Quick Images:
Memory and the English Corpus Christi Drama

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At least since Frances Yates' *Art of Memory* in 1966, we have been aware of the pervasive influence of memory and memory arts on late medieval culture. More recently, Mary Carruthers' *The Book of Memory* has reaffirmed the key role of memory in both oral and written aspects of medieval culture. In view of this research, we need to reevaluate our approach to medieval drama, in particular the English Corpus Christi drama. In *The Theater of Devotion*, Gail Gibson comments parenthetically that the distinction between actual mystery plays and elaborate visual spectacles (tableaux) is 'entirely a modern scholarly preoccupation and not a medieval one'.¹ This observation is illuminating, though not surprising, in indicating the way in which medieval viewers might have regarded phenomena which comprise distinct aesthetic categories for us. In fact, both elaborate visual tableaux and religious plays were seen as quick images, to be considered in the same general category as painted and sculpted images. All, whether moving or static, 'quick' or 'deed', were designed as external versions of those images necessary to the psychological processes of memory and understanding. Far from being conceived in aesthetic terms (e.g., as drama, painting, sculpture, art, etc.), all were viewed as the images or *phantasmata* which, in Aquinas' model, served as the link between body and soul, sense and understanding. Based on the evidence of a number of late medieval texts, it is fair to appropriate the discourse regarding images and image veneration to our understanding of the drama.

The purpose of this essay is, first, to consider several fifteenth-century texts which establish a context for the considera-
tion of medieval drama as a ‘quick bok’ or image, and then to examine some of the implications for dramatic texts and performance of such a model of the drama. After establishing that such texts as the Wycliffite ‘tretise of miraclis pleyinge’ and ‘tretysse of ymagis’, Dives and Pauper, and Pecock’s Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy constitute a valid and fruitful source of evidence for our consideration of late medieval drama, we will see that they reflect the key role of the image, or phantasm, as a bridge in Thomist (and Aristotelian) thought between sensibilia and intellectual understanding. They further manifest an appreciation of the primacy among sensed objects of visual sensibilia in creating images. We will explore the connection between images, either ‘deed’ (painted) or ‘quick’ (living or performed), and memory, taking as a touchstone Pecock’s view of images as ‘remem-
ratijf signes’ uniquely suited to jog the memory to spiritual understanding. Finally, looking at actual dramatic texts and records, we will examine the implications of a theory of drama as quick image for some aspects of medieval dramatic performance, including the apparent importance of proper performing places to the procession-al staging of York and Chester and the role of speech—or what is usually called “dialogue”—in the plays.

1. Drama as ‘Quick Image’:
A Fifteenth-Century Context

Any study of the role of the image or phantasm in medieval models of cognition must begin with Thomas Aquinas’ compelling account of the mediary status of the image between sensibilia and spiritual understanding. Following Aristotle’s De Anima (which, as I have argued elsewhere, is a much more significant text than the Poetics for understanding medieval art and drama), Aquinas, in his articulation of human cognition in Part I of the Summa Theologicae, Questions 75-89, establishes the cognitive matrix of the drama as understood by Reginald Pecock and later writers on images and drama. His model establishes the primary importance of sensibilia, especially visual sensibilia, and locates...
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the memory in the sensitive part of the soul. Among the interior
sensitive powers (potentias sensitivas interiores) (1a: 78: 4; pp.
136-7), the common sense (sensus communis) receives the sen-
sible forms derived from sensibilitia, and these forms are retained
or conserved by the fantasy (phantasia) or imagination (imagi-
natio). According to Aquinas: ‘fantasy or imagination is, as it
were, a treasure-store of forms received through the senses
(phantasia sive imaginatio quasi thesaurus quidam formarum per
sensum acceptarum)’ (1a: 78: 4; pp. 138-9). The memorative
power (vis memorativa) exists for the preservation of such
forms. Here we enter the domain of the Corpus Christi drama: as
Frances Yates has noted, ‘it is difficult to suppose that such inner
images might not have found their way into outer expression’.
In
fact, the drama becomes just such a “thesaurus” of key Christian
images which can move the audience toward spiritual knowledge.

A century and a half after Aquinas, the English Corpus Christi
drama itself grew and flourished in the university climate created
by the thought of John Wyclif and the controversies surrounding
his ideas. Anne Hudson has stated that ‘Wyclif’s real importance
lies in his university teaching’5: his ideas and the controversy they
gave rise to constitute an important intellectual backdrop for cul-
tural events after 1380. As Hudson has shown, the ideas of Wyclif,
as understood and propagated by his followers, did constitute a
kind of “premature reformation”6 in England. Indeed, Lauren
Lebow has argued that the Corpus Christi drama might be seen
fundamentally as a response by orthodox authorities to the Wy-
collifite climate of fourteenth-century England: ‘aspects of the plays’
language, themes, and organization may be examined as possible
embodiments of counter-Lollard force’.7 Even if we do not go so
far as that, we can nonetheless consider that the controversy sur-
rounding Wyclif’s ideas created a climate auspicious to the
strengthening of the orthodox view regarding drama and images.
Although nothing regarding either images or drama is mentioned
in the twenty-four propositions of Wyclif considered by the
Blackfriars Council of 13828, his views—what scholars have
called his “extreme realism”—could, like Augustine’s positions, lay the foundation for a deemphasis of sensibilia and a concurrent attack on images and plays.

And this seems to have been precisely what happened, if not with Wyclif himself, at least with his ideas in the hands of his followers. Hudson includes Lollard polemical texts against images and pilgrimages as well as against ‘miracles pleyinge’ in her Selections from English Wyclifite Writings. Both texts come from the same manuscript, BL Additional 24202, a manuscript of the early fifteenth century which Hudson describes as ‘an anthology of works critical of the contemporary church though not all overtly heretical’. What is significant here is the existence of a Lollard polemic against images, despite Wyclif’s apparently moderate position on the matter, and the fact that a polemic against images is paired with one against miracles in the same manuscript. In fact, the writer of the treatise on miracles discusses plays and painted images together as similar, though not identical, phenomena, revealing a qualified acceptance of some painted images. And throughout the ‘tretise’ we find that the same arguments are used against miracles as are used against images in the treatise on images.

