

PART I

The art of memory

I hold opinion with an ancient captain of Athens, who being asked if he took not pleasure to learn the art of memory: 'no, rather', sayeth he, 'I delight in the art of forgetfulness', because, in his judgement, he preserved well all things in his mind, which, being learned, he forgot not. But above all, if a thing once engraved in us cannot be defaced without great pain; love only once rooted in our hearts is most hardly, yea impossible, drawn from us by any human art or policy. . . .

Etienne Pasquier, *Monophylo*, trans. Sir Geoffrey Fenton (1572),
 Q3^v-4^r

Cyrus, therefore King of Persia, and Mithridates, King of Pontus, were both much honoured and much esteemed of their soldiers: Cyrus for his skill and art of memory, for he could name all the soldiers in his army; and Mithridates for his knowledge of tongues, for he could speak two and twenty languages to all those nations that served under him.

James Godskall, *The Ark of Noah* (1604), D3^v

. . . 'tis a childish triumph to boast of a great memory; besides that it is a thing of shame and disgrace to make a show of great reading, exposing a great fare of words without doors, when the house within is altogether unfurnished.

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *The Vanity of Arts and Sciences*
 (1676; first printed 1526), D8^v-E1^r

Introduction to Part I

The classical art of memory (*memoria*), a private technique for aiding oratorical delivery (*actio*) in a public arena, clung on as a curious relic of a primarily oral culture in the medieval period – a time when the written word surpassed the spoken. Neglected in the public forum of the Middle Ages, the art was primarily used by monks as a compositional and meditative technique. The Dominican friars Albertus and Aquinas advocated the artificial memory, drawing on Cicero's conception of *memoria* as one of the three component parts of Prudence in *De inventione* (along with *intelligentia* and *providentia*). In theory, their advocacy of the use of the artificial memory supported the individual's use of memorable imagery to aid private devotional practice and prompt devout work in the world; in practice, in a wider sphere, it influenced the use of striking didactic imagery in late medieval and Renaissance Christian visual culture. Its influence has been identified in the design of visual alphabets, heraldic signs, stained glass windows, frescoes and friezes, figure poems, striking imagery on carved stone wall adornments, and, of course, emblem books.¹ The underlying precepts of the Scholastic appropriation of the art of memory – ordered, coded associations based on repeated evocative imagery to instruct prudential behaviour – can also be identified in cultural practices and movements, such as the *ars moriendi*, *danse macabre* and *memento mori* traditions, in educational practices, such as the dissemination of popular and sacred history in spectacles, such as Corpus Christi processions, and even the composition of music and musical systems.²

However, the Scholastic advocacy of Ciceronian artificial memory represents only one strand of transmission to later culture. Important also were the

¹ For visual alphabets, see Samuel, p. 36; Clanchy, pp. 179–80; Rossi *LA*, p. 135; Yates *AM*, pp. 125–7; Carruthers *BM*, p. 109. For heraldic signs, see Clanchy, p. 230. For stained glass windows, see Samuel, p. 36, and George Henderson, *Early Medieval Art and Civilisation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 155–7. For frescoes and friezes, see Samuel, p. 36. For emblem books, see Michael Bath, *Speaking Pictures: English Emblem Books and Renaissance Culture* (London and New York: Longman, 1994), pp. 33–6, 48–51, and Ayers Bagley, 'Some Pedagogical Uses of the Emblem in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England', *Emblematica: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Emblem Studies*, 7 (1993), 39–60.

² For musical composition and music systems, see Anna Maria Busse Berger, *Medieval Music and the Art of Memory* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), esp. pp. 51, 93–4, 214–20.

religio-philosophical writings of the Majorcan Franciscan missionary Ramon Lull. Lull's combinatorial art (*ars combinatoria*), rooted in Augustinian Platonism's conception of the presence of divine realities in the soul, sought to classify knowledge by breaking down 'compound concepts into simple and irreducible notions'.³ In effect, using letters and symbols to represent these irreducible notions, which could be combined in various ways, Lull created an artificial universal language based upon the attributes of God (*Dignitates Dei*). Such a Christian scheme organised around the divine attributes or names of God has much in common with cabalist meditation in Jewish mysticism. His works' combination of quasi-scientific method, encyclopedic conception of knowledge, pursuit of hidden truth and the idea of universal knowledge exerted a great influence on Renaissance hermetic and Neoplatonic writings, magic, astrology and occultism, but also paved the way towards the scientific method and the study of logic in the seventeenth century.

