

CONFLICT BETWEEN BRUNIAN AND RAMIST MEMORY

IN 1584 an extraordinary controversy broke out in England about the art of memory. It was waged between an ardent disciple of Bruno and a Cambridge Ramist. This debate may be one of the most basic of all Elizabethan controversies. And it is only now, at the point in the history of the art of memory which we have reached in this book, that one can begin to understand what were the issues at stake, what is the meaning of the challenge which Alexander Dicson¹ threw at Ramism from the shadows of his Brunian art of memory, and why William Perkins angrily retaliated with a defence of the Ramist method as the only true art of memory.

The controversy² opens with Dicson's *De umbra rationis*, which is a close imitation of Bruno's *Shadows* (the title of which, *De umbris idearum*, it echoes). This pamphlet, it is hardly a book, is

¹ I prefer to keep Dicson's own spelling of his name, rather than modernise it.

² The controversy is noticed in J. L. McIntyre, *Giordano Bruno*, London, 1903, pp. 35-6, and D. Singer, *Bruno His Life and Thought*, New York, 1950, pp. 38-40. For new material about the life of Dicson and valuable suggestions about the controversy, see John Durkan, 'Alexander Dickson and S.T.C. 6823', *The Bibliothek*, Glasgow University Library, III (1962), pp. 183-90. Durkan's indication of William Perkins as 'G.P.' is confirmed by the analysis of the controversy in this chapter.

Alexander Dicson was a native of Errol in Scotland, hence the name by which Bruno calls him, 'Dicsono Arelio'. From the traces of him found by Durkan in various state papers it would seem that he was a secret political agent. He died in Scotland about 1604.

dated 1583 on the title-page, but its dedication to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, is dated as having been written 'on the kalends of January'. According to modern dating, therefore, this work was published early in 1584. It elicited the *Antidicsonus* (1584) the author of which styles himself 'G. P. Cantabrigiensis'. That this 'G.P. of Cambridge' was the well known Puritan divine and Cambridge Ramist, William (Guglielmus) Perkins, will become certain in the course of this chapter. With the *Antidicsonus* is bound up another little tract in which 'G.P. of Cambridge' further explains why he is strongly against 'the impious artificial memory of Dicson'. Dicson came to his own defence, under the pseudonym 'Heius Scepsius', with a *Defensio pro Alexandro Dicsono* (1584). And 'G.P.' made another attack, also in 1584, with a *Libellus de memoria*, followed in the same booklet by 'Admonitions to A. Dicson about the Vanity of his Artificial Memory'.³

This controversy is waged strictly within the limits of the subject of memory. Dicson puts out a Brunian artificial memory which to Perkins is anathema, an impious art, against which he urges Ramist dialectical order as the only right and moral way of memorising. Our most ancient friend, Metrodorus of Scepsis, plays a prominent part in this Elizabethan fray, for the epithet 'Scepsian' which Perkins hurls at Dicson is proudly adopted by the latter in his defence when he styles himself 'Heius Scepsius'. In Perkins's terminology a 'Scepsian' is one who uses the zodiac in his impious artificial memory. The Renaissance occult memory, in its extreme Brunian form, is at loggerheads with Ramist memory and whilst the controversy is always ostensibly about the two opposed arts of memory, it is at bottom a religious controversy.

³ The full titles of the four works in the controversy are: Alexander Dicson, *De umbra rationis*, printed by Thomas Vautrollier, London, 1583-4; 'Heius Scepsius' (i.e. A. Dicson), *Defensio pro Alexandro Dicsono*, printed by Thomas Vautrollier, London, 1584; 'G. P. Cantabrigiensis', *Antidicsonus* and *Libellus in quo dilucide explicatur impia Dicsoni artificiosa memoria*, printed by Henry Middleton, London, 1584; 'G. P. Cantabrigiensis', *Libellus de memoria verissimaque bene recordandi scientia* and *Admonitiuncula ad A. Dicsonum de Artificiosae Memoriae, quam publice profitetur, vanitate*, printed by Robert Waldegrave, London, 1584.

It is not the least curious feature of the controversy that Dicson's anti-Ramist works are printed by the Huguenot, Vautrollier, who printed the first Ramist works to be published in England (see Ong, *Ramus*, p. 301).

Dicson is enveloped in shadows when we first meet him in the *De umbra rationis*, and they are Brunian shadows. The speakers in the opening dialogues move in a profound night of Egyptian mysteries. These dialogues form the introduction to Dicson's art of memory, in which the loci are called 'subjects' and the images 'adjuvants' or more frequently 'umbra'.⁴ Clearly he is using Bruno's terminology. He repeats the 'Ad Herennian' rules for places and images, but muffled in an obscure mystique, after the Brunian manner. The 'umbra' or image is as a shadow of the light of the divine mind which we seek through its shadows, vestiges, seals.⁵ The memory is to be based on the order of the signs of the zodiac which are repeated,⁶ though Dicson does not repeat the list of the images of the decans. Traces of Bruno's list of inventors are to be discerned in the advice that Theutates may stand for letters; Nereus for hydromancy; Chiron for medicine, and so on;⁷ though the full list of Bruno's inventors is not given. Dicson's art of memory is but a fragmentary impression of the systems and expositions of *Shadows* from which it is nevertheless unmistakably derived.

