

Chapter IV

MEDIAEVAL MEMORY AND THE FORMATION OF IMAGERY

THE tremendous recommendation of the art of memory, in the form of corporeal similitudes ranged in order, by the great saint of scholasticism was bound to have far reaching results. If Simonides was the inventor of the art of memory, and 'Tullius' its teacher, Thomas Aquinas became something like its patron saint. The following are a few examples, culled from a much larger mass of material, of how the name of Thomas dominated memory in later centuries.

In the middle of the fifteenth century, Jacopo Ragone wrote an *An mentorativa* treatise; the opening words of its dedication to Francesco Gonzaga are: 'Most illustrious Prince, the artificial memory is perfected through two things, namely *loci* and *imagines*, as Cicero teaches and as is confirmed by St. Thomas Aquinas.'¹ Later in the same century, in 1482, there appeared at Venice an early and beautiful specimen of the printed book; it was a work on rhetoric by Jacobus Publicius which contained as an appendix the first printed *Ars memorativa* treatise. Though this book looks like a Renaissance product it is full of the influence of Thomist artificial memory; the rules for images begin with the words: 'Simple and spiritual intentions slip easily from the memory unless joined to corporeal similitudes.'² One of the fullest and most widely cited of

¹ Jacopo Ragone, *Artificialis memoriae regulae*, written in 1434. Quoted from the manuscript in the British Museum, Additional 10, 438, folio 2 verso.

² Jacobus Publicius, *Oratoriae artis epitome*, Venice, 1482 and 1485; ed. of 1485, sig. G 4 recto.

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the printed memory treatises is the one published in 1520 by Johannes Romberch, a Dominican. In his rules for images, Romberch remarks that 'Cicero in *Ad Herennium* says that memory is not only perfected from nature but also has many aids. For which St. Thomas gives a reason in II, II, 49 (i.e. in this section of the *Summa*) where he says that spiritual and simple intentions slip easily from the soul unless they are linked with certain corporeal similitudes.'³ Romberch's rules for places are based on Thomas's conflation of Tullius with Aristotle, for which he quotes from Thomas's commentary on the *De memoria et reminiscencia*.⁴ One would expect that a Dominican, like Romberch, would base himself on Thomas, but the association of Thomas with memory was widely known outside the Dominican tradition. The *Piazza Universale*, published by Tommaso Garzoni in 1578, is a popularisation of general knowledge; it contains a chapter on memory in which Thomas Aquinas is mentioned as a matter of course among the famous teachers of memory.⁵ In his *Plutosofia* of 1592, F. Gesualdo couples Cicero and St. Thomas together on memory.⁶ Passing on into the early seventeenth century we find a book, the English translation of the Latin title of which would be 'The Foundations of Artificial Memory from Aristotle, Cicero, and Thomas Aquinas.'⁷ At about the same time a writer who is defending the artificial memory against attacks upon it, reminds of what Cicero, Aristotle, and St. Thomas have said about it, emphasising that St. Thomas in II, II, 49 has called it a part of Prudence." Gratarolo in a work which was Englished in 1562 by William Fulwood as *The Castel of Memory* notes that Thomas Aquinas advised the use of places in memory,⁹ and this was quoted from Fulwood in an *Art of Memory* published in 1813.¹⁰

³ J. Romberch, *Congestorium artificiosa memorie*, cd. of Venice, 1533, p. 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16 etc.

⁵ T. Garzoni, *Piazza universale*, Venice, 1578, Discorso LX.

⁶ F. Gesualdo, *Plutosofia*, Padua, 1592, p. 16.

⁷ Johannes Paep, *Artificiosae memoriae fundamenta ex Aristotele, Cicerone, Thomae Aquinatae, aliisque praestantissimis doctoribus*, Lyons, 1619.

⁸ Lambert Schenkel, *Gazophylacium*, Strasburg, 1610, pp. 5, 38 etc.; (French version) *Le Magazin de Sciences*, Paris, 1623, pp. 180 etc.

⁹ W. Fulwood, *The Castel of Memory*, London, 1562, sig. Gv, 3 recto.

¹⁰ Gregor von Feinaigle, *The New Art of Memory*, third edition, London, 1813, p. 206.

Thus a side of Thomas Aquinas who was venerated in the ages of Memory was still not forgotten even in the early nineteenth century. It is a side of him which, so far as I know, is never mentioned by modern Thomist philosophers. And though books on the art of memory are aware of II, II, 49 as an important text in its history,¹¹ no very serious enquiry has been undertaken into the nature of the influence of the Thomist rules for memory.

What were the results of the momentous recommendation by Albertus and Thomas of their revisions of the memory rules as a part of Prudence? An enquiry into this should begin near the source of the influence. It was in the thirteenth century that the scholastic rules were promulgated, and we should expect to find their influence at their greatest strength beginning at once and carrying on in strength into the fourteenth century. I propose in this chapter to raise the question of what was the nature of this immediate influence and where we should look for its effects. I cannot hope to answer it adequately, nor do I aim at more than sketching possible answers, or rather possible lines of enquiry. If some of my suggestions seem daring, they may at least provoke thought on a theme which has hardly been thought about at all. This theme is the role of the art of memory in the formation of imagery.

The age of scholasticism was one in which knowledge increased. It was also an age of Memory, and in the ages of Memory new imagery has to be created for remembering new knowledge. Though the great themes of Christian doctrine and moral teaching remained, of course, basically the same, they became more complicated. In particular the virtue-vice scheme grew much fuller and was more strictly defined and organised. The moral man who wished to choose the path of virtue, whilst also remembering and avoiding vice, had more to imprint on memory than in earlier simpler times.

The friars revived oratory in the form of preaching, and

¹¹ For example, H. Hajdu, *Das Mnemotechnische Schrifttum des Mittelalters*, Vienna, Amsterdam, Leipzig, 1936, pp. 68 ff.; Paolo Rossi, *Chans Universalis*, Milan-Naples, 1960, pp. 12 ff. Rossi discusses Albertus and Thomas on memory in their *Summae* and in their Aristotle commentaries. His treatment is much the best hitherto available, but he does not examine the *imagines agentes* nor raise the question of how these were interpreted in the Middle Ages.

preaching was indeed the main object for which the Dominican Order, the Order of Preachers, was founded. Surely it would have been for remembering sermons, the mediaeval transformation of oratory, that the mediaeval transformation of the artificial memory would have been chiefly used.