Indeed, even though it is nominally against plays, this Wyclifite ‘tretise of miraculis pleyinge’ provides perhaps our best contemporary look at the reception of drama. In its objections to miracles, it provides our most sustained critical view of medieval plays and their perceived function. As we have seen, the manuscript in which the ‘tretise’ is found also contains an attack on image veneration, and the ‘tretise’ conceives of plays as phenomenologically in the same category as painted and sculpted images. Just as the author of the ‘tretyse of ymagis’ worries that ‘pe puple worschipis pe gaye peyntynge of pe rotun stok and noust pe seynt in whos name it is seett þere’, so the author of ‘miracles’ is concerned that the ‘wepyng’ at performances is generated not by viewers’ inner concern for sin, but ‘more of theire sight withouteforth’. In general, the author of the ‘tretise of miraculis pleyinge’ objects to claims ‘reversith’ (II. 66, 89, ‘ernestful werkis of God’ (II. is in ful erenst’ (I. 170). Specific arguments which he attribute arguments which he will refute prohibitions against play.

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claims ‘reversith’ (ll. 66, 89, and elsewhere) the intention of the 

‘ernestful werkis of God’ (ll. 48 and 54). For him, ‘al holiness is in 

ful ernest’ (l. 170). Specifically, the author reconstructs six 

arguments which he attributes to those who defend ‘miracils’—

arguments which he will refute before ending by finding Scriptu-

ral prohibitions against play. These six arguments of his oppo-

nents, whose refutation comprises the crux of his case against 

miracles and which include the most revealing information about 

plays, include: 1) that miracles are presented in worship of God; 

2) that miracles often convert people to good living; 3) that people 

are often moved to compassion and devotion by ‘miracles play-

inge’; 4) that some people are more readily converted by ‘gamen 

and pley’ than by ‘ernestful doing’ (ll. 202-3); 5) that everyone 

needs some recreation; and 6) that since the miracles of God may 

be painted, their playing ought also to be allowed. The first, third, 

and sixth of these arguments are particularly relevant to our dis-

cussion here and will be dealt with in more detail below.

Lawrence Clopper has argued that the term miracula and its 

derivatives in the ‘tretise’ could have a very broad application in 

the later Middle Ages. Clopper argues, in fact, that the term mi-

racle does not refer to religious drama at all, but rather to ‘pagan 

survivals’ which broadly ‘parody the liturgy or make jest of sa-

cred events’. Based on a meticulous examination of passages 

including the term miracula, most before 1400, Clopper conclu-

des that the ‘miracils’ referred to in the ‘tretise’, like ancient 

spectacula and the steraclis referred to in Dives and Pauper (an 

important text which we shall consider in more detail below), 

‘were not religious but heathen, not conducive to morality but to 

cupidity and lechery’. Thus, Clopper tries to eliminate altogether 

the “anti-theatrical” argument of the ‘tretise’, arguing that the au-

thor objects only to ‘raucous and inappropriate ludi’. ‘Miracula 

are derisive; they jest with or mock the truth of God’s word’. 

While I will not attempt here an extensive response to Clop-

per’s intriguing argument, it must be noted that the Wycliffite
author himself allows in his text for a distinction between the playing of miracles and the playing of other ‘japes’ or ‘rebaudye’ of the raucous jesting kind, seemingly eliminating Clopper’s conclusion that miracles themselves are to be regarded as ‘rebaudye’. In reconstructing the fifth argument of those opponents who support miracles, the ‘tretise’’s writer notes that they claim that it is better for people to have their recreation ‘by pleyinge of miracles than by pleyinge of other japis’ (ll. 209-10). And in his response, the author holds to this distinction: rather than arguing that miracles are themselves raucous japes, as we might expect based on Clopper’s argument, he argues that because people give credence to what they see in miracles, ‘lasse yvele it were to pleyin rebau-
dye than to pleyin siche miriclis’ (ll. 428-30). The objection seems to be that miracles are broadly raucous or derisive, but that, in seeming to be true, they contain ‘mengid leesingis’ and ‘mengid trewhis’ (ll. 426-7)—in fact, the author would argue, open ribaldry is safer.

Further, it is hard to accord the concept of a raucous, parodic theatre with the reaction that the Wyclifite author describes in the spectactors: that of ‘wepinge bitere teris’ (ll. 193-4). And finally, it is important to note, as Clopper recognises, that the writer of the ‘tretise’ parallels miracles, as ‘quick boks’ (ll. 218-9), with painted images, suggesting in opposition to orthodox defenders that, while painted images may have their place, miracles tend too much toward ‘fedinge mennus wittis’ to be legitimate images:

... peinture, yif it be verruy withoute menging of lesingis, and not to curious, to myche fedinge mennus wittis, and not occasion of mau-
metrie to the puple, they ben but as nakyd lettris to a clerk to riden
the treuth. But so ben not mirialis pleyinge that ben made more to
deliten men bodily than to ben bokis to lewid men. (ll. 442-8)

The author, in other words, sees miracles as somewhere on the continuum of religious images. Thus, in order to fully understand the parallel in the terms of Clopper’s argument, we would have to postulate a genre of painted images which also tended toward parody. But no evidence of such a genre exists, and Clopper does not try to argue for one. In images is irrelevant if the V
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miracles as somewhere on the us, in order to fully understand ‘s argument, we would have to which also tended toward pa- genre exists, and Clopper does not try to argue for one. In other words, the reference to painted images is irrelevant if the Wycliffite author is talking only about, as Clopper suggests, inappropriate ludi—raucous pagan survivals. It is only relevant because the author is talking about serious religious plays, which, like serious images, purport to move spectators toward understanding and devotion.