The opening dialogues are the most prominent feature of the work, being nearly as long as the Brunian art of memory which they introduce. They are obviously inspired by those at the beginning of *Shadows*. It will be remembered that Bruno introduces *Shadows* with the conversation between Hermes who produces the book 'on the shadows of ideas' as a way of inner writing; Philothimus who welcomes it as an 'Egyptian' secret; and Logifer, the pedant, whose cackle is likened to animal noises and who despises the art of memory.⁸ Dicson varies this personnel slightly. One of his speakers is the same, namely Mercurius (Hermes). The others are Thamus, Theutates, and Socrates,

Dicson has in mind the passage in Plato's *Phaedrus* which I quoted in an earlier chapter,⁹ in which Socrates tells the story of the interview between the Egyptian King, Thamus, and the wise Theuth who had just invented the art of writing. Thamus says

⁴ Dicson, *De umbra rationis*, pp. 38 ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 62, etc.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 69 ff.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁸ See above, pp. 202-3, and *G.B. and H.T.*, pp. 192-3.

⁹ See above p. 38.

that the invention of writing will not improve memory but destroy it, because the Egyptians will trust in these 'external characters which are not part of themselves' and this will discourage 'the use of their own memory within them'. This argument is closely reproduced by Dicson in the conversation of his Thamus and Theutates.

The Mercurius of Dicson's dialogue is a different character from Ms Theutates; and this at first seems strange for Mercurius (or Hermes) Trismegistus is usually identified with Thoth-Hermes the inventor of letters. But Dicson follows Bruno in making Mercurius the inventor, not of letters, but of the 'inner writing' of the art of memory. He thus stands for the inner wisdom which Thamus says that the Egyptians lost when external writing with letters was invented. For Dicson, as for Bruno, Mercurius Trismegistus is the patron of Hermetic, or occult, memory.

In the *Phaedrus*, it is Socrates who tells the story of Thamus' reaction to the invention of letters. But in Dicson's dialogue, Socrates has become the cackling pedant, the superficial person who cannot understand the ancient Egyptian wisdom of the Hermetic art of memory. It has been suggested,¹⁰ and I am sure rightly, that this superficial and pedantic Greek is meant as a satire on Ramus. This would fit in with the Ramist *prisca theologia*, in which Ramus is the reviver of the true dialectic of Socrates." Dicson's Socrates-Ramus would be the teacher of a superficial and false dialectical method, whilst his Mercurius is the exponent of a more ancient and better wisdom, that of the Egyptians as represented in the inner writing of occult memory.

Once the origin and meaning of the four speakers is grasped, the dialogue which Dicson puts into their mouths becomes understandable—or at least understandable within its own peculiar terms of reference.

Mercurius says that he sees a number of beasts before him. Thamus says that he sees men, not beasts, but Mercurius insists that these men are beasts in human forms, for the true form of man is the *mens* and these men, through neglecting their true form have fallen into the forms of beasts and come under the 'punishments of matter' (*vindices materiae*). What do you mean by these

¹⁰ By Durkan, *article cited*, pp. 184, 185.

¹¹ See above, pp. 239-40.

punishments of matter, asks Thamus? To which Mercurius replies:

It is the duodenarius, driven out by the denarius.¹¹

This is a reference to the thirteenth treatise of the *Corpus Hermeticum* where is described the Hermetic regenerative experience in which the soul escapes from the domination of matter, described as twelve 'punishments' or vices, and becomes filled with ten powers or virtues.¹³ The experience is an ascent through the spheres in which the soul casts off the bad or material influences reaching it from the zodiac (the duodenarius), and ascends to the stars in their pure form, without the contamination of material influences, where it is filled with the powers or virtues (the denarius) and sings the hymn of regeneration. This is what Mercurius means in Dicson's dialogue when he says that the 'duodenarius' of immersion in matter and in beast-like forms is to be driven out by the 'denarius' when the soul becomes filled with divine powers in the Hermetic regenerative experience.

Thamus now describes Theutates as a beast, at which Theutates strongly protests. 'You calumniate, Thamus... the use of letters, of mathematics, are these the work of beasts?' Whereupon Thamus replies, closely in the word of Plato's story, that when he was in the city called Egyptian Thebes men were writing in their souls with knowledge, but Theutates has since sold them a bad aid for memory by inventing letters. This has brought in superficiality and quarrelling and made men little better than beasts.¹⁴

Socrates comes to the defence of Theutates, praising his great invention of letters and defying Thamus to prove that when men knew letters they studied memory less. Thamus then launches a passionate invective against Socrates as a sophist and a liar. He has taken away all criteria of truth, reducing wise men to the level of boys, malicious in disputing; he knows nothing of God and does not seek him in his vestiges and shadows in the *fabrica mundi*; he

¹² *De umbra rationis*, p. 5.

¹³ *Corpus Hermeticum*, ed. Nock-Festugiere, II, pp. 200-9; cf. *O.B. and H.T.*, pp. 28-31.

¹⁴ *De umbra rationis*, pp. 6-8. The insistence on the beast-like forms of men unregenerated by Hermetic experience may have some connection with Bruno's *Circe* in which Circe's magic seems to be interpreted as morally useful by making evident the beast-like characters of men (see *G.B. and H.T.*, p. 202).

can perceive nothing of what is beautiful and good for the soul cannot perceive such things when enclosed in the passions of the body; he encourages such passions, inculcating cupidity and wrath; he is sunk in material darkness, though boasting of superior knowledge:

for unless the *mens* is present and men are immersed in the bowl (*crater*) of regeneration in vain are they made glorious with commendations.¹⁵

Here again there is a reference to Hermetic regeneration, to that immersion in the regenerative bowl (*crater*) which is the theme of the fourth treatise of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, 'Hermes to Tat on the Crater or the Monad'.¹⁶

Socrates makes efforts in self-defence and counter-attack, for example by reproaching Thamus with never having written anything. In view of the theme of the dialogues this line was a mistake. He is crushed by the reply of Thamus that he has written 'in the places of memory',¹⁷ and is dismissed as a vain Greek man.

