A Cloister of Remembered Sounds: A Defense of Memorization as a Pedagogical Practice

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Chapter 1

Introduction

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Children and old men and philosophers,
Bald heads with their mother's voice still in their ears.
The self is a cloister full of remembered sounds
And of sounds so far forgotten, like her voice,
That they return unrecognized.

—Wallace Stevens, "The Woman That Had More Babies Than That"

Some of my oldest memories are of my father reciting poetry: Hamlet's soliloquy, Cyrano's "No, thank you," Kipling's "If," Robert Service's "Soldier of Fortune." When I recall this half-forgotten life, I cannot see the room or the walls or even my father's face, but I can hear his words and his proud voice in my mind. In moments of high extravagance, he would wave his arms in wild gesture and boom theatrically for his audience, and I, his crowd of one, would look up and grin at this towering figure who seemed to belong in a world grander than our own. At times, I felt myself transported to another life in a far-off land. I heard the clash of rapiers. I saw the tribes that ringed me with their spears. I trembled at the roar of Saint Crispin's day, and I was filled with the sense that behind those blue hills that circled my little town were moments of exaltation that I, in feverish anticipation, would await. Those poems gave me the vision of a life bursting at the seams. They fed that glowing ember in my boyish heart, that secret hope that I would be the hero in this little life of mine. And so long as I remember those words, that little flame in my heart, that spark I call my life, shall never perish.

Thomas Wolfe once said that "we are the sum of all the moments of our lives—all that is ours is in them: we cannot escape or conceal it."[1] Personality is not fashioned *ex nihilo*. It is plundered from the coffers of wisdom and experience that surround our daily lives. We are all patchwork souls, little chunks and swatches of character gathered from those who've come before us. We are merely a thin barrier, cut through by influence, permeated by our company. The chorus of voices and influences that surround us deeply matter in our lives— in many ways they are what we will become. If this is true, then a good bit of me is poetry—a good bit of my soul is the vision of a man hungering for scraps of adventure, lost in something greater and more powerful than himself. In those half-remembered days in the spring of my life, my father's words had burrowed deep inside my soul and taken primitive shape. They had become the "clay of

[1] Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel*, (New York: Scribner, 2006), xxix.

life," my own batch of raw material that would be beaten and fashioned by time and years into the form I call my own.[2]

I'm forever grateful to my father that in the blindness and blank confusion of my youth, my life was furnished with beauty. My father had unwittingly followed the advice of Hart Crane: I was "drenched in words, literally soaked in them," in the hopes that someday "the right ones [would] form themselves into the proper pattern at the right moment."[3] But I fear I may be the last generation raised in a world of language and poetry. Today, the incessant babble of TikTok, reality TV, and the insipid dreck we call "popular culture" captivates a generation of young minds. Babies swipe on their iPads and little Johnny is swallowed in a gleam of bright light and flashing colors emanating from the television. Some suggest that this change is unimportant or that the true problem of our era is quite the opposite: *too little* technology. They want to combine smartboards, interactive slideshows, electronic polling, and digital infographics in some sickening display of grotesque overstimulation. Gone are the days, they believe, when children could read lines on a page and declare with Emerson "This is my music, this is myself."[4] Today everything must be augmented; children must be initiated into the holographic hyper-reality. They must learn to type incoherent codes of letters and numbers to make pretty lights on a machine that cannot teach you how to live, a machine that does not care about your soul.

Reflecting on this unhappy state, I cannot help but declare with Milton's Satan "But O how fall'n! how chang'd..." (*PL*: I. 84). Many of today's youth will remember nothing from their childhood but spasms of desire and a barrage of fragmented imagery. They will have no sacred words, no sweet, sad music that rings in their hearts. Everything today is borrowed from the lowest of cultural trash heaps: wedding vows stolen from an empty pop song; prayers taken from a fortune cookie; an epitaph lifted from a corporate slogan. This is the spiritual poverty of our age. We live in an aesthetic vacuum. High art is all but lost, and what's worse, this is greeted only with an insouciant shrug. Many are unconcerned that today's children do not know "Casabianca" and do not understand Chaucer. Poetry today seems a hopeless anachronism, a relic from an antique land that cannot compete with the orgy of CGI explosions in the newest blockbuster movie. It was once thought that all children should carry within them a secret trove of beauty and that every new poem might add to their treasures. The rich, the poor, the sick, the healthy would all at least have an equal share of literature and poetry to call upon in their moments of loss, despair, happiness, success, infatuation, love, defeat, rapture. But the practice of memorization and recitation has now been largely abandoned, and in 1982, *The New York Times* reported that the "guidelines promulgated at Board of Education headquarters no longer emphasize literary memorization. The only group for whom the practice is still suggested are children in early elementary grades."[5] Quite literally, we have forgotten beauty.

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[2] Wolfe, xxix.
[3] Hart Crane, *O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane,* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1997), 72.
[4] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature and Selected Essays,* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003), 97.
[5] Gene I. Maeroff, "Use of Memorization in Schools Fading," *The New York Times*, June 8, 1982.

The critics of learning by rote have suggested that many of the poems recited in school do not pertain to the immediate experiences of children. They lack "relatedness" and "relevance" in the modern world. Those who would replace Yeats and Tennyson with JavaScript and C++ believe we should exchange what they see as a rude and outdated study for a subject with more "practical application."[6] I fear that this constant focus on the utility value of texts will force children to eke out some petty existence feeding on the diseased products of modern culture. If we are to preserve the spirit of adventure and imagination, we cannot shun the fruits of inspiration and reduce life to a diet of dull roots and ragged weeds. If we have any hope of cultivating a rich interior life for today's youth, we must not condemn them to what Nietzsche called the "slowly turning swamp of sounds without tune and rhythms without dance."[7] We must provide children every chance to develop their "third ear," a special sixth sense that detects subtle intimations of melody in the garbled speech of daily life.[8] A choice word or a fine phrase must glimmer like a gem the moment it is heard, while a stilted clause must provoke a mysterious and sudden bout of nausea. This is the mark of a well-tuned third ear.

To become sensitive to the subtleties of language at a deeply unconscious level, students must be steeped in heightened prose and fine poetry, but more than that, they must remember what they read. Too often, teachings storm upon the young mind flooding it with words and phrases that bounce off the dry surface and do not sink deep into the dark and rich soil below. Unless students commit words to memory, the nourishments of education are lost like runoff in a great storm. Students must not just read the teachings of Eliot, Yeats, Pound, and Wolfe, they must strive to retain them for all their days. Memorization augments the mind by exercising one of the primary functions of cognition (retention and recall), but what's more, it forges together the self and the sublime in the white heat of inspiration and provides a vast store of intellectual fuel to be plundered by the young mind. In the beginning, genius must be robbed from others. To strike up the heat of our forge, we must steal little embers from another man's fire and first exercise our art in poor pastiche and mimicry. But this is only to do as all men must—no flame supplies its own fuel. If we are to have any creative life or spirit, we must borrow from those who have come before us—only later may we begin to distinguish the unique lines and shading of our soul and reveal ourselves in chiseled relief.

Surely, I am no poet like Yeats or Tennyson, but it is one of the great joys of my life that I can call upon their words in hours of gloom and darkness and hold within me a beauty that is forever mine. Years later, I can still remember the words that unlocked something deep in my heart, the words that came flowing back to me "with a certain alienated majesty" and allowed me to follow Nietzsche's proclamation— "become who you are!"[9] The things I possess by memory I can never lose. They may be the only true possessions I have in this world. You may rob a man

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[6] It has been forgotten that beauty is the most practical of all studies and that we find use of it in every moment of our lives.
[7] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Helen Zimmern, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 202.
[8] Ibid, 202.
[9] Emerson, *Essays,* 176; Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Viking, 1974), 351.

of his wealth, his property, even his life, but you cannot take his mind. You cannot make him forget his past and the words he holds dear. Memory is the integration of the world into the self, a union of external and internal solidified by rituals and incantations that possess almost magical powers. By memorization, you come to possess the world, and it possesses you. The faint voices of the past fill our minds, and we become the conduit of all that is "past, passing, and to come."[10] The wisdom of a thousand generations flows through a single soul, beats in a single heart. The ghostly figures of days gone by are revived and their blood, just as red and hot as your own, pumps in your veins. When I recite Yeats, a part of him lives on in me, and I am reminded that some things are beyond death, that the march of drums beating in our chests cannot be silenced by the grave. There is a music in every man's life. It is the song of himself. And as I turn again to the verses from my youth, I hear the music of Shakespeare and Kipling, but I also hear my own, and I am reminded of the deepest and most final thing I know. I am reminded of myself. Their words invite me to wade in the depths of my soul where I discover some fundamental certainty, "something that cannot be sought, nor found, nor perhaps lost."[11] Here, I am reminded of that "deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go."[12] It is a faith, a spirit, a feeling I vaguely sense but cannot name—it is the "me myself," my sense of life, the bottom of all bottoms.[13]