If, then, we can accept, with Chambers16, Kolve17, and others, that the Wycliffite author does include vernacular religious drama in his conception of ‘miraclis’, the arguments which he attributes to his opponents become quite powerful as a contemporary view of the drama as religious image, and, in particular, the three arguments cited above can help us to formulate a contemporary poetics of drama.

First, we may conclude that miracles, like painted and sculpted images, are viewed as signs. Thus, defenders argue that they are presented in worship, but those, who, like the author of the ‘tretise’, in a rather unsophisticated version of the Augustinian, ultimately Platonic tradition, hold a fundamental distrust of signs of any kind must disagree. Augustine had come to see the lustful plays which he had attended in his youth in Carthage as idle ‘fables and fictions, which could only graze the skin’.18 In lamenting the death of Dido, he realised, his efforts had been falsely refracted away from his own sinful plight. Augustine logically follows this insight in Book X of the Confessions to its conclusion in a vision of mystical union which fundamentally distrusts all signs, including language. Similarly, without being concerned with all the implications of this argument, the author of the ‘tretise’ objects to the idleness of ‘miraclis pleyinge’: ‘these miraclis pleyinge been verrey leesing as they ben singis withoute debe and ... they been verrey idilnesse, as they taken the miraclis of God in idil aftur theire owne lust’ (ll. 243-7).

Second, orthodox defenders argued that such signs—plays and images—moved viewers ‘to compassion and devotion, we-pinge bitte-re-teris’ (ll. 193-4). In other words, they were viewed
as devotional aids. And finally, as we have seen, in an argument that makes explicit the correlation between painted images and plays, supporters argued that since it is lawful to have God's miracles painted, it ought to be lawful as well to have them played. For, as Aquinas had established, the soul understands nothing without the phantasms, or images, of memory (1a: 84: 7). And miracles are even stronger aids to memory than images: 'betere they ben holden in mensus minde and oftere reheresid by the pleyinge of hem than by the pintinge, for this is a deed bok, the tother a qu[i]ck' (ll. 216-9). These arguments, taken in conjunction with other contemporary texts, reveal that plays, like images, were conceived of as a 'quick bok': 'rememoratijf or mynding signes' uniquely able to jog the mind to understanding and devotion.

Like the Wycliffite texts, the popular fifteenth-century treatise Dives and Pauper argues for the use of images as devotional aids, and in doing so it contains passages redolent of drama. Nominaly the text is a lengthy explication of the ten commandments by Pauper to Dives; however, the discussion ranges freely through topics as diverse as folklore, astrology, witchcraft, warfare, trade, iconography, and political and social commentary. The exchange on the first commandment, in the context of its prohibition of graven images, contains a discussion of images. Like other iconoclasts of his day, Dives attacks images and image veneration from two different directions: first, from the point of view of the apparent prohibition in the first commandment, and second, from the Augustinian, ultimately Platonic point of view (also central to the two treatises discussed above) that images deter true spiritual devotion in the sense in which they encourage a feeding of the wits or a resting in sense. Dives begins by taking the first tack, arguing that the first commandment prohibits, 'defedyat', the making of images by stating that man should make 'noo grauyn ping, noo maument, noo lyknesse' (Cap. i: 81). In response, Pauper takes the orthodox mendicant view toward images and relics, arguing that God had not totally forbidden the making of images—Mose strucyd to make images—not worship images: 'Anc [the] makkyng of ymage to worshepyn henتروst, here hope, here loue Consistenstly, Pauper stater that worship is to be dymage' (Cap. ii: 85).

In answer to Dives' quyses which images serve: Christ and his saints; 2) th and 3) they are a book f these reasons are present vestiges of Aquinas' mc which clearly parallel tho ractis pleyinge'. First, the memory, with a jogging c it is in the reconstructed c been ordeyned to steryn carnacioun and of his pas i: 82). Similarly, the auth to his opponents the notic lous werkis ... ben holden of them than by the paint ion of the image of the c the York Crucifixion pl hese armys weryn spred tree tyl þe senuys and þ hondys weryn naylid to þ 83).

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have seen, in an argument between painted images and it is lawful to have God’s law as well to have them play, for soul understands nothing in memory (1a: 84: 7). And more than images: ‘betere oftene rehearsed by the play—this is a deed bok, the guments, taken in conjunct and that plays, like images, rememoratifj or mynding to understanding and devo-
lar fifteenth-century treatise of images as devotional images redolent of drama. None of the ten commandments discussion ranges freely astrology, witchcraft, war and social commentary.19 ment, in the context of its a discussion of images. It attacks images and image first point of the first commandment, and Platonic point of view cussed above) that images in which they encourage nse. Dives begins by taking commandment prohibits, desiring that man should make lyknesse’ (Cap. i: 81).20 In mendicant view toward ad not totally forbidden the making of images—Moses and Solomon had, after all, been instructed to make images—that the important thing was that one not worship images: ‘And perfore God defendyxt nought vttly [the] makkynge of ymageis but he defendyxt vttly to makyn ymageis to wursheypyn hem as godys and to settyn here feyst, her trost, here hope, here loue, and here beleue in hem’ (Cap. i: 82). Consistently, Pauper states that the important thing is to remember that worship is to be done ‘aforn þe ymage and nought to þe ymage’ (Cap. ii: 85).