The effort of Dominican learning in the reform of preaching is parallel to the great philosophical and theological effort of the Dominican schoolmen. The *Summae* of Albertus and Thomas provide the abstract philosophical and theological definitions, and in ethics the clear abstract statements, such as the divisions of the virtues and vices into their parts. But the preacher needed another type of *Summae* to help him, *Summae* of examples and similitudes¹² through which he could easily find corporeal forms in which to clothe the spiritual intentions which he wished to impress on the souls and memories of his hearers.

The main effort of this preaching was directed towards inculcating the articles of the Faith, together with a severe ethic in which virtue and vice are sharply outlined and polarised and enormous emphasis is laid on the rewards and punishments which await the one and the other in the hereafter.¹³ Such was the nature of the 'things' which the orator-preacher would need to memorise.

The earliest known quotation of Thomas's memory rules is found in a *summa* of similitudes for the use of preachers. This is the *Summa de exemplis ac similitudinibus rerum* by Giovanni di San Gimignano, of the Order of Preachers, which was written early in the fourteenth century.¹⁴ Though he does not mention Thomas by name, it is an abbreviated version of the Thomist memory rules which San Gimignano quotes.

There are four things which help a man to remember well.

The first is that he should dispose those things which he wishes to remember in a certain order.

The second is that he should adhere to them with affection.

¹² Many such collections for the use of preachers were compiled; see J. T. Welter, *L'exemplum dans la littérature religieuse et didactique du Moyen Âge*, Paris-Toulouse, 1927.

¹³ See G. R. Owst, *Preaching in Mediaeval England*, Cambridge, 1926.

¹⁴ See A. Dondaine, 'La vie et les œuvres de Jean de San Gimignano', *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, II (1939), p. 164. The work must be later than 1298 and is probably earlier than 1314. It was enormously popular (see *ibid.*, pp. 160 ff.).

The third is that he should reduce them to unusual similitudes. The fourth is that he should repeat them with frequent meditation.¹⁵

We have to make clear to ourselves a distinction. In a sense, the whole of San Gimignano's book with its painstaking provision of similitudes for every 'thing' which the preacher might have to treat is based on the memory principle. To make people remember things, preach them to them in 'unusual' similitudes for these will stick better in memory than the spiritual intentions will do, unless clothed in such similitudes. Yet the similitude spoken in the sermon is not strictly speaking the similitude used in artificial memory. For the memory image is invisible, and remains hidden within the memory of its user, where, however, it can become the hidden generator of externalised imagery.

The next in date to quote the Thomist memory rules is Bartolomeo da San Concordio (c. 1262-1347) who entered the Dominican Order at an early age and spent most of his life at the convent in Pisa. He is celebrated as the author of a legal compendium, but what interests us here is his *Ammaestramenti degli antichi*,¹⁶ or 'teachings of the ancients' about the moral life. It was written early in the fourteenth century, before 1323.¹⁷ Bartolomeo's method is to make an improving statement and then support it with a string of quotations from the ancients and the Fathers. Though this gives a discursive, almost an early humanist, flavour to his treatise, its groundwork is scholastic; Bartolomeo is moving among the Aristotelian ethics guided by the ethic of Tullius in the *De inventione* after the manner of Albertus and Thomas. Memory is the subject of one set of quotations, and the art of memory of another; and since the immediately following sections of the book are recognisably concerned with *intelligentia* and *providentia*, it is certainly of *memoria* as a part of Prudence that the devout Dominican author is thinking.

One gains the impression that this learned friar is close to the

¹⁵ Giovanni di San Gimignano, *Summa de exemplis ac similitudinibus rerum*, Lib. VI, cap. xlii.

¹⁶ I have used the edition of Milan, 1808. The first edition was at Florence in 1585. The edition of Florence, 1734, edited by D. M. Manni of the Academia della Crusca, influenced later editions. See below, p. 88, note 20.

¹⁷ It could be almost exactly contemporary with San Gimignano's *Summa*, and not later than that work.

well-head of an enthusiasm for artificial memory which is spreading through the Dominican Order. His eight rules for memory are mainly based on Thomas, and he is using both 'Tommaso nella seconda della seconda' (i.e. *Summa Theologiae*, II, II, 49) and 'Tommaso d'Aquino sopra il libro de memoria' (i.e. Thomas's commentary on the *De memoria et reminiscentia*). That he does not call him Saint Thomas is the evidence that the book was written before the canonisation in 1323. The following are Bartolomeo's rules which I translate, though leaving the sources in the original Italian:

(On order).

Aristotile in libro memoria. Those tilings are better remembered which have order in themselves. Upon which Thomas comments: Those things are more easily remembered which are well ordered, and those which are badly ordered we do not easily remember. Therefore those things which a man wishes to retain, let him study to set them in order.

Tommaso nella seconda della seconda. It is necessary that those things which a man wishes to retain in memory he should consider how to set out in order, so that from the memory of one thing he comes to another.

(On similitudes).

Tommaso nella seconda della seconda. Of those things which a man wishes to remember, he should take convenient similitudes, not too common ones, for we wonder more at uncommon things and by them the mind is more strongly moved.

Tommaso quivi medesimo (i.e. *loc. cit.*). The finding out of images is useful and necessary for memory; for pure and spiritual intentions slip out of memory unless they are as it were linked to corporeal similitudes.

Tullio nel terzo della nuova Rettorica. Of those things which we wish to remember, we should place in certain places images and similitudes. And Tullius adds that the places are like tablets, or paper, and the images like letters, and placing the images is like writing, and speaking is like reading.¹⁸

Obviously, Bartolomeo is fully aware that Thomas's recommendation of order in memory is based on Aristotle, and that his recommendation of the use of similitudes and images is based on *Ad*

¹⁸ Bartolomeo da San Concordio, *Ammaestramenti degli antichi*, IX, viii (ed. *cit.*, pp. 85-6).

Herennium, referred to as Tullius in the third book of the New Rhetoric'.