In the final analysis, the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual benefits of learning prose and verse by heart cannot be counted up in facts and figures. The soul does not lend itself to line graphs and data tables, and I resent the recent effort to turn the study of English language and literature into just another dismal social science. I cannot provide a spreadsheet to show that memorization once taught students to cultivate a "refined and patient ear" which could detect the secret undercurrents and quiet rhythms of language.[14] I have no bar graph to prove that students once felt the natural rise and fall of language, the ascent into triumphant aria and the graceful return to sturdy recitative. At bottom, my argument rests on a single and fundamental intuition: I prefer a world where the common man can quote Hamlet and even small children can summon words that "kindle souls to perform lofty deeds."[15]

Perhaps you do not prefer this world, and it is of little concern to you if the thoughts of most men are only an endless string of bromides drawn from a bank of prefabricated phrases that can be tacked together like IKEA furniture. But I believe that if children are not taught the words that can breathe life into their own "latent conviction[s]," the words that excite the iron strings of their hearts and make them feel "as though we had ourselves originated the ideas which we read," then they shall live much shallower, much emptier lives.[16] As Richard Rorty remarked at the end of his life,

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[10] William Butler Yeats, *Selected Poems and Four Plays*, ed. M.L. Rosenthal, (New York: Scribner, 1996), 103.
[11] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Beyond Good and Evil" in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York, The Modern Library, 1992), 418.
[12] Emerson, *Essays*, 187.
[13] Walt Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, (London: Penguin, 2004), 678.
[14] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Zimmern, 203.
[15] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and The Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal, (New York: Vintage, 1989), 20.
[16] Emerson, *Essays*, 175; Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. H.L. Havell, (London: Macmillan, 1890), 12.

> I now wish that I had spent somewhat more of my life with verse. This is not because I fear having missed out on truths that are incapable of statement in prose. There are no such truths; there is nothing about death that Swinburne and Landor knew but Epicurus and Heidegger failed to grasp. Rather, it is because I would have lived more fully if I had been able to rattle off more old chestnuts — just as I would have if I had made more close friends. *Cultures with richer vocabularies are more fully human — farther removed from the beasts — than those with poorer ones; individual men and women are more fully human when their memories are amply stocked with verses.*[17]

If we do not supply students with a deep well of art and literature upon which they may draw for the rest of their days, they will absorb the mindless inanities of popular culture; they will regurgitate the stock phrases and tired platitudes of which even children grow weary: "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush...a penny saved is a penny earned...birds of a feather flock together..." on and on *ad nauseam*. This is not thinking. Those who speak in this way are sleepwalking through life. Their days shall bear no distinguishing marks, and they shall stagger home every evening in a daze of stupefaction. They shall feel in their brief moments of solitude not clarity and freedom, but an eerie fog, a sickening malaise that they cannot shake. Their only comfort shall be a descent into forgetfulness and oblivion as they turn on the television and wait quietly as darkness drops like a curtain across their minds. I fear that in sixty years, a generation of today's young students will lie in their final moments with nothing flitting through their minds but neon signs and corporate jingles while the television blares in the background and flashes in empty space "3 Easy Payments of $19.99!" In their final death rattle, perhaps they shall be heard straining for breath and quietly humming along to tunes on the television. This is the life of quiet desperation led by so many decent people in this nation. Their days are unexamined, and their waking moments are spent in quiet anticipation, awaiting the simple pleasures of the morning and the simple pleasures of the evening. They have lost that "strange rich color of their lives" and become just another name in a gray desert of people and places.[18] They have become common.

It was once thought that if we could imbibe enough great art and literature and drink it into our soul, we could *resist* this commonness. We could crowd the hours with the best of what has been thought and said and fend off the pernicious trend towards the average. "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire," but this fire cannot be lit nor can commonness be avoided unless students are exposed to the rarest of minds and permitted to converse with twenty centuries of genius.[19] This is the essence of all fine education, to experience a mind more powerful and expansive than your own, to encounter the strong guide who has "gone a little

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[17] Richard Rorty, *The Richard Rorty Reader,* ed. Christopher J. Voparil and Richard J. Bernstein (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 521.
[18] Wolfe, 52.
[19] This quote is often attributed to Yeats, but it is not anywhere in his works or letters. Perhaps it will remain one of those lost phrases in linguistic purgatory which now has no author at all.

further down our particular path than we have yet gone ourselves."[20] It is only in this way that language can live up to the promise of R.P. Blackmur and add "to the stock of available reality."[21] Percival Chubb, a now forgotten pedagogue, felt this same sentiment when he wrote *The Teaching of English in the Elementary and the Secondary School* in 1902.

> [T]he work in memorizing, and the declamation that goes with it, has much value also as a means of confirming the child in correct ways of speaking. But its greatest service is in storing the mind with the priceless treasure of the noblest thoughts and feelings that have been uttered by the race. Especially important is it to make the first impression and memories, which are to impart a tone to one's spiritual system for life, rich and pure enough to outsing all baser and cruder songs, and to set the pitch of character . . . to fashion the norm of his taste . . . To endear by repetition, to accumulate a common stock of old familiar songs that graft themselves deep in the affections and reveal gradually as the child grows, their music and meaning.[22]

The great work of art changes our essential composition and our perceptions of the world. As Yeats put it, "The imaginative writer shows us the world ... that we may see it, not as it seems to eyes habit has made dull, but as we were Adam and this the first morning."[23] But this sentiment has been lost among many modern educators. I remember some years ago I came across an episode of BBC's "Question Time" addressing modern education. Perhaps halfway through the broadcast, the host took questions from the audience, at which point a young lady volunteered: "I teach 5-year-olds, and we've been doing poetry, and they love exploring it; they love reading it; they love writing it, their own etc. etc. [but] making them sit down and recite poems is just a waste of my time and a waste of their time...."[24] The audience thundered with applause and nodded in affirmation. The host moved on to the next audience member, taking a question from a man giddy with self-satisfaction: "Could the panel recite a poem they learned by rote in school and explain how this has been useful in their subsequent careers?"[25] The audience again boomed with laughter and resumed their raucous applause.

What was most disheartening here was not that most people do not care for poetry—this is perhaps no surprise today (though it would come as a great shock to our ancestors). The great tragedy here is that even the teachers, the great stewards of knowledge, have lost faith, closed up shop, thrown out their wares. For many years it was assumed that "a body of knowledge exists, is in the hands of the adult and educated, and can be passed on in measurable ways, by disciplined

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[20] E.M. Forster, "A Book That Influenced Me" in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Co., 1951), 222.
[21] John Berryman, *Selected Essays*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 55.
[22] Percival Chubb, *The Teaching of English in the Elementary and the Secondary School*, (New York: Macmillan, 1902), 48-49.
[23] William Butler Yeats, *The Cutting of an Agate*, (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 191.
[24] *Question Time*, 1143, directed by Rob Hopkin, June 14, 2012, BBC One.
[25] Ibid.

learning reinforced with authority."[26] A pantheon of great works had been passed on from father to son, from teacher to student, and the job of the schoolteacher was to protect this rich inheritance. Many of today's educators have abandoned this project of preservation. Students can still read, but they no longer carry knowledge in their "deep heart's core."[27] Nothing sinks below the skin and lodges where it cannot be lost or forgotten.

I do not know if anyone can say precisely why learning by rote has been abandoned as a pedagogical practice, but I will advance some of my suspicions. First, I suspect we have lost faith in the capacities of young children and that our expectations for literary competence have declined. Second, as Harold Bloom observed, "there has been a general debasement of popular taste" such that the activities that once delighted the common man (reading, writing letters, memorizing poems) now seem irredeemably dull to most Americans.[28] Our students (and especially young children) are bombarded with advertisements, video games, and a flood of other entertainment whose "greatest minute-by-minute appeal is that it engages without demanding."[29] We have surrendered to a world of easy pleasures and lost the difficult and more sublime joys that come only with a battle hard-won. On the street, in the classroom, in the corner café, voices can be heard wondering aloud, "What good is poetry? Why should children memorize Shelley?" I can only reply that those who ask such questions reveal something of themselves. As the wise sage Emerson notes, "People seem not to see that their opinion of the world is also a confession of character."[30] To declare yourself in no need of art, as Peter Hitchens put it, is to "declare yourself a spiritual desert."[31] Those who have lost faith in poetry and literature have either had the most passionless teachers who never inspired a hunger for good books and a fine phrase, or they have fallen prey to the apathy of our age. They have had their wings broken and their spirits reduced to a desiccated husk. They have abandoned the hero in their soul.