In answer to Dives’ query, Pauper gives three general purposes which images serve: 1) they stir men’s minds to think of Christ and his saints; 2) they stir men’s affection toward devotion; and 3) they are a book for the lewd. In the language in which these reasons are presented and developed we can recognise the vestiges of Aquinas’ model of cognition, as well as concerns which clearly parallel those regarding drama in the ‘tretise of miraclis plyeinge’. First, the fundamental association of images with memory, with a jogging or stirring of the mind, is present, just as it is in the reconstructed defenses of the Wycliffite ‘tretise’: ‘þey been ordeyned to steryn manys mende to thynkyn of Cristys incarnacioun and of his passioun and of holye seyntys lyys’ (Cap. i: 82). Similarly, the author of the ‘tretise’ on miracles attributes to his opponents the notion that ‘the wille of God and his merveulous werkis... ben holden in mennus minde’ better by the playing of them than by the painting (ll. 214-8). In fact, a graphic depiction of the image of the crucifix in Dives suggests the imagery of the York Crucifixion play: ‘Take heid also be þe ymage how hese armys weryn spred abrod and drawyn wol strete vpon þe tree tyl þe senuys and þe veynys crakkydlyn, and how hese hondys weryn naylid to þe cros and stremedyn on blode’ (Cap. ii: 83).

A further parallel exists in the Thomist notion of the superiority of sight to the other senses. As we have noted, Aquinas had argued that, in the hierarchy of the senses, sight was supreme: because it ‘does not involve physical change (est absque immutati-
tione naturali) on the part of either object or organ, [sight] is the most spiritual, the highest (perfectior) of the senses, with the widest range of objects (communior)' (1a: 78: 3; pp. 132-3). That same sight which is for the Wycliffite author of the 'tretise' a source of evil and of 'lustis' comprises for Pauper one of the advantages of visual images: 'often man is more steryd be syghte þan be heryling or redyngge' (Cap. i: 82).

Finally, we can recall that the Wycliffite author of the 'tretise' objects to miracles on the grounds that they do not generate 'werrey weeping and medeful' (l. 357)—that the weeping is more the result of feeding of the wits. In the same vein, Dives worries that worship is often done, in fact, to the image, 'for þei staryn and lokyn on þe ymage wyt wepyngge eye' (Cap. iii: 86). Pauper answers that if worshippers do worship to the image, they commit the sin of idolatry. Once again, images and drama are spoken of in the same terms.

A similar, but even more rigorously orthodox point of view is taken on the issue of images by Reginald Pecock, Bishop of Chichester, in The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy, written about 1450. Pecock, as an alumnus of Oriel College of Oxford (c. 1417), was no doubt intimately familiar with the Wycliffite controversies of his day. According to Babington, it was probably during his thirteen years in London that Pecock familiarised himself with the arguments of the Lollards. His purpose in the Repressor is to speak out against those, especially the Lollards but perhaps even "liberal" orthodox churchmen, who fault the regular clergy.

Pecock's defense of the use of images bears on our discussion of the contemporary reception of images—sculpted, painted, and 'quick'. First Pecock, without specifically identifying Aquinas, places himself in the Thomist, ultimately Aristotelian tradition we have identified by constantly referring to images as 'rememortatif' or mynding signes'. The connection between images, imagination, and memory is specifically evoked in this phrase. Images aid spiritual knowledge and understand God, and of his beneficent aid of Seintis and of her holiness combats the argument that the making of images by individuals in Exodus and Kings—when making of images. 23

Pecock also recognises other senses in his defence and clearly accords images weight, with hearing. He pointed out that some seeable need for 'seeable signes' or 'Mankinde in this liyf is scienct remembraunce of their he nedeth not oonli heera Scripture and othere deuo and therto seeable rememora fically evokes the cognizant Pecock argues: 'that the imaginacioun and into the myche mater and long m: traveil and peine, than the of the quantity and the let cycle plays and the necess In this passage, it is the co its retention in the imagina The concept of the internal images. And we mig the advantages of both the

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ages bears on our discussion ages—sculpted, painted, and fically identifying Aquinas, tely Aristotelian tradition we g to images as 'rememoratif in between images, imagin- ed in this phrase. Images aid spiritual knowledge and understanding as 'rememoratif signes of God, and of his benefetis, and of his holij lif and passioun, and of Seintis and of her holij cnuersacioun'.22 Like Pauper, Pecock combats the argument that the first commandment prohibits the making of images by indicating other places in Scripture—e.g., Exodus and Kings—where God allows or even commands the making of images.23

Pecock also recognizes the superiority of sight to hearing and other senses in his defense of images. In his argument, Pecock clearly accords images with sight, and Scripture, either read or heard, with hearing. He points to the sacraments as evidence that all agree that some seeable signs are necessary, and argues for the need for 'seeable signes' on the basis of man's frailty in this life: 'Mankinde in this lijf is so freell, that forto make into him sufficien remembraunche of thingis to be profitabli of him remembred he nedith not ooni heerable rememoratif signes (as ben Holi Scripture and othere deoute writings) but he nedith also therwith and theerto seeble rememoratif signes'.24 In a passage which specifically evokes the cognitive dimension of such seeable signs, Pecock argues: 'that the ise siest scheweth and bringith into the yimaginaciuon and into the mynde withynne in the heed of a man myche mater and long mater sooner, and with lasse labour and traveil and peine, than the heering of the eere doth'.25 One thinks of the quantity and the length of the matter to be covered in the cycle plays and the necessity for seeable signs as a cognitive aid. In this passage, it is the cognitive superiority of the seen object—its retention in the imagination—that is used in defense of images. The concept of the internal image is adduced in defense of external images. And we might further note that the drama combines the advantages of both the seen and the heard image.