What are we, as devout readers of Bartolomeo's ethical work intended to do ? It has been arranged in order with divisions and sub-divisions after the scholastic manner. Ought we not to act prudently by memorising in their order through the artificial memory the 'things' with which it deals, the spiritual intentions of seeking virtues and avoiding vices which it arouses ? Should we not exercise our imaginations by forming corporeal similitudes of, for example, Justice and its sub-divisions, or of Prudence and her parts ? And also of the 'things' to be avoided, such as Injustice, Inconstancy, and the other vices examined ? The task will not be an easy one, for we live in new times when the old virtue-vice system has been complicated by the discovery of new teachings of the ancients. Yet surely it is our duty to remember these teachings by the ancient art of memory. Perhaps we shall also more easily remember the many quotations from ancients and Fathers by memorising these as written on or near the corporeal similitudes which we are forming in memory.

That Bartolomeo's collection of moral teachings of the ancients was regarded as eminently suitable for memorisation is confirmed by the fact that in two fifteenth-century codices" his work is associated with a 'Trattato della memoria artificiale'. This treatise passed into the printed editions of the *Ammaestramenti degli antichi* in which it was assumed to be by Bartolomeo himself.²⁰ This was an error for the 'Trattato della memoria artificiale' is not an original work but an Italian translation of the memory section of *Ad Herennium* which has been detached from the Italian translation of the rhetoric made, probably by Bono Giamboni, in the thirteenth century.²¹ In this translation, known as the *Fiore di Rettorica*, the memory section was placed at the end of the work,

¹⁹ J.I. 47 and Pal. 54, both in the Bibliotheca Nazionale at Florence. Cf. Rossi, *Clavis universalis*, pp. 16-17, 271-5.

²⁰ The first to print the "Trattato della memoria artificiale" with the *Ammaestramenti* was Manni in his edition of 1734. Subsequent editors followed his error of assuming that the 'Trattato' is by Bartolomeo; it was printed after the *Ammaestramenti* in all later editions (in the edition of Milan, 1808, it is on pp. 343-56).

²¹ The two rhetorics (*De inventione* and *Ad Herennium*) were amongst the earliest classical works to be translated into Italian. A free translation of the parts of the first Rhetoric (*De inventione*) was made by Dante's

and so was easily detachable. Possibly it was so placed through the influence of Boncompagno, who stated that memory did not belong to rhetoric alone but was useful for all subjects.²² By placing the memory section at the end of the Italian translation of the rhetoric it became easily detachable, and applicable to other subjects, for example to ethics and the memorising of virtues and vices. The detached memory section of *Ad Herennium* in Giamboni's translation, circulating by itself,²³ is an ancestor of the separate *Ars memorativa* treatise.

A remarkable feature of the *Ammaestramenti degli antichi*, in view of its early date, is that it is in the vulgar tongue. Why did the learned Dominican present his semi-scholastic treatise on ethics in Italian? Surely the reason must be that he was addressing himself to laymen, to devout persons ignorant of Latin who wanted to know about the moral teachings of the ancients, and not primarily to clerics. With this work in the *volgare* became associated Tullius on memory, also translated into the *volgare*.²⁴ This suggests that the artificial memory was coming out into the world, was being recommended to laymen as a devotional exercise. And this tallies

²² This is my suggestion. It is however recognised that there is an influence of the Bolognese school of *dictamen* on the early translations of the rhetorics; see Maggini, *Op. cit.*, p. I.

²³ It is to be found by itself in the fifteenth-century Vatican manuscript Barb. Lat. 3929, f. 52, where a modern note wrongly attributes it to Brunetto Latini.

There is much confusion about Brunetto Latini and the translations of the rhetorics. The facts are that he made a free version of *De inventione* but did not translate *Ad Herennium*. But he certainly knew of the artificial memory to which he refers in the third book of the *Trisor*: 'memore artificiel que l'en aquiert par enseignement des sages' (B. Latini, *Li Livres dou Tresor*, ed. F. J. Carmody, Berkeley, 1948, p. 321).

²⁴ This association is only found in two codices which are both of the fifteenth century. The earliest manuscript of the *Ammaestramenti* Bibl. Naz., II. II. 319, dated 1342) does not contain the 'Trattato'.

teacher, Brunetto Latini. A version of the Second Rhetoric (*Ad Herennium*) was made between 1254 and 1266 by Guidotto of Bologna, with the title *Fiore di Rettorica*. This version omits the section on memory. But another translation, also called *Fiore di Rettorica*, was made at about the same time by Bono Giamboni, and this does contain the memory section, placed at the end of the work.

On the Italian translations of the two rhetorics, see F. Maggini, *I primi volgarizzamenti dei classici latini*, Florence, 1952.

with the remark of Albertus, when he is concluding triumphantly in favour of the *Ars memorandi* of Tullius, that the artificial memory pertains both 'to the moral man and to the speaker'.²⁵ Not only the preacher was to use it but any 'moral man' who, impressed by the preaching of the friars, wished at all costs to avoid the vices which lead to Hell and to reach Heaven through the virtues.

Another ethical treatise which was certainly intended to be memorised by the artificial memory is also in Italian. This is the *Rosaio della vita*,²⁶ probably by Matteo de' Corsini and written in 1373. It opens with some rather curious mystico-astrological features but consists mainly of long lists of virtues and vices, with short definitions. It is a mixed collection of such 'things' from Aristotelian, Tullian, patristic, Scriptural, and other sources. I select a few at random—Wisdom, Prudence, Knowledge, Credulity, Friendship, Litigation, War, Peace, Pride, Vain Glory. An *Ars memorie artificialis* is provided to be used with it, opening with the words 'Now that we have provided the book to be read it remains to hold it in memory.'²⁷ The book provided is certainly the *Rosaio della vita* which is later mentioned by name in the text of the memory rules, and we thus have certain proof that the memory rules were here intended to be used for memorising lists of virtues and vices.

The *Ars memorie artificialis* provided for memorising the virtues and vices of the *Rosaio* is closely based on *Ad Herennium* but with expansions. The writer calls 'natural places' those which are memorised in the country, as trees in fields; 'artificial places' are those memorised in buildings, as a study, a window, a coffer, and the like.²⁸ This shows some real understanding of places as used in the mnemotechnic. But the technique would be being used with the moral and devotional purpose of memorising corporeal similitudes of virtues and vices on the places.

