

CHAPTER I

*Allegories of Love*  
*Affect and the Art of Memory in Shakespeare's Sonnets*

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In Sonnet 122, Shakespeare's poetic persona "Will" promises to remember his beloved, the beautiful young man usually referred to as the "fair youth," in paradoxical, even perverse fashion – that is, by denying the memorializing power of his own love poetry:

Thy gift, thy tables, are within my brain  
Full charactered with lasting memory,  
Which shall above that idle rank remain  
Beyond all date, even to eternity;  
Or, at the least, so long as brain and heart  
Have faculty by nature to subsist,  
Till each to razed oblivion yield his part  
Of thee, thy record never can be missed.  
That poor retention could not so much hold,  
Nor need I tallies thy dear love to score;  
Therefore to give them from me was I bold,  
To trust those tables that receive thee more:  
    To keep an adjunct to remember thee  
    Were to import forgetfulness in me.

The speaker recalls the classical boast that monuments of writing, unlike those of marble, never fall to ruin and so offer "lasting memory," but with the intent of upending it. Replacing outer writing with inner writing, this book with his body, the speaker makes himself into the place of "lasting memory" that writing only pretends to be, constructing himself as a memorial to love. To make this case, the speaker evokes the art of memory through its most common mnemonic metaphors, books and buildings, and in ways that make the speaker sound remarkably like Hamlet: just as Hamlet promises to "remember" his father by wiping the "table of my memory" so that his father's command will be in "the book and volume of my brain, / Unmixed with baser matter" (1.5.103–4), so the speaker of Sonnet 122 writes upon the "tables . . . within [his] brain" and "heart,"

constructing himself as a living memory theater that merges the architectural and scribal as metaphoric storage spaces for memory.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, “Will” also indirectly acknowledges that his mnemonic structure is only human, and thus also time-bound and destined to decay, along with the memory of his beloved and the poetic memorial fashioned for him. The immortality of poetry topos thus collapses twofold, as both internal and external locations for memory are subject to inexorable ruin – inevitably reduced to “razed oblivion” – despite the obvious irony that Shakespeare’s speaker makes this claim in writing and as poetry.

Shakespeare treats the relationship between affect and the art of memory in Sonnet 122, as throughout the *Sonnets*, in far more significant ways than these mnemonic metaphors might suggest. With Sonnet 122, the speaker presents a palinode, a “taking back poem” in action, which symbolically retracts the very poem before its readers and indeed, it seems, this poetry writ large. It is also a palinode to another poet’s palinode, I will argue, one which Shakespeare remembers and rewrites, and which is central to his poetics of memory. The speaker’s rejection of writing as an “adjunct” that will “import forgetfulness” recalls the cautionary tale that Socrates gives to another “fair youth” in Plato’s *Phaedrus*: the story of the Egyptian king Theuth, who rejects the “gift” of writing from the god Thoth, precisely as a deceptive aid-to-memory that would “import forgetfulness” by creating a dependence on external rather than internal remembrance, on artificial rather than natural memory, from which Socrates concludes that writing is nothing more than a mere “reminder.”<sup>2</sup> Crucially, this story about remembering and forgetting caps Socrates’ “palinode” to the God of Love, which he performs as though a poet remembering another poet’s palinode to love: a story about how love, like writing, can serve as a crucial “reminder” because of its power to lead the fallen, forgetful soul from ruin to recollection, repair, and even rebirth, from *anamnesia* to *anamnesis*. The tale of Theuth thus serves as an ironic reminder of the importance of reminders in Socrates’ palinode, an allegory of love that doubles as a teaching tale for philosophy as a love of wisdom. With this tale, moreover, Plato underscores the clear irony that he memorializes Socrates’ teachings in writing despite his apparent rejection of it, both as a love story and as an art of memory. Plato’s allegory of love in the *Phaedrus*, as in the *Symposium*, remakes mnemonic poetics for philosophy in ways that profoundly influence the Platonic sonnet tradition and shape Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*.

This essay explores the relationship between affect and the art of memory, the psychological and physiological responses at the heart of such

personal and poetic remembrance, written into Shakespeare's *Sonnets* as Platonic and anti-Platonic allegories of love and poetry.<sup>3</sup> The art of memory – a colloquial term for an art which goes by many names, including artificial memory, mnemonics, and locational or spatial memory systems – is more than a rhetorical method of memorization or aid-to-memory, as it has been understood historically. Rather, the art of memory represents first and foremost a poetics whose principles derive from epic poetry and performance, and whose affective power – the emotional force which makes it memorable, which moves and marks the mind, body, and soul – is drawn from memories of love, paradigmatically, and stories about it. The *ars memorativa* meets the *ars amatoria* in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, as throughout the poetic tradition explored here, represented in metapoetic fashion: as an allegory of love that returns to ancient poetics by rewriting the origin story of the art of memory, the tale of the ancient Greek poet Simonides, who discovers the art of memory when he memorially reconstructs an edifice from its ruins. More than marking the decline and fall of the immortality of poetry topos, Sonnet 122 repudiates and in effect 'ruins' the ideal of Platonic love and poetry which has governed the *Sonnets* from the start, and which Shakespeare represents as an allegory of love: the speaker's doomed desire for the rebirth of antiquity in his poetry, and the early modern poetics that emerge from the failure of this fantasy. The personal is poetic, the speaker's "passions" partially veiling Shakespeare's allegory of love as an art of poetry and an art of memory.