The presentation of the Greeks as superficial, quarrelsome, and lacking in deep wisdom had a long history behind it, but in the form of a Trojan-Greek antithesis with the Trojans as the wiser and more profound people.¹⁸ Dicson's anti-Greek dialogues are reminiscent of this tradition but with the Egyptians as the representatives of superior wisdom and virtue. In his Greek-Egyptian antithesis Dicson might have been influenced by the sixteenth treatise of the *Corpus Hermeticum* in which King Ammon advises that the treatise should not be translated from Egyptian into Greek which is a vain and empty language and the 'efficacious virtue' of the Egyptian language would be lost by translating it into Greek." He would have known from the Platonic passage which he was using that Ammon was the same god as Thamus. This could have suggested making the Thamus of the Platonic story the opponent of Greek emptiness as typified in Socrates. If Dicson had seen the sixteenth treatise of the *Corpus Hermeticum*

¹⁵ *De umbra rationis*, p. 21.

¹⁶ *Corpus Hermeticum*, ed. cit., I, pp. 49-53.

¹⁷ *De umbra rationis*, p. 28.

¹⁸ The Trojan-Greek antithesis is, of course, Virgilian in origin.

¹⁹ *Corpus Hermeticum*, ed. cit., II, p. 232.

in the Latin translation of Ludovico Lazzarelli²⁰ he might also have seen Lazzarelli's *Crater Hermetis* which describes the passing of a Hermetic regenerative experience from a master to a disciple.²¹

When Mercurius cites passages from the *Hermetica* he is of course quoting supposedly his own works. He is speaking as Mercurius Trismegistus, the teacher of the ancient Egyptian wisdom in the Hermetic writings. And this same Mercurius is he who teaches the 'inner writing' of the occult memory. Bruno's disciple makes abundantly clear what we have already realised from Bruno's own memory works, that the art of memory as he taught it was very closely associated with a Hermetic religious cult. The theme of Dicson's most curious dialogues is that the inner writing of the art of memory represents Egyptian profundity and spiritual insight, carries with it Egyptian regenerative experiences as described by Trismegistus, and is the antithesis of the beast-like manners, the Greek frivolity and superficiality, of those who have not had the Hermetic experience, have not achieved the gnosis, have not seen the vestiges of the divine in the *fabrica mundi*, have not become one with it by reflecting it within.

So strong is Dicson's abhorrence of supposedly Greek characteristics that he even denies that the Greek Simonides invented the art of memory. It was the Egyptians who invented it.²²

This work may be of importance altogether disproportionate to its size. For Dicson makes it even clearer than Bruno himself does that Brunian memory implied a Hermetic cult. Dicson's art of memory is only an impressionistic reflection of *Shadows*. The important thing in his little work is the dialogues, expanded from the dialogues in *Shadows*, in which there are verbal quotations from the Hermetic regeneration treatises. Here are unmistakable

²⁰ The sixteenth treatise of the *Corpus Hermeticum* was not included in Ficino's Latin translation of the first fourteen treatises which Dicson was probably using. It was first published in the Latin translation of Lazzarelli in 1507. I have suggested (*G.B. and H.T.*, pp. 263-4) that Bruno knew this treatise.

²¹ On Lazzarelli's extraordinary *Crater Hermetis*, see Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, pp. 64-72; *G.B. and H.T.*, pp. 171-2, etc.

²² In the art of memory which follows the dialogues, Dicson states that 'he of Chius', that is Simonides of Ceos, is falsely thought to have been the inventor of the art which originally came from Egypt. 'And if it is separated from Egypt it can effect nothing.' He adds that it may have been known to the Druids. (*De umbra rationis*, p. 37).

and strong Hermetic influences of a religious character involved with a Hermetic art of memory.

The probability that Dicson's Socrates is a satirical portrait of Ramus is increased by the fact that the cap fitted and that 'G.P. of Cambridge' was goaded into defence of Ramus and attack on the impious artificial memory of Dicson. In the dedication to Thomas Moufet of his *Antidicsonus*, Perkins states that there are two kinds of arts of memory, one using places and 'umbra', the other by logical disposition as taught by Ramus. The former is utterly vain; the latter is the only true method. Ostentatious memorio-graphers such as Metrodorus, Rossellius, Nolanus, and Dicsonus must be repelled and one must adhere as to a column to the faith of Ramist men.²³

Nolanus—here is the name that matters. Giordano Bruno of Nola who the year before had flung his *Seals* at Oxford was the real initiator of this debate. Perkins sees him as in alliance with Metrodorus of Scepsis and with Rossellius, Dominican author of a memory treatise. He is also clearly aware of Dicson's connection with Bruno though he makes, so far as I can see, no references in the *Antidicsonus* to Bruno's works on memory, but directs himself solely against the work of the disciple, the *De umbra rationis* of Alexander Dicson.

He says that Dicson's Latin style is obscure and does not smell of Roman purity'.²⁴ That his use of the celestial signs in memory is absurd.²⁵ That all such nonsense should be thrown out for logical disposition is the sole discipline for memory, as Ramus teaches.²⁶ That Dicson's soul is blind and in error knowing nothing of the true and the good.²⁷ That all his images and 'umbrae' are utterly vain for in logical disposition you have a natural power for remembering.