There is probably some connection between the *Rosaio* and the *Ammaestramenti degli antichi*; the former might almost be an

²⁵ See above, p. 67.

²⁶ A. Matteo de' Corsini, *Rosaio della vita*, ed. F. Polidori, Florence, 1845.

²⁷ The *Ars memorie artificialis* which is to be used for memorising the *Rosaio della vita* has been printed by Paolo Rossi, *Clavis universalis*, pp. 272-5.

²⁸ Rossi, *Clavis*, p. 272.

abridgement or a simplification of the latter. And the two works and the memory rules associated with them are found in the same two codices.²⁹

These two ethical works in Italian, which we may envisage laymen labouring to memorise by the artificial memory, open up the possibility that tremendous efforts after the formation of imagery may have been going on in the imaginations and memories of many people. The artificial memory begins to appear as a lay devotional discipline, fostered and recommended by the friars. What galleries of unusual and striking similitudes for new and unusual virtues and vices, as well as for the well known ones, may have remained forever invisible within the memories of pious and possibly artistically gifted persons! The art of memory was a creator of imagery which must surely have flowed out into creative works of art and literature.

Though always bearing in mind that an externalised visual representation in art proper must be distinguished from the invisible pictures of memory—the mere fact of external representation so distinguishes it—it can be a new experience to look at some

²⁹ The contents of Pal. 54 and of J.I. 47 (which are identical, except that some works of St. Bernard are added at the end of J.i. 47) are as follows:—

- (1) The *Rosaio della vita*.
- (2) The *Tattato della memoria artificiale* (that is, Bono Giamboni's translation of the memory section of *Ad Herennium*).
- (3) The Life of Jacopone da Todi.
- (4) The *Ammaestramenti degli antichi*.
- (5) The *Art memorie artificiali* beginning 'Poi che hauiamo fornito il libro di leggere resta di potere tenere a mente' and later mentioning the *Rosaio della vita* as the book to be remembered.

In other codices the *Rosaio della vita* is found with one or both of the two tracts on memory but without the *Ammaestramenti* (see for example Riccardiana 1157 and 1159).

Another work which may have been thought suitable for memorisation is the ethical section of Brunetto Latini's *Trisor*. The curious volume entitled *Ethica d'Aristotele, ridotta, in compendio da ser Brunetto Latini* published at Lyons by Jean de Tournes in 1568 was printed from an old manuscript volume, otherwise lost. It contains eight items amongst which are the following: (1) An *Ethica* which is the ethical section from the *Trisor* in Italian translation; (4) A fragment which appears to be an attempt to put the vices with which the *Ethica* ends into images; (7) The *Fiore di Rettorica*, i.e., Bono Giamboni's translation of *Ad Herennium*, with the memory section at the end, in a very corrupt version.

early fourteenth-century works of art from the point of view of memory. See for example the row of virtuous figures (Pl. 2) in Lorenzetti's presentation of Good and Bad Government (commissioned between 1337 and 1340) in the Palazzo Comunale at Siena.³⁰ On the left sits Justice, with secondary figures illustrating her 'parts', after the manner of a composite memory, image. On the couch, to the right, sits Peace (and Fortitude, Prudence, Magnanimity, Temperance, not here reproduced). On the bad side of the series (not here reproduced), with the diabolical horned figure of Tyranny, sit the hideous forms of tyrannical vices, whilst War, Avarice, Pride, and Vain Glory hover like bats over the grotesque and dreadful crew.

Such images, of course, have most complex derivations, and such a picture can be studied in many ways, by iconographers, historians, art historians. I would tentatively suggest yet another approach. There is an argument behind this picture about Justice and Injustice, the themes of which are set out in order and clothed in corporeal similitudes. Does it not gain in meaning after our attempts to imagine the efforts of Thomist artificial memory to form corporeal similitudes for the moral 'teachings of the ancients'? Can we see in these great monumental figures a striving to regain the forms of classical memory, of those *imagines agentes*—remarkably beautiful, crowned, richly dressed, or remarkably hideous and grotesque—moralised by the Middle Ages into virtues and vices, into similitudes expressive of spiritual intentions?

With yet greater daring, I now invite the reader to look with the eyes of memory at those figures sacred to art historians, Giotto's virtues and vices (probably painted about 1306) in the Arena Capella at Padua (Pl. 3). These figures are justly famous for the variety and animation introduced into them by the great artist, and for the way in which they stand out from their backgrounds, giving an illusion of depth on a flat surface which was altogether new. I would suggest that both features may owe something to memory.

The effort to form similitudes in memory encouraged variety and individual invention, for did not Tullius say that everyone must form his memory images for himself? In a renewed return to the text of *Ad Herennium* aroused by the scholastic insistence on

³⁰ On the iconography of this picture, see N. Rubinstein, 'Political Ideas in Sienese Art', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXI (1958). PP. 198-227.

artificial memory, the dramatic character of the images recommended would appeal to an artist of genius, and this is what Giotto shows so brilliantly in, for example, the movement of Charity (Pl. 3a), with her attractive beauty, or in the frenzied gestures of Inconstancy. Nor has the grotesque and the absurd as useful in a memory image been neglected in Envy (Pl. 3b) and Folly. And the illusion of depth depends on the intense care with which the images have been placed on their backgrounds, or, speaking mnemonically, on their *loci*. One of the most striking features of classical memories as revealed in *Ad Herennium* is the sense of space, depth, lighting in the memory suggested by the place rules; and the care taken to make the images stand out clearly on the *loci*, for example in the injunction that places must not be too dark, or the images will be obscured, nor too light lest the dazzle confuse the images. It is true that Giotto's images are regularly placed on the walls, not irregularly as the classical directions advise. But the Thomist emphasis on regular order in memory had modified that rule. And Giotto has interpreted the advice about variety in *loci* in his own way, by making all the painted backgrounds of the pictures different from one another. He has, I would suggest, made a supreme effort to make the images stand out against the carefully variegated *loci*, believing that in so doing he is following classical advice for making memorable images.