In the process of arguing against the Lollard contention that every man is a more perfect image of God than 'eny stok or stoon grauad'26, Pecock, in perhaps his most illuminating remark for our purposes, alludes specifically to plays. After stipulating the three conditions requisite to a proper image, Pecock states: 'But
so it is, that no Cristen man now lyuyng hath these iii condicions anentis the persoon of Crist in his manhood, as hath a stok or a stoon graued into the likenes of Crist hanging on a cros nakid and woundid ... except whanne a quyk man is sett in a pley to be wounded and scouird. And this bifallith full seelede and in fewe placis and cuntores’. 27 Significantly, this passage places plays firmly in the same phenomenological realm as images. The entire discussion in this section deals with images—the purpose is to discuss whether 'eny Cristen man' or a 'stok or stoon graued' constitutes a more perfect image of Christ. Thus, for Pecock, plays occur naturally as another sort of image that might be considered. And, in fact, this quick image seems, in the abstract, better. The problem with a passion play is not that it is not a good resemblance or sign—indeed, it is better than a stock or stone—but that plays are performed so seldom (only during the Corpus Christi festival?) and in so few places (perhaps examination of records ought not lead us to conclude that there was a pervasive and ubiquitous theatre in England in the late Middle Ages) that they cannot be consistently useful.

Though Pecock and the Wycliffite author of the 'tretise' are on opposite sides of the question, both provide contemporary accounts in which plays and images are seen as resembling one another—as similar in purpose. In these texts, as in Dives and Pauper, the discourse regarding images and their veneration parallels that in which drama is conceived and discussed. Both images and the drama are seen in Thomist terms as cognitive and devotional aids. Not only, it appears, are tableaux and played pageants phenomenologically similar for the medieval audience, as Gibson suggests—so too are plays and images. Clearly, our understanding of the English Corpus Christi drama must be informed by a view of the plays as 'quick bokes' uniquely able to jog the mind toward spiritual understanding.

II. 'Mynding Signes' Performance, Bael

... prente wyly his in 3o i
Who so to god hath be vn
Ffrenchep þer zal he non:
ne þer get he ne grace. 28

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The author of the 'tretise' are on both provide contemporary ac- es are seen as resembling one in these texts, as in Dives and mages and their veneration pa- onceived and discussed. Both Thomist terms as cognitive andears, are tableaux and played ar for the medieval audience, plays and images. Clearly, our Corpus Christi drama must be in- 'quick books,' uniquely able to in- standing.

II. 'Mynding Signes':
Performance, Backgrounds, and Dialogue

... prente wyl pis in 3our mende
Who so to god hath be vnkende
Ffrenchep ber xal he non ffynde
ne ber get he no grace

So says the second vexillator in the Proclamation of the N-Town play in preparing prospective spectators for the Judgement page- ant, the final striking image of the Corpus Christi sequence. His words, frightening and ominous here, might well serve as a gloss on the function of the entire Corpus Christ cycle. As we have seen, the plays, like religious painting and sculpture, are seen by contemporaries as a kind of image—a book where one might read and understand God's purpose. The images, in this case the liv- ing and speaking images of plays, are to be 'prente[d]' in the viewer's mind, in the memory, just as the words of a book are inscribed on a page.

As we have noted, Aquinas' model of human cognition, based on Aristotle's De Anima and spelled out in Questions 75-89 in Part I of the Summa, establishes the fundamental importance of the image, or phantasm, in human understanding. The memory, located in the sensitive part of the soul, is the repository of these images. In order to move further toward an understanding of the rememorative function of the plays in performance, we need to invoke yet another influential memory text: the Rhetorica ad He- rennium, erroneously attributed to Cicero in the Middle Ages. This text provides an important backdrop to all mnemonic theory with its emphasis on the key roles of backgrounds and images in any memory system. From the perspective of these texts, it can be seen that the English Corpus Christi drama, in both its visual and spoken dimensions, functioned as a set of memory images—a 'mynding signe' (Pecock's term) uniquely suited to jog the minds of viewers toward spiritual understanding.
We can begin to trace the Corpus Christi drama’s role as memory theatre by studying the design and performance of the cycles, insofar as we can reconstruct them, against the background of the material on memory in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. The *Ad Herennium* established the central role in artificial memory systems of two elements: backgrounds and images (*constat igitur artificiosa memoria ex locis et imaginibus*). Backgrounds are to be scenes that are ‘complete and conspicuous, so that we can grasp and embrace them easily by the natural memory—for example, a house, an intercolumnar space, a recess, an arch, or the like’. The backgrounds should be in a clear series and should ‘cling lastingly in our memory, for the images, like letters, are effaced when we make no use of them, but the backgrounds, like wax tablets, should abide’. Here we may note again the correlation between images and backgrounds, and characters (i.e., writing) and wax tablets.

Following the discussion of backgrounds come detailed instructions regarding the construction of appropriate images. The author cautions that the images be carefully imprinted (*imaginum diligenti notatione*) against a properly arranged pattern of backgrounds. In particular, it is advised that striking (*insignes*) images ought to be formed, since they remain longer in the memory. The advice that follows might almost describe the construction of the figures of the Corpus Christi cycles: we shall make images memorable, argues the *Ad Herennium*, if we establish likenesses as striking as possible; ... if we assign to them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness; if we dress some of them with crowns or purple cloaks, for example, so that the likeness may be more distinct to us; or if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood (*cruentam*) or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint (*rubrica delibutam*), so that its form is more striking, or by assigning certain comic effects (*ridiculas res aligitas*) to our images, for that, too, will ensure our remembering them more readily.”

Though the author of the *Ad Herennium* is writing in a late classical context, his advice nonetheless calls to mind the rich cos-
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tuning of Herod and other tyrant figures of the cycles, as well as the bloodied and disfigured Christ of, for example, the York *Crucifixion*. And the comic dimension, too, of the cycles finds its place in this theory: the tauntings of a Herod or a Cain, the comic antics of the demons of the cycle Judgement plays work to enhance the memorableness of their stage images. In the thirteenth century, Geoffrey of Vinsauf continues the emphasis on ‘places, times, images, or other similar signposts’ as aids to memory, adding that it is important that these images give pleasure, if one is to be taught by their means. Certainly if we, like Reginald Pecock, view the plays as ‘mynding signes’ or quick images, we can agree with his statement that no image of Christ is as effective as

a stok or stoon graved into the likenes of Crist hanging on a cross nakid and woundid ... except whanne a quyk man is sett in a pley to be woundid and scourgid.