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What is the art of memory?<sup>4</sup> This colloquial term is usually understood as meaning an "art" in the technical sense – a technique or teachable method – in the context of ancient Greek and Roman rhetoric and pedagogy, as a strategy by which orators could memorize speeches. The mnemonic method is fairly simple: orators would construct a mental structure – either real or imagined, most often as a building or book – and then furnish and fill this space with images designed to spark and spur recollection. The orator would mentally traverse these spaces, 'walk through' or 'read from' them during the course of delivery, the places creating an order for topics and the images prompting the remembrance of them. And the more striking the images, the more memorable. As classical sources on the art of memory attest, this art depends upon the affective response that these mental images produce: upon the clear causal relationship between being 'moved' by emotion and its effects on memory.<sup>5</sup>

Yet this mnemonic method associated with rhetoric has a more complicated relationship to poetics, to literary theory and practice. Philip Sidney suggests as much in his sixteenth-century *Apology for Poetry*: “Even they that have taught the art of memory have showed nothing so apt for it as a certain room divided into many places,” he asserts, which describes “verse in effect perfectly, every word having his natural seat, which seat must needs make the words remembered.”<sup>6</sup> Scholars have long recognized the place of the *ars memorativa* in representational art: the use of the mnemonic places and images to construct a literary work as a memorial structure, a poetic monument of sorts, which houses complex and vivid images – often densely allegorical and symbolic, violent and erotic – designed to be memorable by producing a powerful affective response. We remember best through provocations to the imagination – and, of course, few things are more memorable than love and stories about it.

In contrast to most historical accounts of mnemonics, I want to approach the art of memory less as a rhetorical method used to construct a literary monument than as a poetics of ruin and recollection, less a product than a process of art.<sup>7</sup> The art of memory bears an intimate relationship to the art of poetry from the start, as the origin story of the art of memory suggests: the tale of the ancient Greek poet Simonides. As the story goes, Simonides discovered the importance of place to memory when he narrowly escaped being crushed to death in the collapse of a banquet hall in which he had just delivered a poem. When everyone there was “buried in the ruins” and their bodies crushed beyond recognition, Simonides alone was able to identify the deceased “from his recollection of the place in which each had sat, to have given satisfactory directions for their interment.”<sup>8</sup> The dramatic and traumatic nature of this tale – depicting recollection born from ruin, rebirth from death – lends it its affective power: makes it unforgettable. Simonides memorially reconstructs the ruined banquet hall and the dead therein, a tale from which the rules of the art of memory derive: the construction of places by which to remember topics, the ‘heads’ of subjects linked to the heads of the dead. The story of Simonides demonstrates and indeed dramatizes the very method it teaches, the architectural mnemonic, and it points to a central pun of the *ars memorativa* tradition: “edify” and “edifice” are linked in rhetorical education. But this is also a poetry lesson, I would argue. The tale of Simonides joins the art of memory to the art of poetry not simply because the origin story involves a famous poet, but because the story itself dramatizes the poetic principles – the creation of vivid, evocative images and places with which to frame them – upon which the art of memory is

built. Simonides is credited with formulating the idea that “painting is silent poetry, poetry a speaking picture,” and thus drawing a relationship between the visual and the verbal; conceptually, this is at the heart of the art of memory as, metaphorically, internal writing or drawing that leaves its mark both psychologically and physiologically.<sup>9</sup> The tale of Simonides introduces a lesson in the art of memory in Cicero’s *De oratore*, a dialogue on the art of rhetoric which explicitly reenacts and rewrites Plato’s *Phaedrus*. Cicero gestures to his complex emulation of Plato by introducing the tale of Simonides with another tale, an ironic version and inversion of Socrates’ tale of Theuth: a story of the ancient Greek general Themistocles, who rejects being taught the art of memory because he longs for an “art of forgetting.” However, the art of memory ultimately has a far greater role to play in *De oratore*, which Cicero dramatizes by reenacting the tale of Simonides as the frame tale for his dialogue. Albeit indirectly, Cicero plays the part of a poet, that of a new Simonides, by recollecting the “ruins” of Rome and the death of the speakers as a “memorial to posterity,” and explicitly in imitation of “the dialogues of Plato, in . . . which the character of Socrates is represented” (III.ii, iv). By treating the art of memory as a poetics, the means by which he constructs a literary memorial that remembers the ruins of the past, Cicero implicitly reveals the art of memory’s role in Plato’s *Phaedrus* and its twin dialogue, *Symposium*.

Simonides is an important subject and subtext throughout Plato’s dialogues, and nowhere more clearly than in the *Republic*. Here, Simonides’ sense of poetic justice (tellingly introduced by a story about Themistocles) inspires the seminal debate about poetry’s place in an ideal Republic about how the passions poetry inflames are at odds with reason and the larger critique of the ‘lies’ of poets, elements of what Socrates calls the “ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy.”<sup>10</sup> The initial debate about Simonides’ poetry leads both to poetry’s expulsion from this imagined Republic – itself, of course, a poetic construct – and to poetry’s conditional return to this place in a new form: that is, as philosophical allegory, which Socrates dramatizes by telling the tale of the warrior Er’s rebirth from the underworld through recollection, his journey from *amnesia* to *anamnesis*. And though Socrates never tells the tale of Simonides per se in the *Phaedrus*, he nevertheless writes a version of it with the tale of Theuth, which represents an earlier origin story of artificial memory in writing. Socrates treats the art of memory as an oral art – that of the poet in performance, telling epic tales of ruined cities and ruinous love. Even as he scorns artificial memory, openly mocking “the inventor