Perhaps there have always been those who possessed no desire to contemplate a poem or explore the grand questions of human nature, but I suspect that this problem is now more acute than ever. Modernity, as Camile Paglia noted, has "stripped the spiritual dimension from experience."[32] People are not curious about the problems which once received a lifetime of attention. Today, less than 10% of people aged 15-24 say they read for personal interest on an average day, and in 2016, more than 25% of Americans confessed that they had not read a book in the last twelve months.[33] I would also guess that while many adults over sixty-five may know

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[26] Peter Hitchens, *The Abolition of Britain,* (London: Quartet Books, 1999), 77.
[27] Yeats, *Selected Poems,* 12.
[28] Harold Bloom, "How to Read and Why," interview by Charlie Rose, *Charlie Rose*, PBS, July 11, 2000.
[29] David Foster Wallace, "E Unibus Pluram," in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*, (New York, Little, Brown and Company, 1997), 37.
[30] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Conduct of Life,* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1860), 176.
[31] *Question Time.*
[32] Camille Paglia, "Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders" in *Sex Art and American Culture,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 207.
[33] Andrew Perrin, "Book Reading 2016," *Pew Research Center*, Washington, D.C., September 1, 2016; "People Age 65 And Older More Likely Than Younger People To Read For Personal Interest," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Washington, D.C., March 5, 2018.

at least one poem by heart, I suspect that almost no one under forty could recite more than a few scattered and broken lines. Society pays the price for the vulgarization of popular taste, but our general decline is not the fault of average American adults—the burden falls on the educators who have failed to reveal the transformative power of literature and poetry. I can offer only vague inclinations about how to cure the ailments that haunt modern education, but I suspect that encouraging children to drink from the cup of inspiration and imbibe the glimmering words of our greatest literary bards may perhaps be a fine start.

It may be said that I have dreamed the impossible dream—the recapture of a past that cannot be recaptured, the conquest of something that is already lost. But even if I shall fail to "revive the dead art of poetry," even if I am "out of key" with my time and "wrong from the start," I had rather lose with Ezra Pound, let us say, than win with Sally Rooney and Rupi Kaur.[34] Perhaps, to borrow from Milton's Satan, the "field is lost" and we have traded "celestial light" for "mournful gloom," but there remains in me a thin sliver of hope: "What though the field be lost? All is not lost" (*PL*: I. 105-106, 244-245). Though "it may be that the gulfs will wash us down" and we shall sink under the western stars and feel the crash of oblivion, I have faith that "one equal temper of heroic hearts...strong in will to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" can revive all that is low and lost in this broken world.[35] I too am a decadent. "I am no less the child of this age," said Nietzsche, "[o]nly I fought against it, the philosopher in me strove against it."[36] If we are to have any hope of revival, we must go on to the end placing foot after foot in the "tracks of our forefathers" and following the fine words of Harold Bloom: "all you can do is rally the remnants and put up a stand in which you and I and the remaining handful of us fight, people who believe in humanistic values and ultimately in the civilizing effect of the greatest literature."[37]

It is our duty, Oswald Spengler noted, to hold on to the "lost position...like that Roman soldier whose bones were found in front of a door in Pompeii, who, during the eruption of Vesuvius, died at his post because they forgot to relieve him. That is greatness. That is what it means to be a thoroughbred."[38] As I see it, it is our turn to man the post, to carry the burden and the treasures of the past in our minds, and some day, after us, perhaps someone will carry them again. Until then, we must become a "cloister of remembered sounds" protected and hidden from all that lusts for ruination. We must join together in this little sanctuary where we shall set at our task of rebuilding, even if it must be with broken and worn-out tools, in the gray waste around

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[34] I paraphrase here the great conservative thinker Russell Kirk: "I had rather lose with Socrates, let us say, than win with Lenin;" Russell Kirk, *The Essential Russell Kirk: Selected Essays*, ed. George A. Panichas, (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007), 45.
[35] Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Tennyson: Poems*, ed. Peter Washington, (New York: Knopf, 2004), 90.
[36] Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher Psychologist, Antichrist,* (New York: Meridian, 1956), 347.
[37]Edmund Burke, *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke,*Vol. III, (London: F.C. and J. Rivington, 1808), 94; Michael Skafidas, "Harold Bloom: Preposterous 'Isms' Are Destroying Literature," *Huffpost,* June 10, 2015.
[38] Oswald Spengler, *Man and Technics: A Contribution to a Philosophy of Life,* ed. Michael Putnam (United Kingdom: Arktos Press, 2015), 77.

us. Our fight is a fight to remember, for to remember is to keep something alive. Only when all have forgotten has the past truly perished.

Chapter 2

Learning by Heart: A History

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> *Great works of art have their own life and will outlast us. We hold these things in trust. Academe should be a savings and not a spendthrift institution. Like public museums, universities are essentially conservative, curatorial....It is up to us to choose the works best suited to enter the dream life of our students, works that will retain their value and give the best return over time, lasting sources of consolation and enlightenment.*
>
> —Camile Paglia, "Sex, Art, and American Culture" [39]

We have now spoken of some of the general maladies that afflict modern culture, and I have suggested that the plague of illiteracy and the decay of aesthetic sensibilities have contributed to the impoverishment of modern society. Memorization allowed us to preserve literature across time and forestall the democratization of taste, but this practice is now almost extinct. It will be my goal in this chapter to briefly plot the rise and fall of rote learning, explain it's philosophical underpinnings, and speculate on the reasons for its decline.

My short history will begin with perhaps the oldest surviving words in the English literary tradition:

Hwæt. We Gardena in geardagum,
þeodcyninga, þrym gefrunon,
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.

These lines from *Beowulf* were recited by fathers and sons down through the ages until finally they were scrawled on an ancient manuscript which still survives today. The Anglo-Saxon world, possessing only primitive forms of runic inscription, relied heavily on oral performance by bards or "scops" to preserve their ancient stories. These figures occasionally appear in Anglo-Saxon literature and can be seen in *Beowulf* when, amidst drunken revelry, a bard breaks into celebratory recitation telling of old kings and pagan heroes (the Finnesburg Episode and the tale of Sigemund, for instance). Even absent these scenes, the structure of verse in Anglo-Saxon poetry remains a testament to oral tradition. As Albert B. Lord remarked in his book *The Singer Resumes the Tale*,

[39] Paglia, 240.

> It is clear that the basic metrical system common to all Germanic peoples was formed in the oral period and was related to Indo-European metrics. It is tonic rather than syllabic, consisting of from two to four stressed syllables in each hemistich [half line of a verse] with a varying number of unstressed syllables. In Old High German, Old Norse, and Anglo-Saxon the two hemistichs are bound together by alliteration....Rapid composition of lines in performance was made possible by the formulas, and therefore the presence of a large number of them in any given poem was an indication that its style was of oral traditional provenance.[40]

Beowulf's alliterative verse serves to knit together each half line and unite each phrase into a memorable pair. Though the poem is more prosaic in its meter and lacks the sing-song rhythm of a predictable stress/unstress pattern ("Jack and Jill went up the hill"), it remains quite easy to remember and retains a primal force, a poetic simplicity, a gentle pride that pierces the heart like a blade. The pathos of Old English verse is perhaps lost on us today, but a few modern imitations may help to recapture the sentiment. In these lines from *The Two Towers*, J.R.R. Tolkien mimics the alliterative form and borrows from the Old English poem "The Wanderer:"

> **Where** now are the horse and the rider? **Where** is the horn that was blowing?
> Where is the **helm** and the **hauberk**, and the bright hair flowing?
> Where is the **harp** on the **harpstring**, and the red fire glowing?
> Where is the spring and the harvest and the tall corn growing?
> They have passed **like** rain on the **mountain**, **like** a wind in the **meadow**;
> The **days** have gone **down** in the West behind the hills into shadow.
> Who shall gather the smoke of the deadwood burning,
> Or behold the flowing years from the Sea returning?[41]

There is something almost hypnotic in Tolkien's verse. His words beat like a drum, gaining strength as they march forward. The same solemn tones echo across the passage: helm, hauberk, harp, harpsting, mountain, meadow. His words are simple. They are common. But it is perhaps for this reason that they speak to everything great and profound in our soul. Throughout his career, Tolkien continued to borrow from the ancient scops, and his later poem "The Lay of the Children of Hurin" is a fine example: "**valour** is not **vanquished**, nor **vain** the glory / that **once we** did **win** in the **woods** of old."[42] Here we have the repetition of the fricative "v" in the first line and the "w" in the second, which produce a compounding sonic effect and guide the poet through his recitation, allowing him to summon hundreds, even thousands of lines on command. This is a tradition that has now been almost entirely lost. Aside from the occasional monkish

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[40] Albert Bates Lord and Mary Louise Lord, *The Singer Resumes the Tale*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 148-151.
[41] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company), 497; I have bolded the alliterative phrases for emphasis.
[42] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lays of Beleriand*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, (New York: Random House, 1985), 35.

scholar who learns *Paradise Lost* or the *Iliad* by heart, almost no one alive today can recite more than a few lines of poetry.