WE MUST ASSIDUOUSLY REMEMBER THE INVISIBLE JOYS OF PARADISE AND THE ETERNAL TORMENTS OF HELL, says Boncompagno with terrible emphasis in the memory section of his rhetoric, giving lists of virtues and vices as 'memorial notes . . . through which we may frequently direct ourselves in the paths of remembrance'.³¹ The side walls of the Arena Capella on which the virtues and vices are painted frame the Last Judgment on the end wall which dominates the little building. In the intense atmosphere aroused by the friars and their preaching, in which Giotto was saturated, the images of the virtues and vices take on an intense significance, and to remember them, and to take warning by them in time, is a matter of life and death importance. Hence the need to make truly memorable images of them in accordance with the rules of artificial memory. Or rather, the need to make truly memorable corporeal similitudes of them infused with spiritual intentions, in accordance

³¹ See above, p. 59

with the purpose of artificial memory as interpreted by Thomas Aquinas.

The new variety and animation of Giotto's images, the new way in which they stand out from their backgrounds, their new spiritual intensity—all these brilliant and original features could have been stimulated by the influences of scholastic artificial memory and its powerful recommendation as a part of Prudence.

That the remembering of Paradise and Hell, such as Boncompagno emphasised under memory, lay behind the scholastic interpretation of artificial memory is indicated by the fact that later memory treatises in the scholastic tradition usually include remembering Paradise and Hell, frequently with diagrams of those places, as belonging to artificial memory. We shall meet examples of this in the next chapter where some of the diagrams are reproduced.³² I mention here, however, because of their bearing on the period under discussion, the remarks of the German Dominican Johannes Romberch, on this subject. As already mentioned, Romberch's memory rules are based on those of Thomas Aquinas and as a Dominican he was naturally in the Thomist memory tradition.

In his *Congestorium artificiose memorie* (first edition in 1520), Romberch introduces remembering Paradise, Purgatory, and Hell. Hell, he says, is divided into many places which we remember with inscriptions on them.

And since the orthodox religion holds that the punishments of sins are in accordance with the nature of the crimes, here the Proud are crucified . . . there the Greedy, the Avaricious, the Angry, the Slothful, the Envious, the Luxurious (are punished) with sulphur, fire, pitch, and that kind of punishments.³³

This introduces the novel idea that the places of Hell, varied in accordance with the nature of the sins punished in them, could be regarded as variegated memory *loci*. And the striking images on those places would be, of course, the images of the damned. We may now look with the eyes of memory at the fourteenth-century painting of Hell in the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella (Pl. 8a). Hell is divided into places with inscriptions on them

³² See below, pp. 108-11, 115-16, 122 (PL 7).

³³ Johannes Romberch, *Congestorium artificiose metnorie*, ed. of Venice, 1533, p. 18.

(just as Romberch recommends) stating the sins being punished in each, and containing the images to be expected in such places. If we were to reflect this picture in memory, as a prudent reminder, should we be practising what the Middle Ages would call artificial memory? I believe so.

When Ludovico Dolce made an Italian translation (published in 1562) of Romberch's treatise, he made a slight expansion of the text at the point where Romberch is treating of the places of Hell, as follows:

For this (that is for remembering the places of Hell) the ingenious invention of Virgil AND DANTE will help us much. That is for distinguishing the punishments according to the nature of the sins. Exacty.³⁴

That Dante's *Inferno* could be regarded as a kind of memory system for memorising, Hell and its punishments with striking images on orders of places, will come as a great shock, and I must leave it as a shock. It would take a whole book to work out the implications of such an approach to Dante's poem. It is by no means a crude approach, nor an impossible one. If one thinks of the poem as based on orders of places in Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, and as a cosmic order of places in which the spheres of Hell are the spheres of Heaven in reverse, it begins to appear as a summa of similitudes and exempla, ranged in order and set out upon the universe. And if one discovers that Prudence, under many diverse similitudes, is a leading symbolic theme of the poem,³⁵ its three parts can be seen as *memoria*, remembering vices and their punishments in Hell, *intelligentia*, the use of the present for penitence and acquisition of virtue, and *providentia*, the looking forward to Heaven. In this interpretation, the principles of artificial memory, as understood in the Middle Ages, would stimulate the intense visualisation of many similitudes in the intense effort to hold in memory the scheme of salvation, and the complex network of virtues and vices and their rewards and punishments—the effect of a prudent man who uses memory as a part of Prudence.

³⁴ L. Dolce, *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona del modo di accrescere et conservar la memoria* (first edition 1562), ed. of Venice, 1586, p. 15 verso.

³⁵ This can be worked out from the similitudes of Prudence given in San Gimignano's *Summa*. I hope to publish a study of this work as a guide to the imagery of the *Divine Comedy*.

The *Divine Comedy* would thus become the supreme example of the conversion of an abstract summa into a summa of similitudes and examples, with Memory as the converting power, the bridge between the abstraction and the image. But the other reason for the use of corporeal similitudes given by Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa*, besides their use in memory, would also come into play, namely that the Scriptures use poetic metaphors and speak of spiritual things under the similitudes of corporeal things. If one were to think of the Dantesque art of memory as a mystical art, attached to a mystical rhetoric, the images of Tullius would turn into poetic metaphors for spiritual things. Boncompagno, it may be recalled, stated in his mystical rhetoric that metaphor was invented in the Earthly Paradise.

These suggestions as to how the cultivation of images in devout uses of the art of memory could have stimulated creative works of art and literature still leave unexplained how the mediaeval art could be used as a mnemonic in a more normal sense of the word. How, for example, did the preacher memorise the points of a sermon through it? Or how did a scholar memorise through it texts which he desired to hold in memory? An approach to this problem has been provided by Beryl Smalley in her study of English friars in the fourteenth century,³⁶ in which she draws attention to a curious feature in the works of John Ridevall (Franciscan) and Robert Holcot (Dominican), namely their descriptions of elaborate 'pictures' which were not intended to be represented but which they were using for purposes of memorisation. These invisible 'pictures' provide us with specimens of invisible memory images, held within the memory, not intended to be externalised, and being used for quite practical mnemonic purposes.

