

Raphael Lyne

King's College, Cambridge, MS 840.5

Edward Pordage's reading notes beg the same questions as many of the manuscripts in the *Scriptorium* collection. Despite its legibility and the familiarity of many of its contents, it proves enigmatic when we consider how to read it, and what to make of it. On the one hand, we might look at a manuscript like this as an aspect of self-fashioning, something in which things we would naturally deem to be internal (memory, knowledge, moral outlook, etc.) are worked on externally in a kind of performance.¹ On the other, we might point to the late date and see this as a post-Renaissance phenomenon, wherein a Descartes-influenced view of inwardness rather more like our own could allow for a volume of reading notes to be written as a self-oriented concomitant to the experience of books, with a different sense of a reader (if any) or a purposeful encounter with what one might become. Sweeping historical definitions don't do much to clarify things in relation to a document like this, so communicative in some ways (given the more multi-faceted and much less legible comparisons one could make in the *Scriptorium* collection), and yet not ultimately revealing its compiler.

The first item in the manuscript – notes from a book of English passages to be turned into Latin, probably William Leedes's *New English Examples* (London, 1685) – seems at home in the notebook of a Cambridge student, with academic ambitions, but not yet ordained (as Pordage was a few years later). Even here the search for something revealing is parried by the use of the first-person pronoun in the opening quotations. The book starts 'I'; indeed, it starts 'I love'. 'I love to teach Lilly's Grammar': in Lily's Grammar (a Latin manual which dates back to Henry VIII's reign) the verb 'amo' (I love), then as now, was among the very first to be learned. How emphatic and personal, knowing and circular, this opening might seem, were it not for the fact that Pordage is quoting from his source in an apparently unfiltered and unironic way. Perhaps he is not 'I'. It gets no easier to determine where he / 'I' is placed in his book. There are patterns to be observed, and perhaps two key particular groupings of material, as will be explored below. Education recurs as an interest in no. 22, notes on the dedicatory epistle to John Newton's *The Scale of Interest* (London, 1668). The change of academic subject (this is an arithmetic book) is stark but the epistle is full of trenchant thoughts about education in general, and again the first-person voice (it starts 'I here present thee') is captured in the notes. This attention to education suggests a self-conscious element in the creation of this book – as does an interest in memory, on which more later – but this does not ultimately emerge as a substantial structuring principle for the compilation.

Many of the notes are devoted to the work of John Dryden. In recording extracts from his political and satirical poems, Pordage is motivated by an

¹ The term 'self-fashioning' was made famous in literary criticism of the period by Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983). The intersection between material book culture and the public performance of knowledge I am envisaging here has more in common with the topics covered in Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

interest in controversy and in history. The poems come from 30-50 years earlier, and it is not easy to assess how this historical distance might have felt to a Cambridge student c. 1710. Comparisons are not easy to find: perhaps a contemporary student reading a Kingsley Amis novel touching on the Cold War, or Tony Harrison's play *The Common Chorus* (published in 1992), about nuclear weapons and the Greenham Common air base, might match reasonably well – my assumption being that the issues present and/or the means of addressing them would seem to come from a significantly different time. Possibly generations and issues and styles of writing changed a little more slowly c. 1700, and Dryden was a towering figure who died in that year. Then again, he himself looked back on the era before the Civil War as a 'giant age before the flood'.² This would be much easier to resolve if Pordage gave more hints as to his own historical outlook, but he remains impassive, copying with apparent diligence but displaying no notable engagement with, nor detachment from, the controversies evoked.

His notes taken from 'Heroick Stanza's, on the late Usurper Oliver Cromwel, written after his Funeral, By Mr John Dryden' take their title from *Poems on Affairs of State* (London, 1689), rather than the more flattering original title from 1659: 'Consecrated to the Glorious Memory of his most Serene and Renowned Highnesse Oliver Late Lord Protector of this Commonwealth'. *Poems on Affairs of State* testifies to the period's interests in recent ferment (in its case, that bit more recent), and Pordage clearly shares this. His notes, though, are plain, with most of the poem's stanzas simply transcribed. The criteria for exclusion seem to be (i) those stanzas that are historically specific, e.g. 28 ('From this high spring our foreign conquests flow'), or which seem obsolete given the intervening time, e.g. 36 ('No civil broils have since his death arose'); (ii) those stanzas which attempt more forced rhetoric, e.g. 8 ('Fortune... her best-lov'd Pompey'), and 28 ('When such heroic virtue Heav'n sets out, / The stars like Commons sullenly obey'). The remainder is more or less self-standing, with many sententious praises, and some grand classical references (20: 'When past all off'rings to *Pheretrian Jove*, / He *Mars* depos'd'), though it does start with numbered stanza 3, and the word 'Tho[ugh]'.²