of . . . mnemonic verse,” Socrates nevertheless appropriates mnemonic poetics for philosophy as an allegory of love.<sup>11</sup> He remakes artificial memory into a form of natural memory, into an internal mnemonic rather than an external aid-to-memory, thus returning it to its original form. To do so, Socrates tells two competing love stories, of ‘wrong’ and ‘right’ love, which also represent the competing disciplines of rhetoric and philosophy. In the process of marking this division, he nevertheless conflates rhetoric with poetics, implying throughout that both fields use the poet’s mnemonic method – the art of memory – to tell or perform the same old love stories: tales of love as a destructive, ruinous force, which amount to political and pedagogical allegories about power and remembering the past. Socrates rejects this perspective with a palinode to the God of Love, self-consciously adopting the role of the poet in the process, which ‘takes back’ this false idea of love, or ideal of false love. Socrates credits the palinode that he claims to remember and reenact to the poet Stesichorus, who retracted his false accusations against Helen of Troy; thus the archetypal story of love’s ruinous effects is transformed into one of recollection, one that represents the love of wisdom, philo-sophia. Imagining the soul as a chariot drawn by two horses of desire (one wanton and wild, the other tame and temperate), Socrates describes how the soul “burdened with a load of forgetfulness . . . sheds her wings and falls to earth” (248c), but regrows them and re-ascends to the heavens when reminded by love, a transformation that elevates reason over passion, subduing desire through dialectic (249c). Whereas the ‘wrong’ kind of love leads to love sickness, “perplexed and frenzied,” driven by “madness” and desire that leads the soul to “forget . . . all” else, the ‘right’ kind of love, the love of wisdom, leads to the soul’s remembrance of things past and the reformation of the soul (251d–e). The “sight” of the beloved spurs the chariot “driver’s memory [back] to that form of beauty,” and when passion is tamed it results in the “friendship of a lover” (254b). Calling his palinode “perforce poetical, to please Phaedrus,” Socrates confesses that he plays the part of a poet, adapting the art of memory as an allegory of love about the love of wisdom (257a). In the context of this role, Socrates contends that no “man [can] come to the gates of poetry without the madness of the Muses” (345a), and that the madness of the lover is that of the poet and, in turn, the philosopher.<sup>12</sup> Such allegory is the means by which Plato justifies poetry’s place in society: rather than mere love stories about ruin, his are edifying tales that reform poetics for new, higher purposes, and which represent deeper truths beneath the veil of ‘lies.’

The *Symposium* extends this allegory of love as defining the love of wisdom by rewriting the tale of Simonides anew. In this implicit poetry

competition dedicated to praising the God of love as something more than a dangerous and deranging force, Socrates tells the story of his education in the philosophy of love, a tall tale which he represents as remembrance. As he recounts it, his teacher Diotima defined love as a "longing for the endless fame," a desire for "immortality" shared by all, from parents and poets to philosophers. Some pursue immortality through procreation and others through poetry, but those "whose procreancy is of the spirit" beget "wisdom": "it is the office of every poet . . . to beget them, and of every artist whom we may call creative," which includes Socrates.<sup>13</sup> In this allegory of love, beauty is the reminder which allows the soul to ascend "the heavenly ladder" from the physical to the philosophical in pursuit of immortal memory (211c). This recollected story of the soul connects with that of the *Phaedrus*, partly through direct address to that dialogue's title character: "So you may call this my eulogy of Love, Phaedrus," Socrates concludes (212c). The dialogue ends with the narrator's memory of Socrates arguing that "the tragic poet might be a comedian as well," or a satirist such as himself (223d). Described as a "giant exercise in oral recall," the *Symposium* implicitly reenacts the tale of Simonides through its framing device: a banquet hall, a space of poetry and performance, is imaginatively recreated after the death of Socrates and the other interlocutors, by a person who had learned the story from another.<sup>14</sup> Standing as a symbolic memorial to Socrates, the *Symposium* is a mnemonic space through which Plato plays the part of Simonides, remembering the dead and recollecting the ruins of time.

Albeit indirectly, Plato's treatment of the art of memory *as* art, a poetics transformed for philosophy and rendered as teaching tales about remembering, underlies the allegorical sonnet tradition. To remember and forget Platonic love, and to be divided between the right and wrong kinds of love, is foundational to Dante's and Petrarch's sonnets and the mnemonic poetics they fashion; this is especially clear in their mutual debt to Augustine, who in *Confessions* appropriates the Ciceronian and Platonic art of memory for Christianity, 'converts' it, in effect, for his love story about divinity.<sup>15</sup> Augustine's autobiographical allegory of divine love recounts the reformation of his fallen, forgetful soul as a "house in ruins," which he rebuilds as a house of God.<sup>16</sup> His spiritual conversion turns on mnemonic poetics, his transformation of artificial memory – memory as a "spacious palace, a storehouse for countless images" – into a Platonic allegory of his journey from amnesia to *anamnesis*, the recollection of divine love through 'reminders' in writing, from Socrates to scripture (X.8). In their poetry, Dante and Petrarch grapple with Augustine's

dismissal of poetry as representative of the wrong kind of love – famously, he “wept for Dido” while forgetting himself – but also to emulate his reformation of poetics in their own allegories of love (I.13). For both poets, to remember love is to remember Rome from ruins, secular and sacred, as immortalized in the palindrome *roma summus amor*.<sup>17</sup> Their allegories of love – divine and human, personified through Beatrice and Laura – double as allegories of poetry, and their sonnet sequences suggest how the poetry’s “pretty rooms” (as Donne describes the stanzas of the sonnet in poem “The Canonization”) create a space for reflecting in metapoetic ways about how poetry remembers the past.<sup>18</sup>

Yet Dante and Petrarch remember (and forget) Augustine’s allegorical justification for poetry in very different ways. Dante writes an Augustinian “Book of Memory” with the *Vita nuova*, a confessional collection of sonnets and a statement of allegorical poetics made to reconcile the secular with the sacred, the sonnet with the soul and salvation, and which begins the journey of the allegorical Everyman to Paradise in *The Divine Comedy*.<sup>19</sup> By contrast, Petrarch “ruins” what Dante reconciles by imagining poetry as “ruinae”: spaces for recollection, but ones which could never reconstruct the past or fully reform the poet’s soul.<sup>20</sup> In an ironic turn on the conversion narrative, Petrarch remains divided between times, past and present, and between loves; the love of Laura (and laureate poetry) remains in tension with the love of God, the immortality of the soul with literary immortality. In other words, love leads Petrarch not to remember or reform his soul but rather to “forget” himself.<sup>21</sup> And although Petrarch is usually credited with the temporal creation of the “Renaissance” – as the rebirth of an idealized antiquity through which he sought to illuminate his own dark age – the failure of this fantasy ultimately defines Petrarch’s poetry and the afterlife of Petrarchism in the English sonnet.<sup>22</sup> To remember and forget Petrarchan love and by extension Platonic love is also, in Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*, a way to remember the art of memory and the art of poetry in new ways.