The advent of the printing press in Europe in the late fifteenth century witnessed the printing of a number of Latin treatises about memory training. Ludovico Di Pirano's *Regulae memoriae artificialis* (1482) draws on Aristotle's laws of association (see Introduction);⁴ while the memory treatise appended to Jacopus Publicius's *Oratoriae artis epitome* (1482), firmly rooted in the medieval tradition, uses a diagram of the spheres of the universe, natural and divine, as its architectural mnemonic. Dominican friars continued memory work in the tradition of Albertus and Aquinas: Johannes Romberch's *Congestorium artificiosae memoriae* (1533; Figure 0.3) advises using an abbey for a memory palace; Cosmas Rossellius uses hell, purgatory and heaven as place systems in his *Thesaurus artificiosae memoriae* (1579) to create a theological encyclopedia.⁵ One of the most renowned mnemonists of the early sixteenth century was Giulio Camillo, who, drawing on hermetic, cabalist and Neoplatonist influences, purported to be able to reduce all knowledge to its constituent parts. By means of a physical memory 'amphitheatre', the student of memory would be able to access the 'eternal nature of all things'.⁶ Giordano Bruno, trained as a Dominican, was well versed in the oratorical roots of the art of memory, but was more broadly influenced by the combinatorial logic of cabalism and Lullism and contemporary strains of hermeticism and Neoplatonism. He wrote a series of quasi-magical works that transformed the art of memory into a technique for attaining divine powers; renowned throughout

³ Rossi *LA*, p. 32. ⁴ Yates *AM*, pp. 106–7. ⁵ Rossi *LA*, p. 79.

⁶ Yates *AM*, chapter 6; Rossi *LA*, pp. 74–5.

the continent for his work in the occult, Bruno was later burned at the stake for various heresies. Unsurprisingly, the art of memory was also commonly rejected in writings from this period. Agrippa disputed the value of the memory arts in his *Of the Vanity and Uncertainty of the Arts and Sciences*. Erasmus was lukewarm towards the memory arts (and derisive of Camillo's theatre in a letter to a mutual acquaintance); Melanchthon committedly was against it.

Early modern England remains relatively untouched by the art of memory until the first half of the sixteenth century. Thomas Bradwardine's *De memoria artificiali* (c. 1325–35, extant in three distinct manuscripts) is the exceptional early example. Bradwardine, a distinguished scholar of theology and chaplain to Edward III, rose to the position of Archbishop of Canterbury before his death. His Latin treatise⁷ outlines the basic rules of *loci* and *imagines* (as well as separating memory for things from memory for words), derived in part from Ciceronian and pseudo-Ciceronian works on rhetoric.⁸ Publicius's treatise had been circulated in manuscript years before, and Thomas Swatwell, an English monk, had prepared a manuscript copy of the memory section of Publicius's work in 1460.⁹ Otherwise the classical art of memory would have been primarily familiar to English students of rhetoric in the period; the *Ad Herennium*, Cicero's *De oratore* and Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* were all part of the grammar school curriculum in the early sixteenth century, and such texts would have been readily accessible to readers at the universities too. For those literate in Latin, a series of memory treatises were printed in England: Giordano Bruno's *Seals*, which begins with a reprint of the 'ars reminiscendi' section of Bruno's *Circe*, was printed and published in England in 1583 by a London printer named John Charlewood. Other Latin works printed in England which discuss in part the memory arts include Alexander Dickson's *De umbra rationis* (1584), refuted by William Perkins in *Antidicsonus* (1584); John Dee's *Monas hieroglyphica*; and Thomas Watson's *Compendium memoriae localis*. John Willis's treatise on memory was originally published

⁷ Available in translation in Carruthers *CM*, pp. 205–14.

⁸ Bradwardine's images for things are extraordinarily violent and vivid in nature; for example, in attempting to recall the order of the beginning of the Zodiac (Aries and Taurus), he suggests imagining a white ram (for Aries) kicking a red bull (for Taurus) 'in his large and super-swollen testicles, causing a copious effusion of blood' (trans. Carruthers *CM*, pp. 209–20). Carruthers suggests that his indebtedness to Ciceronian sources is only 'skin-deep', with the types of images prescribed arising from 'distinctly medieval visual conventions' (p. 206).

⁹ British Library, BM Additional 28,805, cited by Yates *AM*, p. III.

in Latin as *Mnemonica* (1618; see 1.7). Henry Herdson's *Ars mnemonica*, an adaptation of Adam Bruxius's widely read *Simonides redivivus* (1610), appeared in the same year as his English work on memory (1651; see 1.8). The English author Robert Fludd's *Utriusque cosmi . . . historia*, which includes a famous section on the art of memory (see Introduction, Figure 0.4) was published on the continent in five parts over five years (1617–21).