The oral tradition and many of the formal qualities of alliterative verse were made obsolete by the advent of literacy and writing. This problem has only compounded in the modern era where search engines have made human memory superfluous. Why learn anything by heart when a Google search takes .6 seconds? Why practice a Shakespeare sonnet when you have the Library of Congress in your pocket? Though it certainly seems today that "literacy carries the seeds of the eventual demise of oral traditional composition," for many years, the English-speaking world was determined not to let the oral tradition perish or be replaced by the more stable and sober forms of the written word.[43] It was known that some unspoken wisdom and vitality rested within those who possessed the world by memory. This was certainly still the case in the late 16th century when the young William Shakespeare attended a small grammar school in Stratford-upon-Avon and was instructed in the uses and joys of learning by rote. As Michael Wood records in his biography of the young poet,

> Shakespeare was the product of a memorizing culture in which huge chunks of literature were learned off by heart. Today we no longer live in such a culture, but learning by rote offers many rewards, not least a sense of poetry, rhythm and refinement — a feel for heightened language. It forms habits of mind too: what they called the 'art of memory' was an invaluable tool when it came to composing speeches.[44]

Memorization was likewise the foundation of the classical and religious education at Harrow and Eton in the 16th century, a curriculum that continued almost without change until the early 19th century.[45] At Eton and Harrow, students spent countless hours learning scripture and the Greek and Roman classics by heart. John Lyon, who chartered Harrow in 1572, mandated that all students attend the parish church and listen to the scripture with "reverence."[46] They were required to not just recognize the text but integrate it into their mind and absorb it deep into every pore of their flesh. Every boy was required to know the Lord's Prayer, the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Ten Commandments, the Catechism, and the "principle points of the Christian religion" both in English and in Latin. Education, Lyon believed, was fundamental to the creation of a "godly society."[47] As he notes in the Harrow Statutes, "I have only sought the advancement and setting forth of the glory of God, and the good example, benefit, and furtherance of good Christian people."[48] Presumably, Lyon believed that a passing familiarity

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[43] Lord, 153.
[44] Michael Wood, *Shakespeare*, (New York, Basic Books, 2003), 52.
[45] H.C. Maxwell-Lyte, *A History of Eton College: 1440–1875*, (London: Macmillan, 1875), 294.
[46] Christopher Tyreman, *A History of Harrow School: 1324–1991*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 30.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

with religious texts was not enough to make good Christian citizens. The texts must possess a centrality, an unparalleled influence that comes only from a work known by heart.

A similar program of study was enacted close by at Eton College where students attended Chapel, recited nightly prayers, and committed large sections of literature to memory. According to surviving records from 1560-1561 which mark the daily routine of the Eton boys under Headmaster Malim, "[t]he Master and Usher used to read aloud and explain to the boys the passages which were to be learnt by heart. The books studied in the School were :— In the first form, Cato, and Vives. In the second, Terence, Lucian's *Dialogues* (in Latin), and Aesop's *Fables* (in Latin)...."[49] The passage continues to describe the requirements and general system of school discipline up through the seventh year of study which features readings from Caesar's *Commentaries*, Cicero's *de Officiis,* and Virgil, a curriculum of surprising difficulty for students of such a young age.

Two-hundred years later, little had changed at Eton. In his book *A History of Eton College*, Sir Henry Churchill Maxwell-Lyte relates the daily schedule of study for Eton boys from 1768-1775.

> In a regular week, [students] had to attend school seventeen times, viz., ten times for construing, and seven times for repetition. The construing lessons were as follows :—
> Homer, twice, about 35 lines each time.
> Lucian, twice, about 40 lines each time.
> Virgil, twice, about 30 lines each time.
> "Scriptores Romani," twice, about 40 lines each time.
> "Poets Greed," about 35 lines.
> Horace (hexameters) about 60 lines.
>
> ...At all the repetition lessons, *each boy was allowed to go out of school as soon as he had repeated his part*.
>
> In the summer, between Whitsuntide and Electiontide, the Odes of Horace were construed instead of Lucian, Virgil, and the "*Scriptores Romani*," and were moreover, *repeated by heart*...[emphasis mine]."[50]

In addition to their studies, the boys were required to attend Chapel twice a day, once at eleven and again at three with classes scattered in between.[51] After school, they supped at six and then attended a supervised reading hour at seven. At eight, they recited prayers in the Lower School and were sent to bed shortly after. Such a rigorous education now exists perhaps nowhere on God's green earth. Students at Eton and Harrow were not merely drenched in classical and

[49] Maxwell-Lyte, 146.
[50] Ibid, 315.
[51] Ibid, 295.

scriptural readings, they actually knew them by heart and likely found themselves much enriched by the power to remember and recall on command.

Even outside the hallowed halls of Eton and Harrow, early teachers knew the value of rote memorization. In 1789, John Walker first published his *Academic Speaker*, a collection of prose and verse "from the best writers," considered "proper" for the general improvement of youth.[52] Although his selections are full of fine wisdom, Walker insists in the introduction that simply reading the passages aloud with the appropriate pose and gesture would not be sufficient: "He [the student] should also frequently recite compositions *memoriter* [from memory]."[53] Walker attests that this method has several advantages: "it obliges the speaker to dwell upon the idea which he is to express, and hereby enables him to discern their particular meaning and force, and gives him a previous knowledge of the several inflections, emphasis and tones which the words require."[54] Walker's book was quite popular both in England, and later, the United States. The introduction was reprinted throughout the 18th and 19th century in several American textbooks and is prominently featured in the 1817 edition of William Scott's *Lessons in Elocution*.

The early pedagogues knew that memorization teaches more than just the literal content of the text. Memory augments the student's understanding, makes him a better reader, and tunes his ear to the delicate phrasing of speech. In the past, it was imagined that the texts students learned in school would live and grow with them across their days—they would become a part of society's common vocabulary. Walker suggests that the reader who memorizes the text, or at least its prominent passages, maintains a much more intimate relationship with the work than the reader who skims across the lines with tired and bleary eyes. Anyone who plays music will understand this instinctively. Certain melodies live with you across time. As the years pass, the piece becomes part of your soul, its strangeness dissolves, and certain secrets reveal themselves to you in stolen glimpses. Perhaps you hear the subtle expression of an unnoticed phrase, the quiet emphasis of a forgotten melody. The piece ultimately changes as you change. Though composed of the same notes, the songs I played as a boy are not those I play as a young man. Likewise, the "Ulysses" I know today is not the "Ulysses" I first read. In the beginning, all that is foreign presents only its hard, inscrutable exterior. It is only with time and patience that we can coax the clam's shell open to reveal the fleshy interior and perhaps the pearl. This might be accomplished with frequent re-reading or re-listenings, but the simplest and best way to acquaint oneself with a piece of art is to know it by heart. Only then may you return to it endlessly throughout your days, revisit at every new stage of life and find when you return that it is always something different, something more.

By the 17th and 18th century, the emphasis on learning by rote had also traveled across the Atlantic and taken root in colonial America. Many early primers and readers for young children provide melodious little verses to aid students in recalling the alphabet, the stories of the

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[52] John Walker, *The Academic Speaker*, (London: G.G.J and J. Robinson, 1789), 1.
[53] William Scott, *Lessons in Elocution*, (Concord: Isaac Hill, 1817), 56.
[54] Ibid, 56.

Bible, and even common English idioms. *The New England Primer,* reprinted in many editions throughout the 18th century, begins with twenty-four wood cut-outs each paired with simple rhyme: "In Adam's fall we sinned all...The Deluge drown'd the Earth around."[55] In the colonies, much of early schooling and memorization was bound up with religious Puritanism. As the critic David Watter's remarks "Puritan parents wanted children to memorize phrases with religious content at the earliest possible age...catechizing was almost exclusively an oral practice in the early decades of New England settlement. Very young children were given individual words or short phrases to memorize...."[56] Many early colonial sources confirm Watter's suspicions. In 1702, Thomas White remarked in *A Book for Little Children*, "O how precious a thing it is to hear a child praying, as soon, nay sooner than it can speak plain...for pretty little children to sing songs, that shews them to be God's Children, and as Angels; and would not you be glad to be like Angels? The blessed Angels as soon as ever they were created, their first work was to praise God. So my dear Children, let yours be."[57] Eleven years later, Cotton Mather wrote in *The A, B, C. of Religion,* "The Weakest, and even the Youngest People, our Children soon after they have done hanging on the Breast; May be taught."[58] It appears that the youngest of colonial children, barely weaned from the mother's breast, were encouraged to mimic the prayers of their parents and begin their "Conversion to God."[59] At this age, it's likely that few words were comprehended by the child's undeveloped mind, but this was of little concern. It was crucial not that children immediately grasp the teachings of the bible but that they internalize a blissful and innocent holiness—depth of understanding would arise later. As they grew older,

> ...children were coached in set formulas for praying. The practice of catechizing itself initiated the child into a discourse which is controlled in form and content. Cotton Mather advocated a rote learning of answers first, what he called "echoes," to be enforced by a methodical testing to see if the child understood the catechism...Children were thus engaged in a dialogue with instructor and text that relied on memorized patterns of call and response.[60]

With the aid of call and response, what began as an infant's primitive mimicry was quickly transformed into an educational dialogue in which the student internalized the entire discourse performed by questioner and respondent. With its two-part verses and dialogic structure ("Who was the first man? Adam. Who was the first murderer? Cain."), *The New England Primer* was

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[55] *The New England Primer Enlarged*, (Boston: 1727), 8; The first surviving *New England Primer* is dated to 1727, though bibliographers suspect that there were perhaps five editions published before the 1727 version.
[56] David H. Watters, "I Spake as a Child: Authority, Metaphor, and *The New England Primer*," Early American Literature, vol. 20, no. 3, (1985): 195.
[57] Thomas White, *A Little Book for Little Children*, (Boston, 1702), 3-4.
[58] Cotton Mather, *The A, B, C. of Religion*, (Boston, 1713), 18-19.
[59] Ibid, 19.
[60] Watters, 196.

instrumental in encouraging the memorization of religious texts.[61] It was, in many ways, merely a book of catechisms that could be rehearsed by parent and child or student and teacher.