For example, Ridevall describes the image of a prostitute, blind, with mutilated ears, proclaimed by a trumpet (as a criminal), with a deformed face, and full of disease.³⁷ He calls this 'the picture of Idolatry according to the poets'. No source is known for such an image and Miss Smalley suggests that Ridevall invented it. No doubt he did, as a memory image which follows the rules in being strikingly hideous and horrible and which is being used to

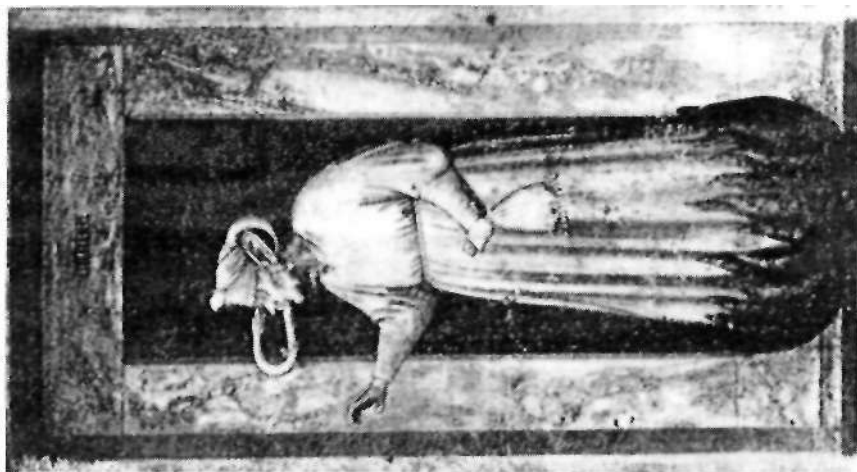
³⁶ Beryl Smalley, *English Friars and Antiquity in the Early Fourteenth Century*, Oxford, 1960.

³⁷ Smalley, *English Friars*, pp. 114-15.

3a LEFT Charity

3b RIGHT Envy

Frescoes by Giotto, Arena
Capella, Padua (pp. 92-4)





4a Temperance, Prudence



4b Justice, Fortitude

From a Fourteenth-Century Italian manuscript, Vienna National Library (MS. 2639) (pp. 99-100).



4c Penance

From a Fifteenth-Century German manuscript, Biblioteca Casanatense, Rome (MS. 1404) (p. 98)

remind of points about the sin of Idolatry; which is painted as a harlot because idolaters leave the true God to fornicate with idols; who is shown as blind and deaf because she sprang from flattery which blinds and deafens its objects; who is proclaimed as a criminal because evil doers hope to obtain forgiveness by worshipping idols; who has a sad and disfigured face because one of the causes of idolatry is inordinate grief; who is diseased because idolatry is a kind of unregulated love. A mnemonic verse sums up the features of the image:

Mulier notata, oculis orbata,
aure mutilata, cornu ventilata,
vultu deformata et morbo vexata.

This seems unmistakably identifiable as a memory image, designed to stir memory by its strikingness, not intended to be represented save invisibly in memory (the memorisation of it being helped by the mnemonic verse), used for the genuine mnemonic purpose of reminding of the points of a sermon about idolatry.

The 'picture' of idolatry comes in the introduction to Ridevall's *Fulgentius metaforalis*, a moralisation of the mythology of Fulgentius designed for the use of preachers.³⁸ This work is very well known, but I wonder whether we have fully understood how the preachers were to use these unillustrated 'pictures'³⁹ of the pagan gods. That they belong within the sphere of mediaeval artificial memory is strongly suggested by the fact that the first image to be described, that of Saturn, is said to represent the virtue of Prudence, and he is soon followed by Juno as *memoria*, Neptune as *intelligentia*, and Pluto as *providentia*. We have been thoroughly trained to understand that memory as a part of Prudence justifies the use of the artificial memory as an ethical duty. We have been taught by Albertus Magnus that poetic metaphors, including the fables of the pagan gods, may be used in memory for their 'moving' power.⁴⁰ Ridevall is, it may be suggested, instructing the preacher

³⁸ J. Ridevall, *Fulgentius Metaforalis*, ed. H. Liebeschütz, Leipzig, 1926. Cf. J. Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, trans. B. Sessions, Bollingen Series, 1953, pp. 94-5.

³⁹ Though the work was eventually illustrated (see Seznec, Pl. 30) this was not originally intended (see Smalley, pp. 121-3).

⁴⁰ See above, p. 66.

how to use 'moving' inner memory images of the gods to memorise a sermon on the virtues and their parts. Each image, like the one of Idolatry, has attributes and characteristics, carefully described and memorised in a mnemonic verse, which serve to illustrate—or rather, as I think, to memorise—points in a discourse on the virtue concerned.

Holcot's *Moralitates* are a collection of material for the use of preachers in which the 'picture' technique is lavishly used. Efforts to find the sources of these 'pictures' have failed, and no wonder, for it is clear that, as in the case of Ridevall's similar efforts, they are invented memory images. Holcot often gives them what Miss Smalley calls a 'sham antique' flavour, as in the 'picture' of Penance.

The likeness of Penance, which the priests of the goddess Vesta painted, according to Remigius. Penance used to be painted in the form of a man, his whole body naked, who held a five-thonged scourge in his hand. Five verses or sentences were written on it.⁴¹

The inscriptions about Penance on the five-thonged scourge are then given, and this use of inscriptions on, and surrounding, his images is characteristic of Holcot's method. The 'picture' of Friendship, for example, a youth strikingly attired in green, has inscriptions about Friendship on it and around it.⁴²

None of the numerous manuscripts of the *Moralitates* are illustrated; the 'pictures' which they describe were not meant for external representation; they were invisible memory images. However, Saxl did find some representations of Holcot's images in two fifteenth-century manuscripts, including a representation of his 'Penance' (Pl. 4c).⁴³ When we see the man with the scourge with the inscriptions on it, we recognise the technique of an image with writing on it as something fairly normal in mediaeval manuscripts. But the point is that we ought not to be seeing this image represented. It was an invisible memory image. And this suggests to me that the memorising of words or sentences as placed or written on the memory images was perhaps what the Middle Ages understood by 'memory for words'.

⁴¹ Smalley, p. 165.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 174, 178-80.