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Shakespeare puts these mnemonic poetics into practice in the *Sonnets* in metapoetic fashion: he ruins and recollects, reconstructs, and deconstructs the fantasy of classical rebirth associated with the sonnet tradition, using an old method to tell a new love story. The failure to remember, and the pain and pleasure of love associated with forgetting, lies at the heart of Shakespeare’s Platonic allegory of love poetry.<sup>23</sup> Returning to Sonnet



122, recall that the speaker symbolically retracts the “gift” of his writing to and about the “fair youth” – ironically, the very poems before the reader and, it seems, the sonnet collection writ large – on the grounds that, as he ruefully concludes, “To keep an adjunct to remember thee / Were to import forgetfulness in me” (122.13–14). Evoking mnemonic metaphors, the speaker asserts that only poetry written in the book and volume of his “brain” and remembered by his “heart” will last until “eternity,” a boast he then qualifies by admitting that both book and body ultimately will fall to “razed oblivion” (122.4–7). Shakespeare’s poetic persona thus rejects his own writing as an agent of forgetting, which he attempts to forget himself, as though rewriting or reenacting Socrates’ tale of Theuth. Yet this rejection of writing as a mere “reminder,” as Socrates puts it, acts as an ironic reminder of Socrates’ palinode to the God of Love: his ‘taking back’ poem about how the right kind of love – like writing – can be a reminder, guiding the forgetful soul from ruin to recollection, an allegory of love as *anamnesis*. However, Sonnet 122 instead moves in the opposite direction from the *Phaedrus*: the speaker’s “palinode” not only retracts his own poetry; it also retracts Socrates’ palinode to love, recuperating the love it repudiates.

Sonnet 122 thus marks the fall of the immortality of poetry topos and the ideal of Platonic love that it has been built upon, which has shaped the *Sonnets* up until this point and defined its poetics of memory. Love has led “Will” not to recollection but to ruin, oblivion, love sickness, madness, the very dangers and derangements described in the *Phaedrus*, which Socrates refutes. With this failure of Platonic love and poetics, Shakespeare ironically draws attention to the allegorical nature of his sonnets as a love story about poetry over time: classical, medieval, renaissance, and, ultimately, something distinctly ‘early modern.’ The speaker’s anachronistic desire for the rebirth of antiquity, and the madness that accompanies his quixotic attempts to realize it, lies at the heart of this allegory of love. The project of the *Sonnets* is partly revealed in Sonnet 122: to rewrite the allegorical love stories of the twin Platonic dialogues, the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, as a new art of memory. This sonnet also highlights the divide between the speaker’s “forgetfulness” and Shakespeare’s remembrance, the ways in which the poet stands apart from his poetic persona. Sonnet 122 is a crucial pivot point in this sequence, from which I will look in two directions: first back to the ideal of Platonic love and poetry that defines the *Sonnets* up to this point, and then forward to the anti-Platonic love by which Shakespeare reimagines poetics.

The *Sonnets* begins with a version of ideal Platonic love and poetry that verges on satire: the speaker’s ardent belief that ideal love *should* lead to

recollection and that poetry *should* repair the ruins of the past, immortalizing both love and poetry in a monumental architecture. But he takes Platonic love too literally, indeed to the point of caricature, in his self-conscious reenactment of Plato's dialogues. The "procreation sonnets," addressed to the "fair youth," recall the fair youth of the *Phaedrus*, and the speaker repeats a version of Socrates' story in the *Symposium* about Diotima's love lesson as a "desire for immortality" – a desire to live on in "memory" and for "fame" – usually pursued through procreation or poetry. Misreading Platonic love – as he later admits, "thy great gift, upon misprision growing" (87.11) – "Will" enacts his 'will' as a transaction based upon these two paths to remembrance: he exhorts the "fair youth" to procreate in order to immortalize himself, and in turn promises that he will immortalize the youth's beauty, and his own love, with these sonnets. The speaker sees his poetry as an art of memory in a limited sense, as the creation of a memorial space – a book-as-building – which he furnishes with images of the beloved. As in Socrates' palinode to the God of Love, the image of the beloved's beauty spurs the speaker's recollection, the affective force of love guiding his memorialization of him. The speaker describes this art of memory in pictorial and architectural terms evocative of Simonides' dictum, "painting is silent poetry, poetry a speaking picture." As though himself a "speaking picture," the speaker urges his love to "learn to read what silent love hath writ: / To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit" (23.13–14). He portrays himself as a "painter" of his beloved and constructs a gallery for his art of memory, a portrait hall of images painted in his imagination and rendered in writing: "Thy beauty's form in the table of [his] heart," his "body" the "frame wherein 'tis held," his "bosom's shop" where his "true image pictured lies" and "is hanging still" (24.2–3, 5–7).<sup>24</sup> But the speaker's view of the art of memory depends on a clichéd "misprision" that results in him "mistaking" Platonic love, as Shakespeare suggests.