The influence of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century continental treatises in English intellectual or popular culture should not be overstated; there is little evidence of sustained English engagement with such techniques. Only two continental treatises were translated into English in the sixteenth century: Peter of Ravenna's *The Phoenix* (1.3) and Gratarolo's *The Castle of Memory* (1.4). Unlike the appropriation of the memory arts to occult purposes in some continental works, the treatises printed in English in this period typically abjured such an approach in favour of practical day-to-day utility of artificial memory. This is an important distinction to make, but one that has been collapsed in much writing about the reception of the art of memory in early modern England. As for pointed references to the art of memory in other popular writings (see Sherley (VI.3), Jones (VI.17)), there is a competing understanding of it as a form of secret knowledge or mystical art (akin to astrology and palmistry). Apart from Saunders's *Art of Memory* (1.9), the English treatises show little interest in the intersection of artificial memory and mysticism.

I. I

STEPHEN HAWES

The Pastime of Pleasure (1509)*About the author*

Stephen Hawes (b. c. 1474, d. before 1529) was a celebrated court poet and Groom of the Chamber to Henry VII. The English antiquary Anthony à Wood reports that Hawes was ‘highly esteemed by [Henry VII] for his facetious discourse and prodigious memory’ (*Athenae Oxonienses*, vol. 1 (London, 1691), B2^r).

About the text

The Pastime of Pleasure is a long allegorical poem, written in rhyme royal and couplets. It was first composed in 1505–6 and published in 1509. Hawes includes a prefatory dedicatory poem to Henry VII. The poem tells the tale of Graunde Amoure’s courtship of La Belle Pucelle. Wood notes that when the text was first printed ‘it is adorned with Wooden Cuts to make the reader understand the story the better and printed in an old English Character’. It certainly attracted a wide readership in the sixteenth century, and was reprinted in 1517, 1554 and 1555. But, Wood laments, ‘such is the fate of poetry, that this book, which in the time of Henry VII and VIII was taken into the hands of all ingenious men, is now thought but worthy of a ballad-monger’s stall’ (B2^r).

The arts of memory

In preparation for his love quest, Amoure receives instruction in the Seven Liberal Arts at the Tower of Doctrine. Chief among the Arts is rhetoric, and Amoure learns (from Dame Rhetoric) that he must master the five parts of this discipline: invention, disposition, elocution, pronounciation and memorative¹ (see Introduction). He is told that ‘retentive memory . . . must ever aggregate / All matters thought’ (D1^v). In the poem’s extended discussion about memory

¹ ‘of or relating to memory’

excerpted below, which evidently draws on the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Hawes describes how an orator or poet can use a ‘memorial art’ of ordered signifying images to recall and deliver his speech in ‘due order, manner, and reason’. Hawes readily admits that the technique is ‘obtuse’ and suggests that the student of rhetoric ‘exercises’ the technique.

Textual notes

This excerpt is taken from John Wayland’s 1554 reprinting, Stephen Hawes, *The historie of graunde Amoure and la bell Pucel, called the Pastime of plesure* (London, 1554; first published 1509), F2^r–F3^r.

The Pastime of Pleasure

And the fifth part is then memorative,
 The which, the perfect ministration¹
 Ordinately² causeth to be retentive

Driving the tale to good conclusion
 For it behooveth³ to have respectiō⁴
 Unto the tale, and the very ground
 And on what image, he his matter found.

If to the orator many a sundry tale
 One after other treatably⁵ be told
 Then sundry images in his closed male
 Each for a matter, he doth then well hold
 Like to the tale, he doth then so behold
 And inward, a recapitulation
 Of each image, the moralisation

Which be the tales, he grounded privily
 Upon these images, signification
 And when time is for him to specify
 All his tales by demonstration
 In due order, manner, and reason

¹ ‘action of administration’ ² ‘in an ordered, regulated way’

³ ‘for it is proper, due’ ⁴ ‘regard’ ⁵ ‘clearly, distinctly’

[Laurence Andrewe], *The Mirror of the World*

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Then each image, inward directly
 The orator, doth take full properly

So is enprinted⁶ in his proper mind
 Every tale, with whole resemblance
 By this image, he doth his matter find
 Each after other, withouten⁷ variance
 Who to this art will give attendance
 As thereof to know the perfectness
 In the Poets' school, he must have interest⁸

Then shall he know, by perfect study
 The memorial art, of rhetoric diffuse
 It shall to him, so well exemplify
 If that him list, the science to use

Though at the first it be to him obtuse,
 With exercise he shall it well augment
 Under clouds dark and terms eloquent.