Perkins's arguments are throughout full of reminiscences of Ramus and frequently he quotes verbally from his master, giving references. 'Open your cars', he cries to Dicson, 'and hear the words of Ramus speaking against you, and recognise the immense river of his genius.'²⁸ He then quotes from the *Scholae dialecticae* on the far superior value for memory of logical disposition as compared

²³ *Antidicsonus*, dedication to Thomas Moufet.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

with the art of memory using places and images;²⁹ and two passages from the *Scholae rhetoricae*. The first of these is one of Ramus' usual pronouncements on logical order as the basis of memory;³⁰ the second is another passage comparing Ramist memory to the classical art to the disadvantage of the latter:

Whatever of art may help the memory is the order and disposition of things, the fixing in the soul of what is first, what second, what third. As to those places and images which are vulgarly spoken of they are inept and rightly derided by any master of arts. How many images would be needed to remember the Philippics of Demosthenes? Dialectical disposition alone is the doctrine of order; from it alone can memory seek aid and help.³¹

The *Antidicsonus* is followed by the *Libellus in quo dilucide explikatur itnpia Dicsoni artificiosa memoria* in which Perkins goes through the 'Ad Herennian' rules, which Dicson had quoted, opposing to them in detail the Ramist logical disposition. At one point in this somewhat dreary process Perkins becomes very interesting, and indeed unintentionally funny. This is where he is speaking of Dicson's 'animation' of the memory images. Dicson had of course been talking in his obscure Brunian fashion of the classical rule that images must be striking, active, unusual, and able to stir the memory emotionally. Perkins thinks that the use of such images is not only vastly inferior intellectually to logical disposition but is also morally reprehensible, for such images must arouse the passions. And here he mentions Peter of Ravenna who in his book on artificial memory has suggested the use of libidinous images to the young.³² This must refer to Peter's remarks on how he used his girl friend, Juniper of Pistoia, as an image sure to stimulate his memory since she was so dear to him when young.³³ Perkins holds up Puritan hands of horror at such a suggestion which actually aims at arousing bad affects to stimulate memory. Such an art is clearly not for pious men, but has been made up by impious and confused people who disregard every divine law.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30. Cf. Ramus, *Scholae in liberales artes*, ed. of Bale, 1578 col. 773 (*Scholae dialecticae*, lib. XX).

³⁰ *Antidicsonus*, p. 30. Cf. Ramus, *Scholae*, ed. cit., col. 191 (*Scholae rhetoricae*, lib. I).

³¹ *Antidicsonus*, loc. cit.; cf. Ramus, *Scholae*, ed. cit., col. 214 (*Scholae rhetoricae*, lib. 3).

³² *Antidicsonus*, p. 45.

³³ See above, p. 113.

We may here be on the track of a reason why Ramism was so popular with the Puritans. The dialectical method was emotionally aseptic. Memorising lines of Ovid through logical disposition would help to sterilise the disturbing affects aroused by the Ovidian images.

The other work against Dicson by Perkins, published in the same year 1584, is the *Libellus de memoria verissimaque bene recordandi scientia* which is another exposition of Ramist memory with many examples of logical analysis of passages of poetry and prose through which these are to be memorised. In an epistle before the work, Perkins gives a brief history of the classical art of memory, invented by Simonides, perfected by Metrodorus, expounded by Tullius and Quintilian, and in more recent times by Petrarch, Peter of Ravenna, Buschius,³⁴ Rossellius. What does it all amount to? asks Perkins. There is nothing wholesome or learned in it, but rather it smells of 'some kind of barbarism and Dunsicality'.³⁵ This is interesting with its use of the word 'Dunsicality', recalling that cry of 'Dunses' used by extreme Protestants against those of the old Catholic order, a word which stimulated the bonfires of Dunsical manuscripts when the Reformers were clearing out the monastic libraries. For Perkins the art of memory has a mediaeval smell; its exponents do not speak with a 'Roman purity'; it belongs to the old times of barbarism and Dunsicality.

The Admonitions to Alexander Dicson which follow run on the same lines as the *Antidicsonus* though with more detailed attention to the 'astronomy' on which Dicson bases memory and which Perkins shows to be false. There is an important reaction against astrology here which deserves careful study. Perkins is making a rational attempt to undermine the 'Scepsian' artificial memory by attacking the astrological assumptions on which it is based. However, the impression of rationality which Perkins makes in these pages is somewhat clouded when we find that the chief reason why it is wrong to use 'astronomy' in memory is because the former is a 'special' art whereas memory as a part of dialectic-rhetoric is a 'general' art.³⁶ Here Perkins is blindly following the arbitrary Ramist reclassification of the arts.

³⁴ H. Buschius, *Aureum reminiscendi. . . opusculum*, Cologne, 1501.

³⁵ *Libellus de memoria*, pp. 3-4 (dedication to John Verner).

³⁶ The *Admonitiuncula* following the *Libellus* are unpagged. This passage is on Sig. C 8 verso of the *Admonitiuncula*.