Memorization (whether repeating early Puritan catechisms or reciting classical texts), is often promoted by essentially conservative and traditionalist cultures who believe that knowledge must be preserved in the collective memory of a society so that certain hierarchies and moral teachings remain stable and unchanging. If knowledge is not passed down, we are thrust into turmoil and disorder: the ancients are uprooted, a culture is deracinated, and a people are cast out of their own heritage and customs. Or, at least, this is what the Puritans and many conservative cultures have feared. In today's pluralistic society, we no longer believe it is our duty to pass down the rigid moralities encoded in the ancient texts. We have abandoned the pagan and Christian gods of old and bow before a new lord—secular tolerance. Today, almost all values, customs, acts, beliefs are permissible so long as they are freely done. Of course, this precludes educational efforts to instill a code of ethics and reduces our finest words to empty platitudes. "Honor," "virtue," "justice," today we use these words more than ever but dare not say how our fellows should interpret them. Education has retreated from many of its normative components and considers itself now merely an unbiased pool of facts and data.

In the modern system, tolerance has become *summum bonum* because it permits us to lean across a vast chasm of insurmountable moral differences and politely shake hands. Surely this is beneficial for the sake of civility and peaceful cohabitation, but conflicts between visions of the "good" cannot be eternally eluded, and in our attempts to do so, we will only raise a generation of morally confused simpletons who will stare in the face of evil and say "'I am in favor of kindness, and you prefer concentration camps'—each of us with his own values which cannot be overcome or integrated."[62] In the past we had the courage to assert that some things were beautiful, noble, and lofty while others were vile, base, and corrupted. Some ways of speaking and writing were elegant and admirable while others were crude and vulgar. The scholars at Eton and Harrow believed that Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and the Bible could teach us enduring truths that no other text could sufficiently provide. Even a century ago, we could still agree that the poetry of Longfellow was worthy of imitation, that the virtues preached by Henley's "Invictus" should be fostered in every young mind. Today we make no such assumptions, especially concerning art and aesthetics. There are almost no values today that are so homogenous and universally acknowledged that they might reasonably be called the "soul" of our nation. And those that do remain are so feeble and drained that they are hardly morals at all: "do no harm," "bodily autonomy," "equality under the law." While we might agree that these are valuable sentiments, they are starved of any positive vision of morality—they do not tell you how to live a good life, the type of man or woman you should hope to become, how you should raise children, treat your body, or improve your soul. It was once the job of a rigorous education to provide this instruction. Teachers would create a cohesive list of materials that epitomized the

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[61] *New England Primer,* 7.

[62] Isaiah Berlin, "My Intellectual Path" in *The Power of Ideas,* ed. H. Hardy, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 11-12.

proper virtues and aesthetic tastes, and students would carry within them these scraps of prose and verse that could guide them in their private hours and lead them on the path to beauty, righteousness, and truth. The early twentieth century had a clear and unapologetic vision of the aesthetic and moral sensibilities they hoped to instill in their students. To confirm this, one need only consult the curated lists of poems and prose teachers asked students to learn by heart. The striking similarities between lists of recommended poems for memorization and study are a testament to both prevalence of rote learning and its role in the task of moral education.

In the many surviving teacher's manuals and courses of study from the early twentieth century, the authors stress the importance of a kind of moral husbandry. The students were under the temporary care of the teacher, and it was his or her job to nurture and cultivate those young minds. In a chapter entitled "Character and Conduct" in the 1925 edition of the Kentucky State Teacher's Manual, the author begins with a quote from Daniel Webster: "If we work upon marble, it will perish; if we work upon brass, time will efface it; if we rear temples, they will crumble into dust; but if we work upon immortal souls, if we imbue them with principles, with the fear of God and love of fellow men, we engrave on those tablets something which brightens all eternity."[63] The author continues,

> It is generally agreed that character is a fundamental aim of education....*Character building is not an incidental or accidental objective of school work. It is the school's first and most important duty.... The important point is that the child develop right attitudes of mind from which correct actions will result.* The child must learn early in his school life that he has moral obligations. It is necessary for him to obey, to tell the truth, and to accord to others the rights due them in order that school may exist.
>
> Ideals of conduct as found in fables, stories, myths, literature, biography, history and other subjects, no doubt, furnish the best type of moral training. *Every subject and every activity should inspire and guide the pupil toward high moral purposes, for a mind filled with worthy interest, high ideals and helpful activities has no room for evil.* Dewey says: "Every act of attention on the part of the pupil; every concentration on study that excludes distracting stimuli; every physical restraint, as sitting quietly when necessary; every form of physical control, as when guiding a pen in writing; every subordination of present pleasure to future satisfaction, requires the same activity of will that moral conduct requires, and results in moral training through the formation of habits." [emphasis mine][64]

The passage then lists a set of virtues to be instilled in every child: cleanliness, politeness, kindness to animals, truthfulness, fidelity to duty, nobility, patriotism, respect and reverence, etc.

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[63] Kentucky State Board of Education, *Kentucky State Course of Study and Teacher's Manual for the Elementary Schools, 1925-1929*, (Frankfort, KY: State Board of Education, 1925), 230.
[64] Ibid.

(there are thirty-two such virtues listed in the 1925 edition). It was believed that students would gain a greater understanding and appreciation of these ideals if they committed certain passages to memory which exemplified the teachings of the lesson.[65] Learning by rote was not merely a "drill in memory;" it was a method that greatly augmented the moral teachings and implanted them deep in the young mind where they would not be easily forgotten or ignored.[66] They knew that it is only the remembered word which enters freely into the mind and heart of the child and influences him or her across the course of a lifetime. The outline of coursework from the 1925 Kentucky State Teacher's Manual thus stresses the necessity of "memory work" beginning as early as the first and second grade.[67] The report notes,

> Bible verses that the child can understand and love, and other memory gems, should be learned. One short poem should be memorized each month, including the best poems in the reading lessons and some from other sources if suited to second grade students. A short poem to be memorized should first be studied for thought and feeling, then read repeatedly from beginning to end, being read at all times with the best possible expression, until it is thoroughly memorized. This method gives a full grasp of the content of the poem along with its words."[68]

In the 1931 edition of the manual, the standards for memorization are even more specific. The section "Standards to be Achieved" notes that first-grade students "[s]hould be able to recite from memory in a clear voice at least four selections."[69] The manual then recommends that four or five more poems should be added to the student's repertoire every year. Among the suggested poems for memorization are "If" by Rudyard Kipling, "Anne Belle Lee [sic]" by Edgar Allen Poe, "O Captain My Captain" by Walt Whitman, "Give Us Men" by Josiah Gilbert Holland, "Flower in the Crannied Wall" by Alfred Lord Tennyson, "The Runaway" by Robert Frost, and "Pippa's Song" by Robert Browning.[70] There are many more (seventy-four in all), but I have cited here only the most famous poems.

For each grade level, the manual suggests eight to ten poems for study which often return to the same themes. Those suggested for the youngest children present a benevolent picture of the universe: life glows like the morning dawn; the world is pleasant and sweet like the pearly blossoms of spring. Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Cow" and Kate Brown's "The Little Plant," both recommended for first grade, are fine examples of this pure and guileless gaze.

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[65] Kentucky State Board of Education and William C. Bell, *Teachers' Manual and Courses of Study for the Elementary Schools*, (Frankfort, KY: The State Journal Company, Printers to the Commonwealth, 1931), 78; "Teach pupils through memory work...in order to increase their appreciation."
[66] Ibid, 181.
[67] *Kentucky State Course of Study 1925,* 55.
[68] Ibid.
[69] *Teachers' Manual and Courses of Study 1931,* 72.
[70] Ibid, 63.