It is worth noting that the Dryden poems extracted here are complemented by items such as no. 19, 'Persons, & Places, signified by some of ye Names in Absalom and Achitophel'. Here more than forty figures in the poem are identified with their historical counterparts, without any embellishment other than a short title. Again the question remains as to whether Pordage is doing this as a modern historian might, or as someone still engaged in the contemporary frisson of cracking the code. This ends up seeming like an anachronistic distinction: perhaps historical perspective, connection and disconnection, is much less keenly present for this writer at this moment. Nonetheless, the evidence of the Dryden poem and the historical clues suggests that this collection of reading notes is less of a performance than one might expect. It does not package itself within a particular towards the past and its questions. An interpretation in terms of larger historical themes might see the classic advice to keep a commonplace book, to extract, arrange, and make use of quotations, coming into contact

² The quotation comes from his dedicatory poem in William Congreve's play *The Double-Dealer* (1694): 'To my dear friend Mr Congreve, on his comedy called *The Double Dealer*', line 5.

with a changing emphasis on the individual and the inward. It is hard not to think of most earlier personal miscellanies as written for an imaginary reader: a future self, perhaps, or an ideal teacher-observer. This manuscript seems less shaped.

Pordage's interest in memory, however, points in a different direction. Such manuscripts are closely associated with the creation, storage, and management of useful memories, and several entries based on the subject suggest rather more self-consciousness in the building of the volume. Item 11 has notes on the Medieval philosopher Raymond Lully's theories, and this is followed by notes on passages about memory by Francis Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605). As the detailed description of the book included in the *Scriptorium* site relates, these pages seem to have been written at a different time, as if space was temporarily left for a further topically-relevant passage. This is of course a strong sign that there is a degree of design and framing behind the manuscript's eventual form, although it is not easy to see many other comparable indications.

The third section devoted to memory, item 17, is taken from Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique*. Pordage cites the edition of 1567; it had first been published in 1561. This trio of texts suggests a scholarly interest in the subject consistent with the historical aspects of his Dryden notes. Wilson's handbook might seem like a marginal place to find information on the topic, and it was more than a century old. However, among Renaissance works on rhetoric, most of which touch on memory which is one of the classical subsections within the discipline, it stands out for the lengthy, speculative, and anecdotal nature of its investigation. It is surprising not to find (for example) something from the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, sometimes attributed to Cicero at the time, which has a famous section on Simonides' invention of the memory arts (which is actually mentioned in the Wilson passages). With the exception of item 1's interest in learning the Latin language, however, this is an Anglophone collection.

The memory sections come to look less scholarly when their other associations within the collection are traced. The first of them, from Lully, is attributed to a source which also provides item 13: the second edition of Richard Saunders's *Physiognomie, and Chiromancie, etc.* (London, 1671). The book's arcane interests tend in another direction in which memory can go: towards the occult rather than the mainstream of humanist scholarship.³ Item 13 is a brief account from Saunders of the Rosicrucians, but items 14 and 15 explore magic (especially in the work of Thomas Vaughan, to whom Pordage is hostile), and item 16 is about alchemy. The flurry of interest in memory, then, is simultaneous in the manuscript with extracts about other esoteric topics. The last paragraph, from the *Arte of Rhetorique*, is neither scholarly nor esoteric in tone:

For the best Art of Memory that can be, is to hear much, to speak much, to read much, and to write much. And Exercise is it that does all, when we have said all that ever we can. [The best mean to preserve a good memory, or mend an evil, is to keep a

³ The classic study, Frances Yates's *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), combines an interest in classic humanist and classical scholarship with a recognition that hermetic and other arcane writings were notably enthused by the subject.