Towards the end of the Admonitions the matter is summed up in a passage in which Dicson is adjured to compare his artificial memory with the Ramist method. The method records in memory through a natural order, but your artificial memory, Dicson, has been artificially made up by Greeklings. The method uses true places, putting generals in the highest place, subalterns in the middle place, specials in the lowest. But in your art what kind are the places, true or fictitious? If you say that they are true, you lie; if you say that they are fictitious I shall not disagree with you since you thereby cover your art with opprobrium. In the method, the images are clear and distinct and clearly divided, not fugitive shadows as in your art. 'Hence the palm is given to the method over that broken and weak discipline of memory.'³⁷ The passage is interesting evidence of how the method was developed out of the classical art yet was basically opposed to it on the fundamental point of images. Using the terminology of the classical art, Perkins turns it against the classical art and applies it to the method.

Dicson's *Defensio pro Alexandro Dicsono* is chiefly remarkable for the pseudonym 'Heius Scepsius' under which he published it. The 'Heius' may refer to his mother's maiden name of Hay.³⁸ The 'Scepsius' is certainly an enrolment under the banner of Metrodorus of Scepsis—and of Giordano Bruno—who use the zodiac in memory.

This controversy abundantly confirms Ong's view that the Ramist method was primarily a method for memorising. Perkins rests his position throughout on the assumption that the Ramist method is an art of memory with which, like Ramus himself, he compares unfavourably the classical art, now to be discarded and superseded. Perkins also confirms the suggestion made in the last chapter that the Brunian type of artificial memory would have looked in Elizabethan England like a mediaeval revival. Dicson's art suggests the past to Perkins, the old bad times of ignorance and Dunsicality.

It is because the opponents think of their respective methods as arts of memory that their warfare is waged entirely in terms of memory. Yet there are obviously other implications in this battle over memory. Both sides think of their respective arts of memory as moral and virtuous, and truly religious, whilst that of their

³⁷ *Libellus: Admonitiuncula*, Sig. E i.

³⁸ Cf. Durkan, *article cited*, p. 183.

opponent is immoral, irreligious, and vain. Profound Egypt and superficial Greece, or, to put it the other way round, superstitious and ignorant Egypt and reformed Puritan Greece, have different arts of memory. The one is a 'Scepsian' art; the other is the Ramist method.

Proof of the identity of 'G.P.' is found in the fact that in his *Prophetica*, a work published under his own name in 1592, William Perkins makes an attack on the classical art of memory on lines similar to those developed by 'G.P.'. The *Prophetica* has been defined by Howell as the first work by an Englishman which applies the Ramist method to preaching, and Howell also notes that Perkins here ordains that the Ramist method is to be used for memorising sermons, not the artificial memory with places and images.³⁹ The passage against artificial memory is as follows:

The artificial memory which consists in places and images will teach how to retain notions in memory easily and without labour. But it is not to be approved (for the following reasons). 1. The animation of the images which is the key of memory is impious: because it calls up absurd thoughts, insolent, prodigious and the like which stimulate and light up depraved carnal affections. 2. It burdens the mind and memory because it imposes a triple task on memory instead of one; first (the remembering of) the places; then of the images; then of the thing to be spoken of.⁴⁰

We can recognise in these words of Perkins, the Puritan preacher, the 'G.P.' who wrote against the impious artificial memory of Dicson and who deplored the libidinous images recommended by Peter of Ravenna. The whirligig of time has transformed the mediaeval Tullius, who used to work so hard at forming memorable images of virtues and vices to deter the prudent man from Hell and lead him to Heaven, into a lewd and immoral person deliberately arousing carnal passions with his corporeal similitudes.

Among Perkins's other religious works there is *A Warning against the Idolatrie of the Last Times*, a warning delivered with earnest insistence because 'the remainders of poperie yet sticke in the minds of many.'⁴¹ People are keeping and hiding in their

³⁹ W. S. Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England*, pp. 206-7.

⁴⁰ W. Perkins, *Prophetica sive de sacra et unica ratione concionandi tractatus*, Cambridge, 1592, Sig. F viii recto.

⁴¹ W. Perkins, *Works*, Cambridge, 1603, p. 811.

houses 'idols, that is images that have been abused to idolatrie'⁴² and there is the greatest need to see that such idols are given up and all remnants of the former idolatry destroyed wherever this has not yet been done. In addition to urging active iconoclasm, Perkins also warns against the theory underlying religious images. 'The Gentiles said that images erected were elements or letters to knowe God by: so say the Papists, that Images are Laiemens bookes. The wisest among the Gentiles used images and other ceremonies to procure the presence of angels and celestially powers that by them they might attaine to the knowledge of God. The like doe the Papists with images of Angels and Saints.'⁴³ But this is forbidden, for 'we may not binde the presence of God, the operation of his spirit, and his hearing of us to any thing, to which God hath not bound himselfe . . . Now God hath not bound himself by any word to be present at images.'⁴⁴

Moreover the prohibition against images applies within as well as without. 'So soone as the minde frames unto it selfe any forme of God (as when he is popishly conceiued to be like an old man sitting in heauen in a throne with a sceptre in his hand) an idol is set up in the minde . . .'⁴⁵ This prohibition is to be applied to any use of the imagination. 'A thing faigned in the mind by imagination is an idol.'⁴⁶

We have to picture the controversy between Perkins and Dicson against the background of ruined buildings, smashed and defaced images—a background which loomed ever present in Elizabethan England. We must recreate the old mental habits, the art of memory as practised from time immemorial using the old buildings and the old images reflected within. The 'Ramist man' must smash the images both within and without, must substitute for the old idolatrous art the new image-less way of remembering through abstract dialectical order.