The Cow	The Little Plant
The friendly cow all red and white,	In the heart of a seed
I love with all my heart:	Buried so deep
She gives me cream with all her might,	A dear little plant
To eat with apple-tart.	Lay fast asleep
She wanders lowing here and there,	"Wake" said the sunshine
And yet she cannot stray,	"And creep to the light"
All in the pleasant open air,	"Wake" said the voice
The pleasant light of day;	Of the raindrops bright
And blown by all the winds that pass	The little plant heard
And wet with all the showers,	And it rose to see
She walks among the meadow grass	What the wonderful
And eats the meadow flowers.	Outside world might be[71]

These are "songs of innocence" as William Blake might have said.[72] They are filled with childish wonder and a sweet benevolence that knows not evil, loss, or death. These poems provide a child the courage to face a lifetime; they provide the basic sense that this world is beautiful and good. The recommendations for the more advanced grades reflect the maturation of the student and begin to teach new lessons: how to "meet with triumph and disaster," how to face a bitter obstacle with pride and dignity, how to love, and how to mourn.[73] By the eighth grade, students declared with Polonius "to thine own self be true," they cried out with Holland "GOD, give us men!," and they intoned with Kipling in solemn phrase "Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet, / Lest we forget—lest we forget!" (*Hamlet*: I. iii. 564).[74] At only twelve or thirteen years of age, every child in a Kentucky classroom in 1931 would have been able to recite upwards of forty poems on command. Is there any child who can do this today?

It's important to note that extensive memorization was not an eccentricity of Kentucky education. Historical documents reveal that rote learning was a quite common practice in the early twentieth century. In a 1920 study, Velda C. Bamesberger reviewed fifty contemporary teacher's manuals and state courses of study from cities across the U.S. and compiled their requirements for literary memorization. Of the cities examined, five had populations more than 250,000, eleven had populations between 100,000 and 250,000, and thirty-four had populations between 25,000 and 100,000. Additionally "twenty [were] from North Atlantic states, three

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[71] *Teachers' Manual and Courses of Study 1931,* 72.
[72] William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 1.
[73] Rudyard Kipling, *The Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling,* (Great Britain: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994), 605.
[74] J.G. Holland, *Garnered Sheaves: The Complete Poetical Works of J.G. Holland,* (New York: Scribner, 1873), 377; Kipling, 340.

[were] from South Atlantic States, eleven [were[from North Central states, eight [were] from South Central States, and eight [were] from the Western States."[75] Bamesberger's analysis showed that despite geographical separation, many cities recommended the same rough schedule for memorization. As Bamesberger notes, "[there is] a surprising uniformity throughout the grades in respect to the number of poems required to be memorized. As far as the mode may be said to yield the best measures of general practice, we may say that the standard number of poems required in each grade, from the first through the eighth, is six."[76]

TABLE XVIII—MINIMUM QUANTATIVE REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMORY WORK (POETRY)

Cities	GRADES															
	I		II		III		IV		V		VI		VII		VIII	
	Poems	Lines	Poems	Lines	Poems	Lines	Poems	Lines	Poems	Lines	Poems	Lines	Poems	Lines	Poems	Lines
Austin	12[1]		12[1]		12[1]		12[1]		12[1]		12[1]		12[1]		12[1]	
Bay City	6		6		6				8		8		10		16	
Boston	9		9		9		9	100	9	150	9	150				
Chattanooga	6		6		6		6				9		9			
Cincinnati	6		6		6		6		6		6		6		6	
Denver	6		6		6		6		9[2]		9[2]		6		6	
Easton	10		8		6[2]		6		10		9		9		12	
Erie			4		4		4		4		4		4			
Fitchburg	6		6		6		6		5		5		5		5	
Flint	4[2]		4[2]		4[2]		6[2]		8		8		[3]		[3]	
Fort Worth	12		[3]		11		8		5		[3]		[3]		[3]	
Harrisburg	9		9		9[5]		9[4]		9		9		9[5]		9	
Haverhill	9[4]		9[4]		9[4]		9		9[4]		9[4]		9[4]		9[4]	
Houston	7		10		7		8		8		8		7			
Indianapolis	6		6		6		6		6		6		6		6	
Jersey City		144		144		144		144		225		225		315		315
Lansing	10		10													
Lexington						216		216		216		216		216		216
Lincoln	4[2]		4		4		4									
Newark			5		7		7		6		6		7		[3]	
New Castle	6		6		6		6		6		6		6		6	
New York City		144		144		144		144		144		144		288		288
Ogden	8		8[5]		8[5]		8[5]		8[2]		8[2]		20[2]		19	
Oklahoma City	4		4		4		6									
Richmond	8		8		8		6		6		6		8		[3]	
Rochester	6		6		6		6		6		6		6		6	
Schnectady	8[2]		8		8		8		8		8		8		8	

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TABLE XVIII—(*Continued*)

Cities	GRADES															
	I		II		III		IV		V		VI		VII		VIII	
	Poems	Lines	Poems	Lines	Poems	Lines	Poems	Lines	Poems	Lines	Poems	Lines	Poems	Lines	Poems	Lines
Spokane	6		6		6		6[2]		6[3]		6[3]		6[3]		6[3]	
Salt Lake City	4		4		4											
St. Paul	8		8		8		8		8		8		8		8	
Tacoma			7		10		6		6		6		6		6	
Tulsa	9		9		9		9		9		9		9		9	
Washington	9		10		10		10		8		8		8		8	
Yonkers	4	70	5	111	5	110	4	64	4	110	4	40	3	36	[3]	

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(1)—Maximum

(2)—Also other materials—e.g. proverbs

(3)—No data

(4)—One long, or two short poems each month

(5)—By inference

Fig 1: Taken from *Standard Requirements for Memorizing Literary Material* by Velda C. Bamesberger, pg. 76-77.

[75] Velda C. Bamesburger, *Standard Requirements for Memorizing Literary Material*, (Illinois: University of Illinois Bulletin, 1920), 10.
[76] Ibid, 78.

There were also large overlaps between the lists of poems recommended by city and state courses of study. Bamesberger marked these similarities and compiled a ranked list of every poem that was mentioned five or more times (Appendix A). The most popular poems in the list are nearly ubiquitous—every poem in the top twenty-nine was recommended by at least half of the courses of study while almost every poem in the top seven was recommended by at least 80% of cities. Though many poets contributed only one poem to Bamesberger's list, Longfellow, Stevenson, Tennyson, Sherman, Lowell, Field, Bryant, Wordsworth, Shakespeare, Thaxter, Emerson, Wiley, Whittier, and Rosetti all contributed at least six poems and together contributed nearly half of the 329 most common poems.

Surely, this list is partly a product of its age. The most popular poets are almost all Romantics or Victorians, and there are many poems on the list which have been lost in time. That said, one would be hard pressed to find a poem here that does not invite students to contemplate their moral soul or at least provide rich imagery to spark imaginative thought. What a world it must have been to enter a classroom in 1931 and see children chanting with Tennyson, "Half a league half a league / half a league onward," or stroll the gas-lit streets and hear schoolboys mourning the lost day with Longfellow: "The day is done, and the darkness / Falls from the wings of the Night."[77] Students of the past learned about empire while sitting with Kipling "by the old Moulmein pagoda looking lazy at the sea."[78] They heard tales of the revolution while strolling with Emerson by the stream where "once the embattled farmers stood."[79] Singing Psalms with Longfellow, they learned to be "a hero in the strife!"[80]

These days have now passed like leaves in the wind, like flowers in the spring. Today, education is trusted not to "the grand old masters" and the "bards sublime" but to committees of editors and fact-checkers at textbook mills like Pearson and McGraw-Hill.[81] These books are artistically barren, and their writers are no better than the average YA word extruder. Instead of expressing their teachings in concrete imagery and delicate phrasing, today's books present only a wall of imprecise abstractions which add nothing to our lives or artistic sensibilities when committed to memory. One cannot detect the presence of a real person in the text; there is no feeling of life behind those words. Everything is drum-tight, terse, sanitized. Here, for instance, is a random quote selected from a modern textbook on my shelf. The volume in question is *The Romans,* published by Oxford University Press in 2012. "For Sulla, victory at the Colline Gate on November 1, 82 was not enough. After so much fierce resistance, he needed to be confident of gaining undisputed control of Rome and Italy."[82] This is by no means a truly frightful passage,

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[77] Tennyson, 150; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: Poems & Other Writings*, (New York: Library of America, 2000), 48.
[78] Kipling, 431.
[79] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. v, (London: George Bell & Sons, 1905), 117.
[80] Longfellow, 4.
[81] Ibid, 48.
[82] Mary Boatwright, Daniel Gargola, Noel Lenski, Richard Talbert, *The Romans: From Civilization to Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 185.

but it speaks of man's lust for power without any real fire and conviction. For comparison, here's Edward Gibbon's discussion of ambition in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*:

> [T]he possession of a throne could never yet afford a lasting satisfaction to an ambitious mind. This melancholy truth was felt and acknowledged by Severus. Fortune and merit had, from an humble station, elevated him to the first place among mankind. "He had been all things," as he said himself, "and all was of little value."[83]

Four authors worked on *The Romans,* and all they could come up with was "For Sulla, victory...was not enough." Gibbon comes far closer to capturing the animating spirit of a tyrant. Gibbon is no poet, but he is that much more full of life than today's writers. He would have understood the "immortal hate" and "study of revenge," that moved Caesar to rebellion; he would have recognized a man who could guide the course of history when Napoleon strode into Paris and declared, "I saw the crown of France lying in the gutter, so I picked it up with my sword."[84] Students will not understand Sulla if they read *The Romans,* and perhaps even Gibbon falls short. If one wishes to understand the will to power, that carnal desire to crush the world between your own two hands, to stand atop the highest peak above all the lighted cities and carve your name into the stone, then one must read Milton: "Innumerable force of Spirits arm'd / That durst dislike his reign, and me preferring, / His utmost power with adverse power oppos'd / In dubious Battel on the Plains of Heav'n, / And shook his throne" (*PL*: I. 101-105). One must read Nietzsche: "...born as one is to a subterranean life of struggle, one emerges again and again into the light, one experiences again and again one's golden hour of victory—and then one stands forth as one was born, unbreakable, tensed, ready for new, even harder, remoter things, like a bow that distress only serves to draw tauter."[85] One should read Thomas Wolfe: "There is no happy land. There is no end to hunger."[86] I dare say they know far more about Sulla and Caesar than the authors of *The Romans* ever will.