⁴³ F. Saxl, 'A Spiritual Encyclopaedia of the Later Middle Ages', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, V (1942), p. 102, Pl. 23a.

Another very curious use of memory images is described by Holcot. He places such images, in imagination, on the pages of a Scriptural text, to remind him of how he will comment on the text. On a page of the prophet Hosea he imagines the figure of Idolatry (which he has borrowed from Ridevall) to remind him of how he will expand Hosea's mention of that sin.⁴⁴ He even places on the text of the prophet an image of Cupid, complete with bow and arrows!⁴⁵ The god of love and his attributes are, of course, moralised by the friar, and the 'moving' pagan image is used as a memory image for his moralising expansion of the text.

The preference of these English friars for the fables of the poets as memory images, as allowed by Albertus Magnus, suggests that the artificial memory may be a hitherto unsuspected medium through which pagan imagery survived in the Middle Ages.

Though directions for placing a memory 'picture' on a text are given, these friars do not seem to indicate how their composite memory images for remembering sermons are to be placed. As I have suggested earlier, the Middle Ages seem to have modified the 'Ad Herennian' place rules. The emphasis of the Thomist rules is on order, and this order is really the order of the argument. Provided the material has been placed in order, it is to be memorised in this order through orders of similitudes. To recognise Thomist artificial memory, therefore, we do not necessarily have to seek for figures on places differentiated after the classical manner; such figures can be on a regular order of places.

An Italian illustrated manuscript of the early fourteenth century shows representations of the three theological and the four cardinal virtues seated in a row; also the figures of the seven liberal arts similarly seated.⁴⁶ The victorious virtues are shown as dominating

⁴⁴ Smalley, pp. 173-4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁴⁶ Vienna National Library, ms. 2639, f. 33 *recto* and *verso*. For a discussion of these miniatures, which may reflect a lost fresco at Padua, see Julius von Schlosser, 'Giusto's Fresken in Padua und die Vorläufen der Stanza della Segnatura', *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen der Allerhochsten Kaiserhauses*, XVII (1896), pp. 19 ff. They are related to those illustrating a mnemonic poem on the virtues and the liberal arts in a manuscript at Chantilly (see L. Dorcz, *La canzone delle virtù e delle scienze*, Bergamo, 1894). There is another copy of them in Bibl. Naz., Florence, II, I, 27.

the vices, which crouch before them. The liberal arts have representatives of those arts seated before them. As Schlosser has pointed out, these seated figures of virtues and liberal arts are reminiscent of the row of theological disciplines and liberal arts in the glorification of St. Thomas in the fresco of the Chapter House of Santa Maria Novella (Pl. 1). Reproduced here (Pl. 4a, b) are the figures of the four cardinal virtues as shown in this manuscript. Someone has been using these figures to memorise the parts of the virtues as defined in the *Summa Theologiae*.⁴⁷ Prudence holds a circle, symbol of time, within which are written the eight parts of this virtue as defined by Thomas Aquinas. Besides Temperance is a complicated tree on which are written the parts of Temperance as set out in the *Summa*. The parts of Fortitude are written on her castle and the book which Justice holds contains definitions of that virtue. The figures and their attributes have been elaborated in order to hold—or to memorise—all this complicated material.

The iconographer will see in these miniatures many of the normal attributes of the virtues. The art historian puzzles over their possible reflection of a lost fresco at Padua and over the relationship which they seem to have to the row of figures symbolising theological disciplines and liberal arts in the glorification of St. Thomas in the Chapter House of Santa Maria Novella. I invite the reader to look at them as *imagines agentes*, active and striking, richly dressed and crowned. The crowns symbolise, of course, the victory of the virtues over the vices, but these enormous crowns are surely also rather memorable. And when we see that sections on the virtues of the *Summa Theologiae* are being memorised through the inscriptions (as Holcot memorised the sentences about Penance on the scourge of his memory image) we ask ourselves whether these figures are something like Thomist artificial memory—or as close to it as an external representation can be to an inner invisible and personal art.

Orders of figures expressive of the classifications of the *Summa* and of the whole mediaeval encyclopaedia of knowledge (the liberal arts, for example) ranged in order in a vast memory and having written on them the material relating to them, might be the foundation of some phenomenal memory. The method would be not unlike that of Metrodorus of Scepsis who is said to have written

⁴⁷ Schlosser points out (p. 20) that the inscriptions on the figures record the parts of the virtues as defined in the *Summa*.

on the order of the images of the zodiac all that he wanted to remember. Such images would be both artistically potent corporeal similitudes arousing spiritual intentions, and yet also genuinely mnemonic images, used by a genius with an astounding natural memory and intense powers of inner visualisation. Other techniques more closely approximating to the memorising of differentiated places in buildings may also have been used in combination with this method. But one is inclined to think that the basic Thomist method may have been orders of images with inscriptions on them memorised in the order of the carefully articulated argument.⁴⁸

So might the vast inner memory cathedrals of the Middle Ages have been built.

Petrarch is surely the person with whom we should expect a transition from mediaeval to Renaissance memory to begin. And the name of Petrarch was constantly cited in the memory tradition as that of an important authority on the artificial memory. It is not surprising that Romberch, the Dominican, should cite in his memory treatise the rules and formulations of Thomas; but what does surprise us is that he should also mention Petrarch as an authority, sometimes in association with Thomas. When discussing the rules for places, Romberch states that Petrarch has warned that no perturbation must disturb the order of the places. To the rule that places must not be too large nor too small, but proportionate to the image which they are to contain, it is added that Petrarch 'who is imitated by many' has said that places should be of medium size.⁴⁹ And on the question of how many places we should employ, it is stated that:

Divus Aquinas counsels the use of many places in II, II, 49, whom many afterwards followed, for example Franciscus Petrarcha ..⁵⁰

This is very curious, for Thomas says nothing about how many places we should use in II, II, 49. and, further, there is no extant work by Petrarch giving rules for the artificial memory with the detailed advice about places which Romberch attributes to him.

Perhaps through the influence of Romberch's book, Petrarch's

⁴⁸ See further below, pp. 120-1.