And if the old mediaeval memory was wrong, what of Renaissance occult memory? Occult memory moves in a direction diametrically opposed to Ramist memory, stressing beyond all measure that use of the imagination which the other prohibited, stressing it into a magical power. Both sides think of their own method as the right and religious one, and of their opponents as foolish and wicked. It is with a swelling religious passion that

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 830.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 833.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 716.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 830.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 841.

Dicson's Thamus inveighs against the disputatious Socrates, who reduces wise men to the level of boys, who does not study the way of the sky, does not seek God in his vestiges and 'umbræ'. As Bruno said when summing up the opposite religious attitude which he found in England:

They render thanks to God for having vouchsafed to them the light that leads to eternal life with no less fervour and conviction than we feci in rejoicing that our hearts are not blind and dark as theirs are.⁴⁷

Thus in England a battle was joined within memory. There was war in the psyche, and the issues at stake were vast. These issues were not the simple ones of new versus old. Both sides were modern. Ramism was modern. And Brunian and Dicsonian memory were suffused with the Renaissance Hermetic influences. Their arts had more links with the past through the use of images than had the Ramist method. Nevertheless theirs was not the mediaeval art of memory; it was the art in a Renaissance transformation.

These tremendous issues were not presented secretively. On the contrary, they were very much publicised. The sensational controversy between Dicson and Perkins was linked with Bruno's even more sensational *Seals* bombshell and with his controversy with Oxford. Bruno and Dicson between them took on both the universities. Dicson's dispute with a Cambridge Ramist was paralleled by Bruno's dispute with the Aristotelians of Oxford in that visit to Oxford the results of which are reflected in his *Cena de le ceneri* published in 1584, the year of the Dicson-Perkins controversy. Though there were some Ramists in Oxford, it was not a stronghold of Ramism like Cambridge. And the Oxford doctors who objected to Bruno's exposition of Ficinian magic in a context of Copernican heliocentricity were not Ramists, for in the satire on them in the *Cena* they are called Aristotelian pedants. Ramists were, of course, anti-Aristotelian. I have recounted elsewhere the story of Bruno's conflict with Oxford and its reflection in the *Cena*,⁴⁸ Here my purpose is only to draw attention to the

⁴⁷ *Dialoghi italiani*, ed. cit., p. 47. Bruno says this in the *Cena de le ceneri*, published in 1584.

⁴⁸ *G.B. and H.T.*, pp. 205-11, pp. 235 ff., etc.

over-lapping of Bruno's controversy with Oxford with his disciple's contemporary contest with Cambridge.

Bruno reveals in the dedication to the French ambassador of his *De la causa, principio e uno*, also published in this exciting year of 1584, that great commotions were going on around him. He is being persecuted he says by a rapid torrent of attacks, from the envy of the ignorant, the presumption of sophists, the detraction of the malevolent, the suspicion of fools, the zeal of hypocrites, the hatred of barbarians, the fury of the mob—to mention only a few of the classes of opponents which he names. In all this the ambassador has been to him a rock of defence, rising firm out of the ocean and unmoved by the fury of the waves. Through the ambassador he has escaped from the perils of this great tempest and in gratitude he dedicates to him a new work.⁴⁹

The first dialogue of the *De la causa*, though opening with a vision of the sun of the Nolan's new philosophy, is also full of reports of the upheavals. Eliotropio (whose name recalls the heliotrope, the flower which turns towards the sun) and Armesso (possibly a version of Hermes)⁵⁰ tell Filoteo, the philosopher (Bruno himself) that there has been much adverse comment on his *Cena de le ceneri*. Armesso hopes that the new work 'may not become the subject of comedies, tragedies, lamentations, dialogues and what not similar to those which appeared a little while ago and obliged you to remain in retirement in the house.'⁵¹ It is being said that he has taken too much upon himself in a country which is not his own. To which the philosopher replies that it is a mistake to kill a foreign doctor because he is trying cures which are unknown to the inhabitants.⁵² Asked what gives him this faith in himself, he replies that it is the divine inspiration which he feels within. 'Few people', observes Armesso, 'understand such wares as yours.'⁵³ It is being said that in the *Cena* dialogues he has poured insult upon a whole country. Armesso thinks that much of his criticism is justified though he is grieved at the attack on Oxford. Whereupon the Nolan makes that retraction of his criticism of the Oxford doctors which takes the form of praise of the friars of mediaeval

⁴⁹ *Dialoghi italiani*, ed. cit., pp. 176-7.

⁵⁰ As suggested by D. Singer, *Bruno*, p. 39 note.

⁵¹ *Dialoghi italiani*, ed. cit., p. 194.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

Oxford whom the men of the present despise.⁵⁴ There is thus much inflammatory matter in the dialogue which can have done little to allay the disturbed situation.

Arnesso hopes that the speakers in the new dialogues will not cause so much trouble as did those in the *Cena de le ceneri*. He is told that one of the speakers will be 'that clever, honest, kind, gentlemanly and faithful friend, Alexander Dicson, whom the Nolan dearly loves.'⁵⁵ And in fact 'Dicsono' is one of the principal speakers in the *De la causa*, which thus not only reflects in its first dialogue Bruno's attacks on Oxford and the troubles they aroused, but also in its four following dialogues recalls Dicson's contemporary adventures with the Cambridge Ramist by introducing 'Dicsono' as a principal speaker and as Bruno's faithful disciple.

Dicsono's presence in the dialogue lends strong point to the remark, not made by him but by another speaker, about the 'arch-pedant of France'. That this French arch pedant is certainly Ramus is made clear by the words immediately following which describe him as the writer of 'the *Scole sopra le arte liberali* and the *Animadversioni contra Aristotele*',⁵⁶ Italian versions of the titles of two of Ramus' most famous works, from which liberal quotation is made by Perkins when confuting the 'impious artificial memory' of Dicson.