This is Platonic love perforce, as the speaker suppresses and sublimates his passion into poetry, 'wills' it into being, and in ways that recall the central myth of the Petrarchan sonnet: Daphne's transformation into the laurel tree, the crown of poet laureate as compensation for that unrequited love of the past that Petrarch's "Laura" represents. From the very start, the speaker's procrustean efforts to shape his passion and poetry to this ideal, and his failure to do so, exposes the fantasy of Renaissance or rebirth as just that: an impossible dream. The speaker suggests that his homoerotic desire is out of place and time – "the master-mistress of [his] passion" has by "Nature" been "pricked . . . out for women's pleasure" – and that his love

truly belongs to another place and time, that of an idealized antiquity (20.2, 13). Will's divided will (his desire and determination that, for the sake of posterity, the youth must procreate and he must write poetry that will perpetuate his memory) speaks to his anachronistic desire for the past reborn: the Renaissance as a cliché. Yet instead of a backward-looking Petrarchan gaze, the speaker looks to preserve the present for the future. When he considers how all "wear their brave state out of memory," he declares war on Time: "And all in war with Time for love of you," he tells his beloved in Sonnet 15, "As he takes from you I ingraft you new" (15.8, 13–14).<sup>25</sup> This "war with Time for love" is ultimately allegorical: an allegory of poetry and poetics over time, represented as a love story (of a kind) about remembering the past and poetry born from ruin.

The speaker imagines his doomed attempt to defeat "Time," whether through progeny or poetry, through mnemonic metaphors: memory as 'buildings' and 'book.' By not reproducing, the youth is willfully erasing his own memory, "Seeking that beauteous roof to ruinate / Which to repair should be thy chief desire" (10.7–8). The only "defence" of the youth "gainst Time's scythe" is to "breed" (12.13–14), lest he "lets so fair a house fall to decay, / Which husbandry in honour might uphold / Against the stormy gusts of winter's day / And barren rage of death's eternal cold" (13.9–12). As the speaker describes his own limbs as "Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang," he suggests that this desire is directed as much toward himself as his muse (73.4). Grandiose claims to literary immortality find their teetering apex in Sonnet 55, which reiterates Horace's boast that he has built an eternal monument to his beloved's memory. "Not marble nor the gilded monuments / Of princes shall outlive this pow'ful rhyme," or "sluttish time" erase "The living record of your memory," the speaker declares, but then qualifies this promise: his memory "shall still find room / Even in the eyes of all posterity / That wear this world out to the ending doom" (55.1–12). His sonnets' "pretty rooms" stand as a monument built to last the ravages of time, but only until the end of time. Whereas in Sonnet 122 the speaker marks the end of his memory with his own death, here his evocation of end-time creates a jarring juxtaposition between old and new views of time: the temporal framework of pagan antiquity in which time could be imagined as endless, cyclical rather than linear, contrasted with Christian revelation, the time when time itself ends. In Sonnet 64, the speaker poignantly admits that his war to defeat time inevitably will end with his own defeat by time: "When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced . . . / When sometime lofty towers I see down rased, / . . . Ruin hath taught me

thus to ruminate: / That Time will come and take my love away” (64.1–3, 11–12).

However, “Time” is not only the enemy of his Platonic love; it is also his unwilling muse. The failure of the speaker’s will to temporal rebirth is figured as personal and poetic betrayal – most notably through the presence of the “rival poet,” whose arrival in Sonnet 77 occasions a reframing of the speaker’s Platonic bargain. Sonnet 77 (the midpoint of the 1609 edition of the *Sonnets*, as for most modern editions) is a mirror for Sonnet 122, as the speaker retracts his original ‘will’ through a return to the *Symposium* and Diotima’s lesson on love and immortality therein. With a threatening memento mori addressed to the fair youth about “Time’s thievish progress to eternity” (77.8), the speaker inverts the initial bargain of the sonnet sequence and tells the beloved to immortalize *himself*:

Look what thy memory cannot contain  
 Commit to these waste blanks, and thou shalt find  
 Those children nursed, delivered from thy brain,  
 To take a new acquaintance of thy mind.  
 These offices, so oft as thou wilt look,  
 Shall profit thee, and much enrich thy book.  
 (77.9–14)

In effect, the speaker relinquishes his role as memorializing poet, offering a blank book in place of his own poetry. Diotima’s lesson in the *Symposium* is recalled here but inverted, such that this “book of memory” is meant to substitute for the youth’s own progeny – “Those children nursed, delivered from thy brain” – but one that the speaker seemingly refuses to write. His beloved is now the source of another poet’s memory, and this rival poet inspires bitter ruminations on the fair youth’s infidelity to the speaker’s vision: “my love was my decay” (80.14), he says, and despairs of his now “forgetful Muse” (100.5). The beautiful youth willfully refuses to reproduce himself, and thus in effect forgets himself, as in turn does the speaker-poet. With this acknowledgment that the Platonic bargain of the procreation sonnets has failed, in the poems that separate Sonnet 77 from Sonnet 122 the speaker increasingly reframes his love of the “fair youth” as what Socrates’ first poem in the *Phaedrus* calls the ‘wrong’ kind of love: love as passion rather than reason, forgetting rather than remembrance, ruin rather than repair: “What potions have I drunk of Siren tears . . . / What wretched errors hath my heart committed, . . . / In the distraction of this madding fever!” the speaker says of his “ruined love” (119.1, 5, 8, 11).