Most books our students read today have no literary pretensions. Their style attempts no linguistic intricacy—it is sans metaphor, sans imagery. It is prose of the most barren variety. Its authors have nothing to say and no way of saying it. They convey raw data as plainly and simply as possible. It is no wonder students do not wish to commit any of it to memory. Who can be inspired to recite the Sears catalog or the label of a cereal box? The inspirational value of art that inspired us all to begin and continue reading has been largely forgotten. If we want students to discover the potency of literature, we must give them something that stirs the passions of the young mind. If students aren't reading, or if the things they do read are flat and dull and lifeless,

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[83] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* vol.i, (London: J.F. Dove, 1821), 149.
[84] Some have claimed that this quote is apocryphal, but I trust the reader will permit me some artistic liberty.
[85] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Genealogy of Morals" in *Basic Writing of Nietzsche,* ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York, The Modern Library, 1992), 480.
[86] Wolfe, 507.

then reading will always remain a chore, and we shall never see the return of a world where children delight in verse.

The Decline of Memorization:

Memorization enjoyed a heyday lasting hundreds of years. It was practiced by the ancient scops, by the schoolteachers at Harrow, by the pilgrims and puritans in the colonies, and by humble educators in small Kentucky schoolhouses. The practice was timeless and universal—it required no fancy equipment, no special books. It transcended barriers of class, and it was not bound to a certain context or subject matter. But in the twentieth century, all the ancient pillars supporting rote learning came crashing down, and it was suddenly quite fashionable to find the practice backward and crude. To understand this shift, we must first comprehend with the arguments that had long justified memorization and solidified its place in every instructor's pedagogical repertoire.

The historical arguments provided in support of memorization have fallen broadly into three categories: the collective, the moral, and the aesthetic. Throughout the decline of memorization, all of these came under attack, and this assault slowly brought the practice to its knees. For the sake of clarity, I shall attempt to summarize the arguments for memorization in order, beginning with the appeal to homogeneity and the collective.

1.) The Collective: The desire to use education to create a collective identity is apparent from even a brief glance at historical courses of study—shared experiences and values were needed to knit together the fabric of society and link man to his brother by the indissoluble bonds of fellowship. Prior to the nineteenth century, this moral homogeneity relied on a common foundation of religious and classical knowledge. As the nation became more diverse throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and parochial religious beliefs could no longer bind America's sprawling communities, the poems recommended for study changed and began to foster "[r]espect and reverence...for the symbols of collective identity" through cultivating a youthful identification with our nation and history.[87] This was true in both England and the United States. As Catherine Robson remarks, "[England's] Empire Day [in the early 1900's] eventually became a high point of the elementary-school year, usually functioning as an open-air fete with much-rehearsed pageants, songs and, of course, poetry."[88] On the day of celebration, heroic recitations of Henry the Fifth's "St. Crispin's Day" and John of Gaunt's "This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle" rang in the air. Works by contemporary poets were also popular, and patriotic verses like Kipling's "English Flag," and Henley's "England, My England" received fair attention.[89] In the early twentieth century, the United States was equally

[87] Catherine Robson, *Heart Beats: Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem*, (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 2012), 74.
[88] Ibid, 75.
[89] Ibid.

eager to celebrate its origins and cultural heritage—the most common poem for study was Samuel Francis Smith's "America" (My country, 'Tis of thee, Sweet land of liberty), and the top fifty most common poems included Key's "Star Spangled Banner," Bennet's "The Flag Goes By," Hemans's "The Landing of the Pilgrims," Child's "Thanksgiving Day," Drake's "The American Flag," Emerson's "Concord Hymn," and several others.

At least some of this flag-waving patriotism still survives in schools today. I recall standing in the gym in fourth grade with hundreds of my peers and singing at the top of my lungs, "Land where my fathers died! Land of the pilgrim's pride!" I cannot say if this was a common practice in the early 2000's or merely a peculiarity of being raised in the Northeast. Nonetheless, I imagine Jonathan Haidt might remark that this experience was meant to flip the "hive switch," to release us from individuality as the "'I' passes insensibly into the 'we.'"[90] In these moments of patriotic or religious exaltation, we feel that what is most real in us extends beyond the self and outlasts our mortal soul. The old pedagogues knew that this was a powerful way to bond communities. If you can connect children with something greater than themselves, unite them with a common myth, let them pray to the same God, or barring that, the same ideals, you'll find that they are united by bonds that cannot be broken. This forges a common moral vocabulary and strengthens communal solidarity through ritual and ceremony. Of course, it's now outré to chant about "pilgrim's pride" (colonial apologetics) or lands where our "fathers died" (too nationalistic), but a hundred years ago, collective recitation of patriotic and religious hymns was essential to instilling a collective identity. The erosion of this tradition has left educators without a group of common beliefs that can be fostered in young children.

2.) The Moral: It might be said that the moral argument for memorization is entwined with the goals of fostering collective identity—by creating a harmonious, cooperative, and civil society, we can avoid much conflict by an appeal to common aims and virtues. But the moral appeal made by many early pedagogues also has a distinctly individual dimension. Setting "the pitch of character" was important not just for the functioning of society but for the health of every child's soul. As we saw with the Puritans, it was crucial that every child was spiritually saved and could live in the good graces of God—this began with early prayer and Mather's angelic "echoes." For many years, the promotion of moral development and moral character meant setting children on the path to holiness. This was a deeply personal and individual endeavor which Chubb identifies in his own discourse on recitation. Moral guidance was not just for society's sake— memorization's power to fill "the mind with the priceless treasure of the noblest thoughts and feelings that have been uttered by the race" was necessary for the improvement of the child himself and was a worthwhile endeavor regardless of its societal consequences. Many believed that without the moral instruction that arises from rote learning, a child would have no common principles to guide his or her action and would stumble through life blind and confused, pulled this way and that by whim and temptation. In the end, it would be his or her soul that would suffer. As Socrates's interlocutors conclude in the *Republic*, it matters

[90] Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, (New York: Vintage, 2012), 257.

not if a man should live in a beautiful city and reap rich rewards from his exploits if his own soul should be "ruined and in turmoil."[91]

3.) The Aesthetic: Finally, there is the aesthetic justification: the beauty of a fine poem is its own reward. In his 1925 text *On the Teaching of Poetry*, Alexander Haddow noted that "[p]oetry is one of a group of subjects," that promote the "development of the aesthetic sense."[92] Taking "joy in beauty" is the purpose of classroom recitation and academic examination of literary works, Haddow remarks.[93] As Chubb noted, memorization of proud verse ousts "all baser and cruder songs" and fashions "the norm of [our] taste." It provides a positive vision of beauty, a glimpse of the Platonic forms which shall be the model and guide for all aesthetic endeavors. I've appealed to this argument often and insisted that through memorization, we escape the emptiness of modern life and hold within us the ideal, the image of life as it could be. Memory permits us to possess art in the truest sense and let its fullness and richness shine a warm glow on all the gloomy and mundane hours of life. Art provides the shudders of awe, the frissons of delight that make life worth living. The benefits are thus two-part. Possessing a fine poem by memory lets us delight in beauty but also inspires and guides our own endeavors—it is an aesthetic North Star whose light we endlessly pursue, even as the waves crash about our boat and the grim tides threaten to drown us in the deep.

It was the slow collapse of these justifications that led to the decline of rote learning throughout the twentieth century. The charges levied against memorization can be divided roughly into two categories: practical complaints that questioned realistic implementation and ideological concerns that disputed the basic premises that justified the practice.