As a whole, however, the last four dialogues of *De la causa* are not overtly controversial but yet another exposition of the Nolan's philosophy, that the divine substance may be perceived as vestiges and shadows in matter,⁵⁷ that the world is animated by a world soul,⁵⁸ that the spiritus of the world may be caught by magical processes,⁵⁹ that the matter underlying all forms is divine and cannot be annihilated,⁶⁰ that the intellect in man has been called god by Trismegistus and other theologians,⁶¹ that the universe is a shadow through which the divine sun may be perceived, that the secrets of nature may be sought out by a profound magic,⁶² that the All is One.⁶³

The philosophy is opposed by the pedant Poliinio, but the

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-10; cf. *G.B. and H.T.*, p. 210.

⁵⁵ *Dialoghi italiani*, p. 214.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 227-8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 242 ff.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 272-4-

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 340.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 342 ff.

disciple Dicsono supports his master throughout, asking the right questions for eliciting his wisdom, and earnestly agreeing with all that he says.

Thus in the heated atmosphere of 1584 Bruno himself proclaims Alexander Dicson as his disciple. The excited Elizabethan public is reminded that 'Nolanus' and 'Dicsonus' belong together, that Dicson's *De umbra rationis* is but the voice of Bruno expounding the same mysterious 'Scepsian' art of memory as was to be found in *Shadows* and *Seals* and which belongs with the Nolan's Hermetic philosophy.

Since the art of memory had become such a red-hot subject, it was somewhat daring of Thomas Watson, poet and member of the Sidney circle, to publish in about 1585 or perhaps earlier, a *Compendium memoriae localis*. This seems a perfectly straight exposition of the classical art as a rational mnemotechnic, giving the rules with examples of their own application. And in his preface, Watson is careful to disassociate himself from Bruno and Dicson.

I very much fear if my little work (*nugae meae*) is compared with the mystical and deeply learned *Sigilli* of the Nolan, or with the *Umbra artificiosa* of Dicson, it may bring more infamy on the author than utility to the reader.⁶⁴

Watson's book shows that the classical art was still popular with poets, and to publish a 'local memory' at this time amounted to taking up a position against Puritan Ramism. He was also perfectly aware, as his preface shows, that Bruno and Dicson were concealing other matters in their arts of memory.

Where did Philip Sidney, the leader of the Elizabethan poetic Renaissance, stand amidst all these controversies? For Sidney, as is well known, was closely identified with Ramism. Sir William Temple, a very prominent member of the Cambridge school, was his friend, and in that same fateful year of 1584 when the 'Scepsians' and the Ramists were at loggerheads over memory, Temple dedicated to Sidney his edition of Ramus's *Dialecticae libri duo*.^{bi}

⁶⁴ Thomas Watson, *Compendium memoriae localis*, no date or place of publication, preface. The *S.T.C.* conjectures the date of publication as 1585 and the printer as Vautrollier.

There is a manuscript copy of Watson's work in the British Museum, Sloane 3751.

⁶⁵ Cf. Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England*, pp. 204 ft.

A very curious problem is raised by the interesting piece of information which Durkan has unearthed in his article on Alexander Dicson. Searching the state papers for references to Dicson, Durkan found this in a letter from Bowes, the English representative at the Scottish court, to Lord Burghley, dated 1592:

Dickson, master of the art of memory, and sometime attending on Mr. Philip Sidney, deceased, has come to court.⁶⁶

It is very striking that Lord Burghley's correspondent knows how best to remind that statesmen (who knew everything) of who Dicson is. A master of the art of memory who formerly attended Philip Sidney. When could Dicson have been in attendance on Sidney? Presumably in those years around 1584 when he made himself conspicuous as a master of the art of memory, and the disciple of that other master of the art, Giordano Bruno.

This scrap of new evidence brings Sidney a little closer to Bruno. If Bruno's disciple was in attendance on him, Sidney cannot have been altogether averse to Bruno himself. We have here for the first time a hint that Bruno had some justification for dedicating to Sidney (in 1585) his *Eroici furori* and his *Spaccio delta bestia trionfante*.

How then did Sidney balance himself between influences so opposite as those of the Ramists and of the Bruno-Dicson school of thought? Perhaps both were competing for his favour. There may be some slight evidence for this suggestion in a remark by Perkins in his dedication to Thomas Moufet, who was a member of Sidney's circle, of his *Antidicsonus*. Perkins says in this dedicatory letter that he hopes that Moufet will assist him in repelling the influence of the 'Scepsians' and of the 'School of Dicson'.⁶⁷

The Sidney who was the disciple of John Dee, who allowed Alexander Dicson to be in attendance on him, to whom Bruno felt that he could dedicate his works, does not quite fit with Sidney the Puritan and Ramist, though he must have found some way of

⁶⁶ *Calendar of State Papers, Scottish*, X (1589-93), p. 626; quoted by Durkan, *article cited*, p. 183.