This dramatic decline and fall sets the stage for Sonnet 122, and the palinode to Platonic love therein, which deliberately ruins the memorial of the speaker's own poetry and recants his idea of Platonic love. In Sonnet 123, a crucial adjunct to Sonnet 122, Shakespeare uses this recantation in order to reframe what the art of memory means. He creates a new allegory of time that juxtaposes fantasies of poetic permanence with the reality of ruin, suggesting that poetics is a perpetual art, and act, of both forgetting and remembering. Pairing the immortality of poetry topos with the architectural mnemonic, the speaker reimagines monuments of both stone and writing as so many ruins that are continually rebuilt and ruined yet again. "No! Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change," the speaker charges in an apostrophe, "Thy pyramids built up with newer might / To me are nothing novel, nothing strange; / They are but dressings of a former sight" (123.1–4). Denying the novelty of new edifices built upon the ruins of the past, "Will" comes to see his own willful misprision of Platonic love and poetry as an expression of a universal dilemma and delusion wrought by time. "Our dates are brief, and therefore we admire / What thou dost foist upon us that is old, / And rather make them born to our desire / Than think that we before have heard them told," the speaker asserts, while denying this deception: "For thy records, and what we see, doth lie" (123.5–8, 11). With this recognition comes a new vision of poetry: his sonnets cannot be ruined by time because they *are* ruins, and anything built from them has been built before. Poetic monuments, like material ones, are not permanent but perpetual, always fashioned and refashioned from ruin.

Tacitly, the speaker admits that his poetry too is "nothing novel, nothing strange." Indirectly, he addresses the fantasy of rebirth that has driven his poetry – the way that authors and audiences remake "old" things "born to our desire" and believe them to be new – and rejects his former fantasy of "renaissance" itself as the rebirth of an idealized antiquity (123.6–7). That's a "lie," he says, while promising to remain "true" to his love despite time's deceptions (123.11, 14). Sonnet 123 suggests that monuments of both stone and poetry find a form of immortality within ruin itself and the cyclical process of reedification, an architectural metaphor that gestures to the shared etymology of "edify" and "edifice," and which would seem to encapsulate the speaker's poetry lesson. Separating himself from "the fools of Time," as he derisively calls naïve architects in Sonnet 124, the speaker redefines himself against them in Sonnet 125: unlike those who "laid great bases for eternity, / Which proves more short than waste or ruining," he embraces the ruins of time (124.13,

125.3–4). Casting aside former immortal longings, he affirms that no “Renaissance” is ever possible, declaring such rebirth to be fantasy – a seductive fiction to delude or deceive oneself or others.

These poems inaugurate a profound shift in the *Sonnets*: to an anti-Platonic allegory of love that rejects fantasies of Renaissance – the rebirth of antiquity and the love/poetry that it represents – and embraces one that is medieval in form but made thoroughly (early) modern.<sup>26</sup> This new understanding of poetry in ruins is then reapplied to the love allegory through the creation of a new beloved – one who is explicitly imperfect, mutable, and ‘ruined’ herself. The speaker’s own ‘middle age’ is represented as an allegory of love/poetry, which turns from an idealized homoerotic Platonic love to an anti-Platonic heterosexual desire, driven by irrational passions rather than reason. In this context, the speaker of the *Sonnets* finally and formally introduces himself: “Make but my name thy love, and love that still, / And then thou lovest me for my name is Will” (136.13–14). The speaker and Shakespeare, poet and persona, come together in this name and in this attitude toward love and poetry. This name also matters not only because of its various meanings – desire, determination, the future and its inheritance, and more – but also because of its allegorical significance as the name of a medieval Everyman: the allegorical “Will” of *Piers Ploughman*, who represents the willful sinfulness of mankind in search of salvation. Shakespeare treats this allegorical name irreverently, to say the very least: “I am that I am,” the speaker proclaims in a parody of playing God, ironically to affirm that “All men are bad” – himself, above all (121.9, 14).

The so-called dark lady poems that conclude the *Sonnets* represent the medieval sonnet tradition minus the morality, from which emerges a kind of “immorality of poetry” topos. Shakespeare borrows the language of sin and salvation, the ruin and remembrance of the soul, central to the sonnet tradition – “Love is my sin, and thy dear virtue hate, / Hate of my sin, grounded on sinful loving” – but here emptied of sacral significance (142.1–2). Petrarchan paradoxes are used to describe the speaker’s divided loves, his “better angel” and “worser spirit,” as though in a morality play but without any moralizing meaning – a perversion of the conversion narrative, which in some sense emulates and extends the secular turn in Petrarch’s own poetry (144.3–4). The speaker confesses to less-than-Platonic loves, having relinquished the spiritual for the sexual: “Th’expense of spirit in a waste of shame / Is lust in action,” desire “Past reason,” “Mad in pursuit, and in possession so,” “the heaven that leads men to this hell,” an anatomical pun on the afterlife (129.1, 7, 9, 14). Yet

he remains unrepentant in any religious sense, and his expressions of regret serve only to highlight an ironic irreverence, indeed, a satire of the Catholic sonnet.<sup>27</sup> And though it is perfectly Petrarchan to be torn between two loves that allegorically represent two time periods and perspectives on poetry, Shakespeare turns this trope into a twisted temporal love triangle – “I have confessed that he is thine, / And I myself am mortgaged to thy will, . . . / Him have I lost, thou hast both him and me” – which is an allegory of poetics as erotics, copulative in every sense (134.1–2, 13). The speaker’s own long ‘middle age’ subsumes what comes before and after, an allegory of love and poetics over “Time” clearly charged with corrupting the morals of the medieval sonnet sequence.<sup>28</sup> The ardent embrace of the ‘wrong’ kind of love-as-poetry, driven by passion rather than reason, reaches its apex in Sonnet 147. In an ironic return to the palinode to the God of Love of the *Phaedrus*, “Will” implicitly performs anti-Platonic love by reenacting the love story that Socrates first rehearses and then recants. The speaker reiterates Socrates’ first love story, the tragic tale that inspires his palinode to the God of Love, which he remembers as another poet’s palinode:

My love is a fever, longing still  
 For that which longer nurseth the disease, . . .  
 My reason, the physician to my love, . . .  
 Hath left me, and I desperate now approve  
 Desire is death, which physic did except.  
 Past cure I am, now reason is past care,  
 And, frantic mad with evermore unrest,  
 My thoughts and my discourse as madmen’s are,  
 At random from the truth vainly expressed.

