (1997, 109–136).

17. The discovery of any one of these symmetries encourages the reader to continue investigating the “kabbalistic” structure of the dialogue. But Brunist metaphysics actively resists final resolution, and the reader learns that rather than being able to find and control the textual “thread that unravels the text and prevents it from achieving closure, thus constantly opening it up to the play of interpretations” (Sedley 1984, 14), the deconstructionist thread is in fact held by the author, looped back into the fabric of the text, making the *Cabala* in the postmodernist sense a distinctly self-referential, self-reflexive reading experience. Perhaps the best example of this is contained in the third dialogue of the *Cabala*, where Saulino reveals that *The Cabala of Pegasus* has yet to be written—though he plans to force it out of his fellow interlocutors when next they meet.

18. J. S. Smart explains that following the conventional fourteen lines, “the poem is continued by the *tail*, which is composed of a half-line and a couplet. There may be one tail, or two, or three, or as many as the poet cares to add in the development of his theme. . . . Unlike the regular sonnet, which is usually reserved for serious and elevated subjects, the *Sonetto Caudato* is used in verses of a humorous and satirical kind” (1966, 112). Each of the *sonetti caudati / codati* in the *Cabala* employs a single half-line and couplet tail. Thomas C. Chubb’s assessment of the tails in Aretino’s sonnets being “full of venom” like the tails of

scorpions (Aretino 1967, 7) applies equally well to Bruno's *Cabala* sonnets praising asininity.

19. Concerning what Bruno would take to be the "pedantic" imposition of rules upon probationary students in the Pythagorean academy—which he ridicules in "The Nolan's Cillenican Ass"—see Heninger (1974, 23–26).

20. Charles B. Schmidt acknowledges the significant contribution of Bruno to a critical tradition that included Copernicus, Petrus Ramus, and Francesco Patrizi, among others, and that guaranteed "that Aristotelianism failed to revive itself as a viable general philosophy" (1983, 8). As an additional context for the discussion of Bruno's Oxford fiasco below, it is telling that Schmidt notes that "the writings of Bruno were certainly not systematic enough for teaching purposes" (1983, 44) themselves to be entertained as viable alternatives to what the philosopher considered the university's rigid Aristotelianism.

21. Bruno's tone is all vitriol here, aimed at discrediting rather than engaging these philosophical positions. Montaigne answered such attacks in the mid-1570s by arguing in the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* that Skepticism is neither nihilistic nor intellectually static (1969, 3:227).

22. For a concise summary of Bruno's use of technical Kabbalah in the first dialogue, Karen de León-Jones's chart of Bruno's Jewish Cosmology in the *Cabala* (1997, 45) details the author's Italianization, and translation, of the names of the ten Sefira, and the symmetry with which he assigns intelligences, angelic orders, heavenly *sfere*, and angels that correspond to them. De León-Jones directly challenges Yates's assertion that Bruno merely adopted the form of Kabbalah in the *Cabala*, asserting that it is "exactly what its title claims to be: a work of Kaballah" (1997, 17).

23. Although this sounds like anti-Semitism to modern readers, Bruno is simply repeating a traditional view reflected in sources such as Tacitus, *Histories*, 5:4 (1931, 179) and Flavius Josephus, *Ad Apionem* [*Against Apion*] (1871, 885).