Nowhere in medieval literature or culture more than in the Corpus Christi drama do we find embodied so centrally the the-
saurus or *treasure-house of communal memory* – the images which give substance and meaning to the common life of the people. The images to be presented in the pageants were carefully selected to give a comprehensive view of society in its context of Christian history, and they and their performance were guarded jealously and carefully. The records show that, in some cities, guilds and individuals could be fined, or even lose a pageant, for playing improperly or in the wrong places. And such an attitude can be attributed in large part to the care with which, as we have seen, the backgrounds or *loci* of the images should be selected and maintained, and the care with which appropriate images should be selected. As with other images, those of the pageants needed to be constructed carefully to properly jog the memory. For example, the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman *Adam* requires the background of a church facade for its proper presentation, and its ‘personae’ must be coached ‘so that they may speak in an orderly manner and make gestures appropriate to the things of
which they speak; and in their verses, let them neither add nor subtract a syllable, but pronounce them all steadily, and speak those things that are to be spoken in their due order (dicantur seriatim quae dicenda sunt).36

Similarly, the debates over playing places, particularly in the records of the processionally-staged pageant sequences of Chester and York, can be attributed at least in part to the need to retain consistent and proper backgrounds for the images of the plays. At Chester, Anne Webster and John Whitmore engage in a legal dispute ‘concerning the claime, right, and title of a mansion, rowme, or place for the Whydson plaies in the Brudg-gate strete’, and this dispute over place is serious enough for the mayor and recorder to intervene before finding for Webster.37 Similarly, at York, emphasis is often placed on the records on playing at the proper, or assigned, places. For example, the Proclamation of 1415 calls for the men to ‘brynges furth pacentes pat pai play at the places pat is assigned perfore and nowere elles of the payne of forfaiture to be raysed pat is ordayned’.38 It is also important that the craftsmen bring forth their pageants ‘in order and course’ and that the players be ‘well arrayed and openly spekyng upon payn of lesyng’.39

Indeed, one 1399 record from the York A/Y Memorandum Book details the playing places for the pageants in a fashion singularly reminiscent of the Ad Herennium’s advice about backgrounds. As we have seen, the Ad Herennium specifies the types of backgrounds that can be most easily remembered: ‘a house, an intercolumnar space, a recess, an arch, or the like’40; further, it is noted that the backgrounds ought to be in a clear series. In the record, the commons ask the mayor and aldermen that the pageants ‘be played in the places to which they were limited and assigned by you and by the aforesaid commons previously’. Twelve playing places are annexed in a schedule at the end of the record, and, as would be expected, houses, doors, and gates figure prominently in the list of places to serve as backgrounds for the play’s images:

first at the gates of Holy Harpham’s door; third at del Brigg’s door; tenth at eleventh at the end of Girn

The ‘banners of the play’ these locations to set the clear and consistent sequel images, a fine is imposed if any of the aforesaid paq or negligence on the part ty of 6s 8d to the same C

Indeed, this concept the memorative culture c plicit documentation in t done to illuminate the ap or backgrounds, to parti places are a part of the pl not just one of isolated cession whereby signific plan—a part of the thesa

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first at the gates of Holy Trinity in Micklegate; second at Robert
Harpham’s door; third at John de Gyseburne’s door ... ninth at Adam
del Brigg’s door; tenth at the gates of the Minster of blessed Peter;
eleventh at the end of Girdlergate in Petergate ...

The 'banners of the play with the arms of the city' are to be put in
these locations to set them off as playing places; further, since a
clear and consistent sequence is important to the pageants as quick
images, a fine is imposed on any who play improperly:

if any of the aforesaid pageants be delayed or held back through fault
or negligence on the part of the players, that they shall incur a penalty
of 6s 8d to the same Chamber.41

Indeed, this concept of place, of background, is so basic to
the memorative culture of medieval theatre as not to warrant ex-
plcit documentation in the records. Much research remains to be
done to illuminate the appropriateness of specific playing places,
or backgrounds, to particular pageants; what is clear is that the
places are a part of the play, that the experience for the audience is
not just one of isolated pageants, but of a clear, consistent pro-
cession whereby significant town spaces become a part of God’s
plan—a part of the thesaurus that is the Corpus Christi theatre.

Just as the cycles’ emphatic sequential design and the context
of their production suggest their status as quick images of memo-
ry, so too does their language—their speeches or “dialogue.”
Contemporaries had frequently debated the vitality of heard as
against seen images, with orthodox defenders such as Pecock fol-

Acock in arguing for the superiority of visual images. It
is a virtue of plays over painted or sculpted images to contain both
visual and auditory sensibilia. Certainly the language of the plays
frequently enough calls specifically on memory—invokes specifi-
cally the importance or centrality of memory in the manner of the
passage quoted at the outset of this section. In his N-Town play,
for example, Moses implores viewers to ‘prent þise lawys well in
þi mende’43, the laws of the ten commandments which he will
present and which are imprinted in the ‘tablys tweyn’ which he
has just shown the audience. At the conclusion of his explication,
he once again exhorts the audience to ‘sett well in mende’ to learn these laws.