(147.1–2, 5, 7–11)

This kind of love – love as destructive desire and the madness that it manifests – leads him to forget himself, as the speaker admits: “Do I not think on thee when I forgot / Am of myself, all tyrant for thy sake?” (149.3–4). As “Will” embraces the ‘wrong’ kind of love, so he also embraces a poetics of deception, the ‘lies’ of the poets which he epitomizes in himself and his poetry: “For I have sworn thee fair: more perjured eye, / To swear against the truth so foul a lie” (152.13–14). The final two sonnets underscore this anti-Platonic allegory by recalling the poems that praise the God of Love in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, but as parody. Here “Cupid” (153.1), “The little Love-god” (154.1), offers “no cure” (153.13) for this deadly love-sickness: the passion of “Love’s fire,” the love which “conquers all” reason, leads not to wisdom but to willful ignorance, to disease and death rather than “rebirth,” to ruin rather than recollection (154.14).

As “Will” willingly submits to his passion, this affective turn in Shakespeare’s allegory of love would seem to reframe poetry not as an art of memory but as an “art of forgetting.” But this will to oblivion also necessarily and paradoxically remembers what it seeks to forget: a Platonic ideal of love-as-allegory which must conceal the shame of poetry and defend its value as more than pleasurable, as more than mere stories designed to seduce readers into falling in love with their own destruction. However, Shakespeare clearly prefers the naked truth, and, in the end, he unveils this poetic allegory of love as a kind of anti-allegory. The *Sonnets* implicitly refutes the idea that poetry must represent a higher spiritual truth designed to make readers more virtuous, which amounts to an indirect defense of poetry as precisely the ‘wrong’ kind of love. It’s not that poetry does nothing, Shakespeare suggests, just not what readers might expect: allegory neither justifies poetry nor makes us better than we are. Art may hold a “mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image,” Hamlet says, but it cannot change that nature; or as Ophelia, the fair maid quintessentially ‘ruined’ by love, sanely observes in the midst of her mad “remembrance”: “we know what we are, but know not what we may be” (3.2.18–19, 4.5.174, 43–44). Yet, as I have suggested, Shakespeare’s art of forgetting ultimately depends on an art of remembering, dressed up as his own allegory of love. To reject Platonic love and poetry is also to remember it, and creating a persona who contends that his poetry is “nothing new” is also a way to be novel, original by dint of denying originality. “Will’s” determination to forget serves as an ironic reminder of Shakespeare’s profound remembrance of the past and poetics, through allegories of love both old and new. And though the speaker of Sonnet 122 rejects writing as that which will “import forgetfulness” in himself and readers, the poem itself involves its audience, present and future, in the perpetual recollection of its ruin (122.14). Even as Shakespeare ruins the fantasy of monumental permanent poetry, his *Sonnets* are a written reminder that poetry’s ruins are places for remembering – for the time being, if not forever.

### Notes

- 1 On *Hamlet* and the art of memory, see Adam Max Cohen, “Hamlet as Emblem: The *Ars Memoria* and the Culture of the Play,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 3.1 (2003), 77–112; James Schiffer, “Mnemonic Cues to Passion in *Hamlet*,” *Renaissance Papers* (1995), 65–80; Lina Perkins Wilder, *Shakespeare’s Memory Theatre: Recollection, Properties, and Character*



(Cambridge University Press, 2010), chapter 4; and Hester Lees-Jeffries, *Oxford Shakespeare Topics: Shakespeare and Memory*, ed. Peter Holland and Stanley Wells (Oxford University Press, 2013), chapter 2.

- 2 *Phaedrus*, 274c–b, in Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., *Collected Dialogues of Plato* (Princeton University Press, 1961). My reading of Sonnet 122 contrasts with that of Vendler and Booth, both of whom in their commentaries understand the speaker to be referring to a physical book given to him by the beautiful young man – seemingly the same book which the speaker gave to the fair youth in Sonnet 77 when exhorting him to memorialize himself – a book which the speaker in Sonnet 122 has now seemingly lost or cast away; see Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 518–20; and Booth, ed., *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 412–13. I read “thy book” (77.14), material and memorial, as referring to the sonnet collection before us.
- 3 My use of the phrase “allegory of love” clearly draws upon C. S. Lewis’ seminal study, *Allegory of Love*, which focuses primarily on medieval poetry and poetics. However, my understanding of the relationship between the art of memory and allegory has been influenced primarily by Michael Murrin’s work, *The Veil of Allegory* (University of Chicago Press, 1969), which offers an illuminating account of the relationship between mnemonics and poetics, especially chapter 3. On the early modern sonnet sequence as social and political allegory, see Arthur F. Marotti, “‘Love Is Not Love’: Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order,” *ELH*, 49.2 (1982), 396–428.
- 4 Seminal studies on the history of the art of memory include Frances Yates’ *The Art of Memory* (University of Chicago Press, 1966); Mary Carruthers’ *The Book of Memory: A Study of Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Lina Bolzoni’s *The Gallery of Memory: Literary and Iconographic Models in the Age of the Printing Press*, trans. Jeremy Parzen (University of Toronto Press, 2001); and Paolo Rossi’s *Logic and the Art of Memory: The Quest for a Universal Language*, trans. Stephen Clucas (University of Chicago Press, 2000). On the range of the memory arts, see *The Memory Arts in Renaissance England: A Critical Anthology*, ed. William E. Engel, Rory Loughnane, and Grant Williams (Cambridge University Press, 2016). For recent work on Shakespeare and the memory arts, see *The Routledge Handbook of Shakespeare and Memory*, ed. Andrew Hiscock and Lina Perkins Wilder (London: Routledge, 2018), including my chapter on “The State of the Art of Memory and Shakespeare Studies.”
- 5 The major classical discussions of the art of memory – Cicero’s *De oratore*, the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herrenium*, and Quintillian’s *Institutio oratoria* – all describe the method and importance of creating striking images that impress themselves upon the memory. On the strategies of the memory artist in creating affecting mnemonic images, see work by Yates, Carruthers, Rossi, and Bolzoni, the latter of whom explores how “eros and memory are deeply related” in the memory arts (Bolzoni, *Gallery of Memory*, 145–62).