⁶ 'imprinted' ⁷ 'without' ⁸ 'concern'

Suggested further reading

Howell, pp. 81–7.

Plett, pp. 503–4.

Anthony J. Hasler, *Court Poetry in Late Medieval England and Scotland: Allegories of Authority*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 80 (Cambridge University Press, 2011), chapter 5.

I. 2

[LAURENCE ANDREWE]

The Mirror of the World (1527)

About the author(s)

Gossuin (or Gauthier) of Metz (*fl.* 1245), a French priest, whose legacy rests chiefly on his composition of an early vernacular verse encyclopedia, *L'Image*

du monde. The work was then rewritten as prose, possibly by Gossuin himself. William Caxton (c. 1415/24–91) was a prominent merchant and diplomat, who brought the first printing press to England. He printed the first English translation of the French prose version, publishing it in 1481 and 1491. In 1527 Laurence Andrewe (fl. c. 1520–30) issued a third edition of this work featuring ‘some alterations and additions’. Little is known of Andrewe. His other works include a translation of Brunschwig’s influential medical work on distillation, *Liber de arte distillandi*, and a translation of a work about the valuation of gold and silver.

About the text

The encyclopedia, often illustrated, was one of the most popular and widely circulated works in the late medieval period. It can be understood as a summary of medieval knowledge across many subjects, including metaphysics, grammar, logic, arithmetic, astronomy, geography and nature. The title page for the revised edition notes the many ‘marvels’ stored within, including ‘rhetoric, with the art of memory’. This edition’s discussion of artificial memory, excerpted below, is a new addition to the encyclopedia.

The arts of memory

This excerpt constitutes the first extended English prose exposition of the techniques of the memory arts printed in England – see Stephen Hawes’s poem *The Pastime of Pleasure* (1.1) – and it situates the memory arts firmly within the rhetorical tradition: ‘how thou shalt elegantly utter thy matter’. The author distinguishes between natural and artificial memory, compares the art with writing with ‘ink upon parchment’, and outlines the basic techniques involved in the mnemonics of places (*loci*) and images (*imagines*). He concludes with a discussion about the types of images to be used, advising that practitioners should use corporeal images to prompt their recollection. This is relatively straightforward if what is to be recalled is a corporeal thing; for example, if you wish to remember a certain person you should use that same person as your image. If you wish to remember an abstract concept, he instructs that you should still use a corporeal image; for example, he uses the image of an elderly man with white hair in place of ‘wisdom’.

Textual notes

Gossuin of Metz, *The myrrour: dyscrypcyon of the worlde*, trans. William Caxton, with new additions and alterations by Laurence Andrewe (London, 1527), D3^{r-v}.

*The Mirror of the World**Ars memorativa*, or memory

The fourth thing is memory, as when thou hast disposed how thou shalt elegantly utter thy matter, then thou must devise a way to keep it in thy mind for fear of oblivion when thou shouldst pronounce it. Which memory standeth in two things, that is to say memory natural and memory artificial. Memory natural is that which God hath given to every man. Memory artificial is that which men call *Ars memorativa*, the craft of memory by which craft thou mayst write a thing in the mind and set it in thy mind as idly¹ as thou mayst read and set the words which thou writeth with ink upon parchment or paper. Therefore in this art of memory thou must have places which shall be to the like, as it were, parchment or paper to write upon. Also instead of thy letters thou must imagine images to set in the same places. Therefore first thou shalt choose thy places first. As in some great house that thou knowst well and begin at a certain place of that house and mark some post, corner, or wall being there as they stand arow and within ten or twelve feet and not past twenty feet asunder mark some other post or wall and so always proceeding for the one way 'til thou hast marked or noted one hundred or two hundred places or as many as thou canst have.

Also in this craft, as I have said before, thou must have ever images of corporal things that thou must see with thine eye which thou must imagine in thy mind that thou seest them set in the places. And so of every corporal thing, thou must imagine that thou seest the same corporal thing in the place. Also when thou wilt remember a man, a horse, a bird, a fish or such other to imagine that thou seest the same man, horse, bird or fish in thy place and so of every corporal thing. But if thou canst not have a corporal image of the same thing as if thou wouldst remember a thing which is of itself no bodily nor corporal thing but incorporal, that thou must yet take an image therefore that

¹ 'easily, without difficulty'