The Last Supper sequences, in their rendering of what becomes the central ritual of the Church, frequently use the language of memory. In one version of the Chester Banns, the speaker announces that the bakers will present the Last Supper, and urges them to utter the ‘same wordes ... As Criste himselfe spake them to be a memorall’ of the death and passion which will follow. Then in the play itself, Christ gives the bread to his disciples, saying: ‘This give I you on me to mynd ll aye after evermore’. Similarly, the N-Town *Last Supper* invokes the importance of memory: the disciples are told to drink Christ’s blood ‘in pe memory of my passygon’, and Christ himself explicates the stage image of his washing the disciples’ feet:

A memory of pis have 3e xall
Pat ech of 3ow xal do to othyr
With vmbyl hert submyt egal
As ech of 3ow were otherys brother.

The pattern is clear: the image, held in the mind, will give rise to the succeeding gloss or significance. And just as the words must be unaltered to be a proper memorial, one can understand how the pageants, as carefully conceived and delineated images, must be presented in consistent and unaltered form to be appropriate memory tools.

In the brief textual interlude of the two Doctors which occurs in the manuscript in between the two lengthy N-Town Passion plays, the first Doctor makes a telling distinction between ‘lernyd’ members of the audience and those members who are ‘not lernyd’:

To pe pepyl not lernyd • I stonde as A techer
Of pis processyion • to g3ve informacion
And to them pat be lernyd • As A gostly precher
that in my rehearsay • they may have delectacion

Though the procession to which he refers, and which follows, is composed of the apostle be of use to both lerne sense of a rehearsal as a Such a rehearsal seems with the idea of retainin, clifite ‘tretise of miracl ponents the view that t mennus minde and oft by the paintinge, for th

Yet even when the invoked in the texts of it embodies their cultural plays as “quick images” sumptions about the fun As Eugene Vance note Feather: Toward a Poet Theater, ‘dialogue has retical analysis among current assumptions ab as ‘a positive alterity a or human) or of truth’ tion in the early Romer, self-understandin, cal relationship betwe such as Emile Benven “successfully mediated

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composed of the apostles, the notion of a ‘rehearsal’ which could

be of use to both learned and lewd is interesting in the medieval

sense of a rehearsal as an ‘account, a narration; recital, listing’.

Such a rehearsal seems to be connected in contemporary debates

with the idea of retaining items in the mind: the author of the Wy-

ciffite ‘tretise of miraclis pleyinge’ attributes to his orthodox op-

ponents the view that the works of God ‘betere ... ben holden in

menchus minde and oftene rehersid by the pleyinge of hem than

by the paintinge, for this is a deuk bok, the tother a qu[i]ck’.

Yet even when the concept of memory is not specifically in-

voked in the texts of the plays, the plays’ language nonetheless

embodies their cultural status as images of memory. Viewing the

plays as “quick images” requires that we revise our traditional as-

sumptions about the function of “dialogue”, or speaking, in them.

As Eugene Vance notes in his exploratory essay ‘The Apple as

Feather: Toward a Poetics of Dialogue in Early French Medieval

Theater’, ‘dialogue has been a relatively neglected object of theo-

retical analysis among literary critics’. Vance suggests that our

current assumptions about dialogue rest on the notion of language

as ‘a positive alterity and a mediator of presence (whether divine

or human) or of truth’. He traces the foundations of this tradi-

tion in the early Romantics Schleiermacher and Novalis—in gen-

eral, self-understanding is seen as emerging only from a dialecti-

cal relationship between self and other. For later theoreticians

such as Emile Benveniste, the notion of dialogue as an effect of

“successfully mediated presences” becomes axiomatic.

One can see emerging from this tradition the post-Romantic

notion of dialogue as contributing to and revelatory of organic

character development. And from this point of view the “dia-

logue” of the Corpus Christi plays seems wooden, even when it

is not fractured by the insertion of Expositor or Doctor characters

who speak directly to the audience.

However, when the plays are looked at as quick images de-

signed to jog the memory of the viewer, the role of “dialogue”, or
speech, becomes clearer. Rather than a situation in which the audience watches the development of selves on stage, we have one in which all of the dialogue (not only the speeches of the Expositor or Doctor) is audience-oriented, basically designed to gloss or explicate the images on stage. The plays provide images which are "copious" in two senses: first of all, the Corpus Christi stage is abundantly filled with the characters and types of the Christian history of the world—a varied and universal theatre; but more importantly for our purposes here, the images of the stage are copious in the sense which Mary Carruthers gives to the "commonplaces" of medieval rhetoric:

> And "copiousness" ... is not a process of analytical definition so much as it is compiling a memory place that is most like a florilegial entry, an indefinitely expandable grouping of "dicta et facta" on some common theme or subject.\(^{54}\)

The copious images of the pageants need to be read and interpreted. And the advantage of quick images over unspeaking stocks and stones is precisely that they can gloss or unlock themselves.\(^{55}\) As speaking images, the figures of the Corpus Christi drama gloss the stage image: in Thomist terms, the speech or "dialogue" functions as the agent intellect extracting the significance of the phantasms of memory.

We can illustrate this aspect of medieval theatre by looking at two plays from the Chester cycle—one which includes an Expositor figure whose speech is explicitly directed toward the audience, and a second containing what might at first look like "dramatic" dialogue. First, in the Barbers’ Play of Abraham, an Expositor emerges several times to gloss the significance of events for the audience. For example, after Melchysedech accepts the gift of a cup from Loth, the Expositor appears to comment on the significance of a cup full of ‘wynne and bred’ offered by Melchysedech to Abraham:

> Lordinges, what may this signifie
> I will expound yt appertly—
> the unlearned standinge herebye

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may knowe what this may bee.
This present, I saye veramente,
signifieth the newe testamente ... .56

The Expositor goes on to explain how the scene represents the
overriding of the old law by the new, with Abraham signifying
the Father of heaven and Melchysedeck a priest.