- 6 Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed., Forrest G. Robinson (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 54.
- 7 See Rebeca Helfer, *Spenser's Ruins and the Art of Recollection* (University of Toronto Press, 2012), chapter 1, where I offer a fuller account of the memory arts.
- 8 Cicero, "De oratore; or, On the Character of the Orator," in J. S. Watson, ed., *Cicero on Oratory and Orators* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), II.l.xxxv.
- 9 On Simonides' analogy between poetry and painting, see William E. Engel, "Mnemonic Criticism and Renaissance Literature: A Manifesto," *Connotations*, 1.1 (1991), 12–33.
- 10 Plato, "Republic," in Hamilton and Cairns, eds., *Collected Dialogues of Plato*, I–III, X.
- 11 Plato, "Phaedrus," in Hamilton and Cairns, eds., *Collected Dialogues of Plato*, 267a.
- 12 On the *Sonnets* and Platonic love, see Ronald Gray, *Shakespeare on Love in the Sonnets and Plays in Relation to Plato's Symposium, Alchemy, Christianity and Renaissance Neoplatonism* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2011). See also Danijela Kambaskovic, "'Of comfort and dispaire': Plato's Philosophy of Love and Shakespeare's Sonnets," in R. S. White, Mark Houlihan, and Katrina O'Loughlin, eds., *Shakespeare and Emotions: Inheritances, Enactments, Legacies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 17–28.
- 13 Plato, "The Symposium," in Hamilton and Cairns, eds., *Collected Dialogues of Plato*, 207a–209a.
- 14 Murrin, *Veil of Allegory*, 91.
- 15 See, for example, R. G. Spiller, *The Development of the Sonnet: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1992). My understanding of Dante's and Petrarch's treatment of memory in their sonnets focuses on the influence of Augustine's Christianized art of memory in *Confessions*, written as a Neoplatonic allegory of love about the soul's *anamnesis*; see Helfer, *Spenser's Ruins*, 48–59.
- 16 Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), 1.13. See Yates, *The Art of Memory*, and Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, on Augustine's complex relationship to the art of memory.
- 17 As Greene and Hui both suggest, Petrarch's mnemonic poetics might be said to begin with a walk through the ruins of Rome (a walk he remembers in a letter), and in this journey through memory, Petrarch articulates his love of a lost past that translates allegorically into his love poetry. See Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), especially chapter 5; and Andrew Hui, *The Poetics of Ruin in Renaissance Literature* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), chapter 3.
- 18 In "The Canonization," when Donne writes, "We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms," he connects the meaning of "stanza" in Italian as "room" or "stopping place" to the architecture of the poem, figured metaphorically as a "well-wrought urn" and monument to the memory of sinful-lovers-turned-

saints. This innovative and irreverent metaphysical conceit, I would argue, turns a conventional trope about the sonnet as a space for memory – and, indeed, as a kind of architectural mnemonic – in two directions: back to the sonnet's Catholic and confessional origins, and forward to a sexualized and secular context.

- 19 See Dante's *Vita nuova*, XXV, on the relationship between "Love" and allegory as a poetics.
- 20 Petrarch suggests as much when he refers to his poetry as *rime sparse* or "scattered rhymes." On Petrarch's view of poetry as "ruinae," see Greene, *Light in Troy*, 92.
- 21 Petrarch, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics*, ed. Robert M. Durling (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), Poem 23.
- 22 On Petrarchism in relation to Shakespeare, see Heather Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire: Petrarchism and Its Counterdiscourses* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), chapter 4; Thomas P. Roche, Jr., *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences* (New York: AMS Press, 1989), chapter 8; Richard Strier, *The Unrepentant Renaissance: From Petrarch to Shakespeare to Milton* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), chapter 1.
- 23 On forgetting and/as remembering in the *Sonnets*, see Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr.'s "Voicing the Young Man: Memory, Forgetting, and Subjectivity in the Procreation Sonnets" and Amanda Watson, "Full character'd: Competing Forms of Memory in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*," both in Michael Schoenfeldt, ed., *A Companion to Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 331–42, 343–60. See also Peter Holland, *Shakespeare and Forgetting* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).
- 24 Bolzoni examines the gallery as mnemonic trope in *Gallery of Memory*, 204–13.
- 25 See Raymond B. Waddington on the art of memory in "Shakespeare's Sonnet 15 and the Art of Memory," in Thomas O. Sloan and Raymond B. Waddington, eds., *The Rhetoric of Renaissance Poetry: From Wyatt to Milton* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 96–122.
- 26 On the de-idealized poetics of the *Sonnets*, see Joel Fineman's classic account, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), where he argues that Shakespeare's anti-Platonism is the source of his new poetics of subjectivity.
- 27 See Strier, *The Unrepentant Renaissance*, chapter 1, on Shakespeare's treatment of this theme.
- 28 Shakespeare's art of memory, by which he represents a medieval poetics-turned-early modern, is reinforced in *A Lover's Complaint*, the narrative poem appended to the *Sonnets* and its de facto conclusion. A 'ruined' maid remembers her seduction and destruction by a deceptive lover, described through metaphors of mnemonic poetics, by which Shakespeare defends poetry as the 'wrong' kind of love: as 'lies' that seduce both maid and reader alike, but which both desire all the same. In the end, the maid confesses that she would do it all again, and allow her poet-seducer to "new pervert a reconciled maid" (*A Lover's Complaint*, 329).