⁶⁷ 'Commentationes autem meas his de rebus lucubrates, tuo inprimis nomine armatas apparere volui: quod ita sis ab omni laude illustris, ut Scepsianos impetus totamque Dicsoni scholam efferuescentem in me atque erumpentem facile repellas'. *Antidicsonus*, Letter to Thomas Moufet, Sig. A 3 *recto*.

conciliating these opposite influences. No pure Ramist could have written the *Defence of Poetrie*, the defence of the imagination against the Puritans, the manifesto of the English Renaissance. Nor could a pure Ramist have written this Sonnet to Stella:

Though dusty wits dare scorn astrology,
And fools can think those lamps of purest light
Whose numbers, ways, greatness, eternity,
Promising wonders, wonder do invite
To have for no cause birthright in the sky
But for to spangle the black weeds of Night;
Or for some brawl, which in that chamber hie,
They should still dance to please the gazer's sight.
For me, I do Nature unidle know,
And know great causes great effects procure;
And know those bodies high reign on the low.
And if these rules did fail, proof makes me sure,
Who oft fore-see my after following race,
By only those two eyes in Stella's face.

The poet is following the way of the sky with religious feeling, like Thamus, the Egyptian king in Dicson's dialogue; he is hunting after the vestiges of the divine in nature, like Bruno in the *Eroici furori*. And if the attitude to the old art of memory with places and images can be taken as a touchstone, Sidney alludes to it in a way which is not hostile. Speaking in the *Defence of Poetrie* of how verse is more easily remembered than prose, he says:

... they that have taught the art of memory have showed nothing so apt for it as a certain room divided into many places, well and thoroughly known; now that hath the verse in effect perfectly, every word having his natural seat, which seat must needs make the word remembered.⁶⁸

This interesting adaptation of local memory shows that Sidney did not memorise poetry by the Ramist method.

The Nolan left these shores in 1586 but his disciple continued to teach the art of memory in England. I derive this information from Hugh Piatt's *The Jewell House of Art and Nature*, published at London in 1592. Piatt speaks of 'the Art of Memorie which

⁶⁸ Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apologie for Poetrie*, ed. E. S. Shuckburgh, Cambridge University Press, 1905, p. 36.

master Dickson the Scot did teach of late years in England, and whereof he hath written a figurative and obscure treatise.⁶⁹ Piatt took lessons of Dicson and learned to memorise places in sets of ten with images on them which were to be made lively and active, a process which 'Maister Dickson tearmed to animate the *umbras* (*sic*) or *ideas rerum memorandarum*'.⁷⁰ An example of such an animated 'umbra' was 'Bellona staring wifh her fierie eies and portraied in all points according to the usual description of the Poets'.⁷¹ Piatt found that the method worked up to a point but hardly came up to the expectations raised by his teacher's descriptions of his 'great and swelling art'. He seems to have been taught a simple form of the straight mnemotechnic which he did not know was a classical art but thought was 'Maister Dickson's art'. He was evidently not initiated into Hermetic mysteries.

Dicson's 'figurative and obscure' treatise on memory, with its dialogues in which Hermes Trismegistus quotes from his own works, seems to have had a considerable circulation. It was reprinted with the tide *Thamus* in 1597 by Thomas Basson, an English printer settled at Leiden; Basson also reprinted in the same year the *Defensio* by 'Heius Scepsius'.⁷² I do not know why Basson was interested in reprinting tiiese works. This printer liked mysteries and was probably a member of the secret sect, the Family of Love.⁷³ He was a protege of Sidney's uncle, the Earl of Leicesters, ⁷⁴ to whom the first edition of the 'figurative and obscure' treatise had been dedicated. Henry Percy, ninth Earl of Northumberland owned a copy of *Thamus*;⁷⁵ and in Poland it was bound with works by Bruno.⁷⁶ Not the least peculiar feature in the career of this strange book is that the Jesuit, Martin Del Rio, in his book against magic published in 1600, commends as 'not without salt and acumen the *Thamus* of Alexander Dicson which Heius

⁶⁹ Piatt, *Jewell House*, p. 81.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁷² See J. Van Dorsten, *Thomas Basson 1555-1613*, Leiden, 1961, p. 79.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 65 ff.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 16 ff.

⁷⁵ Manuscript catalogue at Alnwick Castle of the library of the ninth Earl of Northumberland.

⁷⁶ See A. Nowicki, 'Early Editions of Giordano Bruno in Poland', *The Book Collector*, XIII (1964), p. 343.

Scepsius defends against the attack of a Cambridge man in the edition published at Leiden.⁷⁷ Why was the Egyptian 'inner writing' of the art of memory as taught by Dicson worthy of Jesuit commendation, whereas the master from whom he learned it was burned at the stake ?

In the Venetian Renaissance, Giulio Camillo had raised his Memory Theatre in the sight of all, though it was a Hermetic secret. In the peculiar circumstances of the English Renaissance, the Hermetic form of the art of memory perhaps goes more underground, becoming associated with secret Catholic sympathisers, or with existing secret religious groups, or with incipient Rosicrucianism or Freemasonry. The Egyptian king, with his 'Scepsian' method opposed to the method of Socrates, the Greek, may provide a clue through which some Elizabethan mysteries would take on a more definite historical meaning.

We have seen that the debate within the art of memory hinged on the imagination. A dilemma was presented to the Elizabethans in this debate. Either the inner images are to be totally removed by the Ramist method or they are to be magically developed into the sole instruments for the grasp of reality. Either the corporeal similitudes of mediaeval piety are to be smashed or they are to be transposed into vast figures formed by Zeuxis and Phidias, the Renaissance artists of the fantasy. May not the urgency and the agony of this conflict have helped to precipitate the emergence of Shakespeare ?

⁷⁷ Martin Del Rio, *Disquisitionum Magicarum, Libri Sex*, Louvain, 1599-1600, ed. of 1679, p. 230.