Now if we take a pageant which does not contain an explicit
Expositor or Doctor character, one in which the dialogue on the
surface seems to be more “dramatic”, we will find once again that
the dialogue does not function toward revelation or development
of a self, but rather toward explication of the stage image. The
exchange between Deus, Adam, Eve, and the Serpent in the garden
in the Drapers’ Play would seem on the surface to provide the
material of a dramatic exchange. Yet the scene is not dramatic pre-
cisely because the outcome is so familiar, and the dialogue func-
tions toward explication rather than development.

Deus begins by waking Adam and informing him that he now
has a mate, and Adam by articulating the significance of the cre-
ation of his mate:

for out of man taken she is,
and to man shee shall drawe.19

Because of this process of creation, he explains,

... man kyndely shall forsake
father and mother, and to wife take;
too in one fleshe, as thou can make,
eyther other for to glad20

Though the speeches are cast as dialogue between Adam and
Deus, they serve the same function as that of the Expositor—we
see a stage image of the creation of woman, and we receive a
gloss on the significance of that creation.

Next follows a six-stanza speech by Satan (Demon) in which
he explains why he will tempt man (he envies him the bliss he
will have in paradise after his [Demon’s] fall), why he will tempt
woman, and how and why he will disguise himself. Although Adam and Eve are on stage at the time, the speech is clearly delivered to the audience. During the following exchange between the serpent and Eve, neither character is truly developed or revealed—instead the significance of God’s command is explicated from the point of view of each. Then the significance of their actual eating of the fruit is glossed by Adam in terms of the consequences of breaking God’s commandment:

I am naked, well I see.  
Woman, cursed mote thou bee,  
for wee bothe nowe shente.  
I wot not for shame wherether to flee,  
for this fruite was forbydden mee.  
Nowe have I brooken, through reade of thee,  
my lordes commandemente.29

Similarly, the speeches of the shepherds to one another after the angel appears to them in the Towneley Second Shepherds’ Play seem inconsistent when viewed in terms of character development; indeed, they seem to reduce or eliminate any kind of character differentiation between the shepherds. Yet, viewed as glosses of the stage image of Christ’s nativity, their function comes into clearer focus. The nativity represents the fulfillment of prophecy:

2 Pastor  
We finde by the prophecy ...  
Of David and Isay and mo then I min—  
Thay prophecied by clergy—that in a virgin  
Shuld he light and ly, to slokyn our sin  
...  
1 Pastor  
Patriarkes that has bene, and prophesyts beforne,  
Thay desiryd to have sene this childe that is borne.  
Thay ar gone full clene; that have thay lorne.  
We shal se him, I weyn, or it be morne,  
To tokyn.30

Just as the child himself functions as a ‘tokyn’ for the shepherds, so the self-glossing images of the Corpus Christi plays, seen by the spectators like the Expositor, the explicate the signif-ications to memory mind of the viewer. Which demands consis-tency of their language, the qui-}

Notes
1 Gail McMurray Gibso-and Society in the Late  
2 See my ‘Medieval Aris-Christi Drama’, in Mel-
3 References to the Sum-friars edition of Aqui-
ed., London, 1963—6—lowed, after the semicol-
4 Frances Yates, The Art  
5 Anne Hudson, The Pre-History, Oxford, 1988,  
7 Lauren Lepow, Enact-
8 Anne Hudson [ed.], Se-
9 Ibidem, p. 179.  
10 The ‘treyse of ymagis-
11 The ‘tretise of miraclis-
12 Lawrence M. Clover, ‘Speculum 65 (1990), pp-
13 Ibidem, p. 902.  
14 See E. K. Chambers, Th-
guise himself. Although the speech is clearly developing exchange between is truly developed or related's command is explicated the significance of their adam in terms of the content:

seen by the spectators, serve as aids to understanding and belief. Like the Expositor, the "dialogue" in these examples functions to explicate the significance of the stage images. Even where explicit references to memory are not present, the images serve to jog the mind of the viewer. Both in their conception and performance, which demands consistency and appropriate backgrounds, and in their language, the quick images of the Corpus Christi drama are designed as copious aids to memory and spiritual understanding.

Notes
3. References to the *Summa*, both Latin and English, are from the Blackfriars edition of Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Gilby, O. P. [ed.], London, 1963-, 60 vols. The question and section numbers are followed, after the semicolon, by the appropriate page number(s).
11. The "tretise of miraclis pleyinge", ll. 357-61, also printed in part in Hudson [ed.], *English Wycliffite Writings*; however, line citations from the treatise in this essay are taken from the complete edition by Clifford Davidson [ed.], *A Middle English Tretise on the Playing of Miracles*, Washington, D.C., 1981.
vol. II, pp. 102-3.
20 The section on the first commandment is printed on pp. 81-220 of Barnum’s edition of *Dives and Pauper*; references here show the appropriate chapter (Cap.) number of that section followed by the page number in Barnum’s edition.
27 Ibidem, p. 221 [my emphasis].
35 Pecock, *Repressor*, p. 221.
36 Bevington [ed.], *Medieval Drama*, p. 81.
39 Ibidem, p. 25.

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Over Much Blaming of the Clergy,
360, p. 137.
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nn, Cambridge, Mass., 1954
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43 Block [ed.], Ludus Coventriae, p. 53, l. 66.
44 Ibidem, p. 57, l. 188.
45 Lawrence M. Clopper Jr. [ed.], Records of Early English Drama: Chester, Toronto, 1979, p. 245.
47 Block [ed.], Ludus Coventriae, p. 259, l. 803.
49 Ibidem, p. 269, II. 9-12.
51 ll. 216-9. [My emphasis.]
53 Ibidem.
55 For a closely related and intriguing argument (though with an emphasis on music), see Jody Enders' rhetorical approach to the connections between image, memory, and delivery in liturgical drama, in 'Visions with Voices: The Rhetoric of Memory and Music in Liturgical Drama, Comparative Drama' 24 (1990), pp. 34-54.
57 Ibidem, p. 19, II. 151-2
59 Ibidem, p. 24, II. 258-64.