good diet, to sleep moderately, etc. -- and to exercise the wit with cunning of many things without Book, and ever to be occupied with one thing or other, for by labour the wit is whetted.] (p. 179)

This robust and sensible advice is only slightly adapted from Wilson (who also stipulates avoiding too much female company). It seems more in keeping with this volume's unpretentious practices than some of the more extravagant places memory theory could end up. The section from Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* also takes a rather dim view of memory systems and of Lully in particular. There seems to be a little flurry of esoteric interest in this part of the manuscript, but in the end it does not seem to be the note-taker's instinctive mode. After the Wilson section the extracts from historical and satirical writings return.

Edward Pordage and his manuscript are not exactly enigmatic: the combinations of extracts, and his apparent attitude towards them, do not ignite intrigue, though they do not readily reveal underlying purposes. On the other hand, this is not a book that can simply be dismissed as a kind of automatic writing, a written by-product of the act of reading with no function or effect. It is perhaps over-tempting to see this collection as one poised between self-conscious construction and a more personal record of things that, simply, struck him as striking. Nonetheless, it seems as if the question 'what did Pordage think he was doing here?' cannot be answered easily with reference to core characteristics of early modern miscellaneity. Instead we must acknowledge that the individuals behind these books had a large impact on their particular examples of a widespread phenomenon, but this need not mean that such individuals emerge as emphatic, lucid presences.

Bibliography

Crane, Mary Thomas, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993)

Greenblatt, Stephen, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983)

Yates, Frances, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966)

This essay is published under a version of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDeriv license.

You are free to copy, distribute and transmit it, under the following conditions:

Attribution. You must attribute it, in all cases, to Raphael Lyne.

Non-commercial. You may not use it for any commercial purposes.

No Derivative Works. You may not alter, transform, or build upon it.

Any requests to use the essay in a way not covered by this license should be directed to the author.

King's College Chapel, Cambridge, part of the Britain Express travel guide to Cambridgeshire, highlighting attractions, history, and visitor information.Â King's College Chapel, Cambridge. History, tourist information, and nearby accommodation. By david ross, editor. Historic Connections. Nearby attractions. Accommodation. More Photos. HERITAGE RATING The King's College of -Our Lady and St Nicholas in Cambridge was founded in 1441 by King Henry VI and munificently endowed. King Henry VI laid the foundation stone for the Chapel in 1446, and it was completed in its entirety in 1544, thus taking some 100 years to build. Famous alumni include David Baddiel (comedian, novelist & television presenter), Lily Cole (actor and entrepreneur) and Rupert Brooke (poet). One of the 31 constituent Colleges that make up the University of Cambridge, King's College was founded by King Henry VI in 1441 and has continuously striven to uphold Henry's love for education, religion, learning and research. Whether you are browsing this site as a potential student applicant, visitor or member, we hope that these pages will inform you and draw you closer into the life of this cherished place.Â Alumni Community. Stay connected to the King's community wherever you are in the world, attend an alumni reunion, and keep up-to-date with the College's latest news and research. Read more. The Shop at King's. Buy gifts, souvenirs, concert tickets and CDs of the King's College Choir as well as a range of exclusive products only available at the official College Shop.

King's College School. Coeducational Independent Prep school in Cambridge. Main Menu. Home.Â King's College School, West Road Cambridge CB3 9DN. Telephone: 01223 365814. Email: office@kcs.cambs.sch.uk. Buy gifts, souvenirs, concert tickets and CDs of the King's College Choir as well as a range of exclusive products only available at the official College Shop. The Shop at King's. The College Library.Â An archaeological dig at the site of the new graduate accommodation at Croft Gardens has revealed an extensive early medieval burial ground, shedding light on life and death in Cambridge from the end of the Roman period. Read more. 1 of 5.
â€°â€° Study at King's. Undergraduate Study. View deals for Cambridge University, King's College. University of Cambridge is minutes away. WiFi and parking are free at this hostel. All rooms have coffee makers.Â King's College, King's Parade, Cambridge, England, United Kingdom, 800-246-8357. Located steps from King's College. Free WiFi in lobby and free parking.