⁴⁹ Romberch, *Congestorium*, pp. 27 verso-28.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 19 verso-20.

name is continually repeated in sixteenth-century memory treatises. Gesualdo speaks of 'Petrarch whom Romberch follows on memory'.⁵¹ Garzoni includes Petrarch among the famous 'Professors of Memory'.⁵² Henry Cornelius Agrippa after giving the classical sources for the art of memory, mentions as the first of the modern authorities, Petrarch.⁵³ In the early seventeenth century, Lambert Schenkel states that the art of memory was 'avidly revived' and 'diligently cultivated' by Petrarch.⁵⁴ And the name of Petrarch is even mentioned in the article on Memory in Diderot's *Encyclopaedia*.⁵⁵

There must therefore have been a side of Petrarch for which he was admired in the ages of memory but which has been totally forgotten by modern Petrarchan scholars—a situation parallel to the modern neglect of Thomas on memory. What was the source in Petrarch's works which gave rise to this tenacious tradition? It is, of course, possible that Petrarch wrote some *Ars memorativa* treatise which has not come down to us. It is not, however, necessary to suppose this. The source is to be found in one of Petrarch's extant works which we have not read, understood, and memorised as we ought to have done.

Petrarch wrote a book called 'Things to be Remembered' (*Rerum memorandarum libri*), probably about 1343 to 1345. This title is suggestive, and when it transpires that the chief of the 'things' to be remembered is the virtue of Prudence under her three parts of *memoria*, *intelligentia*, *providentia*, the student of artificial memory knows that he is on familiar ground. The plan of the work, only a fraction of which was executed, is based on the definitions in Cicero's *De inventione* of Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance.⁵⁶ It opens with 'preludes to virtue', which are leisure, solitude, study, and doctrine. Then comes Prudence and her parts, beginning with *memoria*. The sections on Justice and Fortitude are missing, or were never written; of the section on

⁵¹ Gesualdo, *Plutosofia*, p. 14.

⁵² Garzoni, *Piazza universale*, *Discorso* LX.

⁵³ H. C. Agrippa, *De vanitate scientiarum*, 1530, cap. X, 'De arte memorativa'.

⁵⁴ Lambert Schenkel, *Gazophylacium*, Strasburg, 1610, p. 27.

⁵⁵ In Diodati's note to the entry 'Memoire' in the edition of Lucca, 1767, X, p. 263. See Rossi, *Clavis*, p. 294.

⁵⁶ F. Petrarca, *Rerum memorandarum libri*, ed. G. Billanovich, Florence, 1943, Introduction, pp. cxxiv-cxxx.

Temperance, only a fragment of one of its parts appears. The books on the virtues would probably have been followed by books on the vices.

It has, I believe, never been noticed that there is a strong resemblance between this work and Bartolomeo de San Concordio's 'Teachings of the Ancients'. The *Ammaestramenti degli antichi* begins with exactly the same 'preludes to virtue', then reviews the Ciceronian virtues in a discursive and expanded manner, then comes to the vices. This would have been the plan of Petrarch's book, had he completed it.

There is an even more significant resemblance—namely that both Bartolomeo and Petrarch refer under *memoria* to the artificial memory. Bartolomeo, as we saw, gave the Thomist memory rules under that heading. Petrarch makes his allusions to the art by introducing examples of men of antiquity famed for good memories and associating these with the classical art. His paragraph on the memories of Lucullus and Hortensius begins thus:—'Memory is of two kinds, one for things, one for words.'⁵⁷ He tells of how the elder Seneca could recite backwards and repeats from Seneca the statement that the memory of Latro Portius was 'good both by nature and by art'.⁵⁸ And of the memory of Themistocles he repeats the story told by Cicero in *De oratore* of how Themistocles refused to learn the 'artificial memory' because his natural memory was so good.⁵⁹ Petrarch would of course have known that Cicero in this work does not approve the attitude of Themistocles, and describes how he himself uses the artificial memory.

I suggest that these references to artificial memory in a work in which the parts of Prudence and other virtues are the 'things to be remembered' would be enough to class Petrarch as belonging to the memory tradition,⁶⁰ and to class the *Rerum memorandarum libri* as an ethical treatise designed for memorisation, like the *Ammaestramenti degli antichi*. And this is probably what Petrarch himself intended. In spite of the humanist flavour of the work, and the use of *De oratore* rather than solely *Ad Herennium* on the artificial memory, Petrarch's book comes straight out of scholasticism with its pious use of artificial memory as a part of Prudence.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44. ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45. ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁶⁰ Though the *Rerum memorandarum libri* is the most obvious of Petrarch's works to be interpreted as referring to artificial memory, it is possible that others were so interpreted.

What were they like, the corporeal similitudes, the invisible 'pictures' which Petrarch would have placed in memory for Prudence and her parts? If, with his intense devotion to the ancients he chose pagan images to use in memory, images which would 'move' him strongly because of his classical enthusiasms, he would have had behind him the authority of Albertus Magnus.

One wonders whether the virtues rode through Petrarch's memory in chariots, with the famous 'examples' of them marching in their train as in the *Trionfi*.

The attempt made in this chapter to evoke mediaeval memory can be, as I said at the beginning, but partial and inconclusive, consisting of hints for further exploration by others of an immense subject rather than in any sense a final treatment. My theme has been the art of memory in relation to the formation of imagery. This inner art which encouraged the use of the imagination as a duty must surely have been a major factor in the evocation of images. Can memory be one possible explanation of the mediaeval love of the grotesque, the idiosyncratic? Are the strange figures to be seen on the pages of manuscripts and in all forms of mediaeval art not so much the revelation of a tortured psychology as evidence that the Middle Ages, when men had to remember, followed classical rules for making memorable images? Is the proliferation of new imagery in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries related to the renewed emphasis on memory by the scholastics? I have tried to suggest that this is almost certainly the case. That the historian of the art of memory cannot avoid Giotto, Dante, and Petrarch is surely evidence of the extreme importance of this subject.

From the point of view of this book, which is mainly concerned with the later history of the art, it is fundamental to emphasise that the art of memory came out of the Middle Ages. Its profoundest roots were in a most venerable past. From those deep and mysterious origins it flowed on into later centuries, bearing the stamp of religious fervour strangely combined with mnemotechnical detail which was set upon it in the Middle Ages.