The practical complaints were mostly aesthetic. While many critics of memory-work agreed with Haddow that poems could furnish our lives with beauty, they also saw the potential for rote learning to be hollowed out by passionless students and teachers until it was nothing more than mindless repetition without feeling or comprehension. As Catherine Robson remarks,

> The exercise always carried within itself the potential to degenerate into the most leaden and meaningless of rote activities; perhaps, as the years went by, it became progressively harder for this unchanging stalwart of the school curriculum to access the energy required to lift itself to a higher level. Certainly written concerns about the possible unpleasantness and mindlessness of the activity began to appear with increasing frequency after the 1910s.[94]

Students could not penetrate into the heart of a poem and learn its inner music if they were force-fed Longfellow while strapped to their desks. As Arnold Smith observed in his 1915 book *Aims and Methods in the Teaching of English*, "[p]oetry which is learnt by heart under compulsion and the fear of punishment is not only valueless to the learner, but likely to associate

[91] Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, (Cambridge: Hackett, 1992), 121.
[92] Robson, 77.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid, 76.

the reading of poetry with a feeling of distaste."[95] If one of the primary goals of rote learning was to train the ear, this could not be accomplished by students standing at attention "and chanting 'The Wreck of the Hesperus'" in monotone unison.[96] If one of the primary goals was to teach students to cherish a fine phrase and take pleasure in the wisdom of our mellifluous bards, this could not be done by paddling children until they cried out in perfect iambic pentameter. Students, these critics argued, must be allowed to follow their own literary passions and memorize the poems that pricked their ears. Memorization must be joyous, not tyrannical.

Smith does not dispute the normative claim behind memorization; he simply asks if memorization is an effective method—does it work? But other scholars of the early twentieth century would come to challenge the essential moral presuppositions behind rote learning. Is there really an objective set of values that should be conditioned in young children? Should values be fixed and unchanging or rediscovered, recreated by every new generation? The primary pedagogical shift of the early twentieth century that challenged the moral foundation of rote learning was the rise of progressive moral education. As Donald and Jo Ann Parkerson describe it, "[m]any [in the progressive movement] argued that the complexity of modern life had made traditional moral codes obsolete. Simple, rigid rules of behavior, they argued, were too arbitrary to deal with the complexities of our rapidly changing modern world."[97] New standards of education "urged that *relativity* rather than *absolutism* should be the guiding principles of moral education."[98] As the Character Education Committee of the National Education Association's Department of Superintendence wrote in 1932, relativity did not mean "that each generation must repudiate the system of values of its predecessors. It [did] mean, however, that no such system is permanent...."[99] The relativism of modern education rose to particular prominence with theorists of the early 1900's. "We need to see," John Dewey notes in 1909, "that moral principles...are not 'transcendental.'"[100] This same relativism seeps into Dewey's very definition of moral ideas: "moral ideas are ideas of any sort whatsoever which take effect in conduct and improve it, make it better than it otherwise would be."[101] This is essentially a non-definition. Improve society how? Make it better in what sense? Which virtues should guide us there? Words like "improve" and "better" imply a desired end which remains unstated in Dewey's text.

Thus began the slow descent into the swamp of educational ambiguity—no longer did teachers appeal to a common understanding of "good," "bad," "moral," or "immoral." Now there was only "good" as I conceive of it and "good" as you conceive of it. This was a direct assault on one of the primary justifications for rote learning. Curriculums, for hundreds of years, had curated a list of poems and essays which could reveal transcendental truths necessary for the

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[95] Arnold Smith, *Aims and Methods in the Teaching of English*, (London: Constable, 1915), 101.
[96] Arthur Quiller-Couch, *On the Art of Writing*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916), 45.
[97] Donald Parkerson, Jo Ann Parkerson, *Transitions in American Education*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 131.
[98] Parkerson, 131.
[99] Ibid.
[100] John Dewey, *Moral Principles in Education*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 58.
[101] Ibid, 1, 58.

development of any well-constituted mind and body. Certain sentiments, they believed, were vital to the proper growth and maturation of every young child. The educational project until the mid-twentieth century was thus one of deliberate cultivation. The aim was to raise a class of citizens who could stand united and guard civilization against evil and temptation. I cannot relate the sentiment better than John Hibben, former president of Princeton University who addressed the class of 1913 on the day of their graduation.

> You, enlightened, self-sufficient, self-governed, endowed with gifts above your fellows, the world expects you to produce as well as to consume, to add to and not to subtract from its store of good, to build up and not tear down, to ennoble and not degrade. It commands you to take your place and to fight your fight in the name of honor and of chivalry, against the powers of organized evil and of commercialized vice, against the poverty, disease, and death which follow fast in the wake of sin and ignorance, against all the innumerable forces which are working to destroy the image of God in man, and unleash the passions of the beast. There comes to you from many quarters, from many voices, the call of your kind. It is the human cry of spirits in bondage, of souls in despair, of lives debased and doomed. It is the call of man to his brother ... such is your vocation; follow the voice that calls you in the name of God and of man. The time is short, the opportunity is great; therefore, crowd the hours with the best that is in you.[102]

This would have been anathema to Dewey and his followers. The primary mission for students, as many progressive educators saw it, was to follow the primrose path of whimsical self-discovery and spiritual exploration. Any canon centered around a coherent set of virtues was too presumptuous, too self-assured for a world ruled by ambiguity and doubt. Today, we have lost the courage to endorse principles unreservedly. Now everything comes with stuttered qualifications about "cultural practices," "individual perspectives, "lived experiences," "my truth," "your truth," and so on until there is no one left to stand upright with shoulders back and advance with Emerson "on Chaos and the Dark."[103] At some point, we must stare with direct eyes into the world and proudly declare that what is true in our "private heart is true for all men." "[T]hat is genius," Emerson tells us.

My students are a fine example. I find that they utterly refuse to speak in absolutes. They stir nervously in their seats and look askance at their text as Nietzsche boldly proclaims "What is good? Everything that heightens the feeling of power....What is bad? Everything that is born of weakness."[104] There are no truths, they inform me, only perspectives. When I ask them to argue against Emerson or Nietzsche or Plato, they tell me that the *Republic* is ill-conceived not because it advances some evil idea, but because Socrates is too sure of himself—the poor fool has not yet

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[102] David Brooks, *On Paradise Drive*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 177.
[103] Emerson, *Essays*, 177.
[104] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Antichrist," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Viking, 1974), 570.

learned that everything is contingent; nothing is black and white. A proper philosophy, they insist, is one with no convictions at all, one that quakes with anxious self-doubt, one where every page contains copious footnotes acknowledging its own shortcomings—that is modern genius.

Memorization once "endeared by repetition" and taught students that there were some things too holy to touch and defile with unclean hands—now every child is an aspiring skeptic. We have lost our reverence and can no longer appeal to the moral or social-cohesive reasons for memorization because so few common morals remain; the wheel hub has shattered and the loose spokes dangle in empty space. Even if a list of works were created to reflect the beliefs of every subset of the population, this would still fail to accomplish the goals of Chubb and other advocates of memorization. The early purpose of rote learning was to create men and women of common stock, to provide a list of works that would blend in pleasant harmony and tune children's character to the same pitch. This cannot be accomplished when every poem is set to a different melody, every line intoned in a new key, for then the result is only a wall of noise, a barren industrial soundscape that deafens with a thousand cacophonous shrieks. If memorization is to serve as moral tutelage, the works involved must adhere to a common theme that reveals itself through repetition or study. Anything else will only create more children of the modern disposition who know not what to believe and thus come to believe nothing at all.

The final assault on memorization was a reconceptualization of artistic ideals in the early twentieth century. Instead of raising the everyday to new and exalted heights, the burgeoning aesthetic disposition that would become literary modernism saw itself in "opposition to the mainstream of existence, a mode of life that was increasingly depicted as a debased condition of being."[105] With the modernists, the essential function of poetry had changed—it no longer aimed at an unironic appeal to nationalism, brotherhood, glory, pride, and holiness. It did not hope to unite all men by drawing their ships into the common current or baptize humanity in the great stream of noble sentiments. As the twentieth century wore on, the concept of poetry as moral education was left behind and the craft re-emerged from the flames of WWI to cast a cold-eyed glare on the world of yesterday. A culture of aristocratic taste and the stiff upper lip was replaced with Eliot's patient etherized on the table, Pound's "laughter out of dead bellies."[106] Poetry was now meant to question the ancestral lineage of value and custom, to repudiate and demolish everything past and passing in a restless search for individuality and authenticity. The age of heroes and romance had ended—the new poet would find his meaning in sleepless nights and one-night cheap hotels. "Prufrock" was a paean not to God and country but to alienation and loss. Poetry now stood athwart the quotidian and the mainstream—its fundamental artistic pose relied on a critical distance from everyday life. In oedipal rebellion against the Georgians and Victorians, it strove to become disinherited by its mawkish forbearers and dispel the intoxicating fumes of honor and glory that had lured so many young men to their deaths. Those young boys

[105] Robson, 23.
[106] Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems of Ezra Pound,* (New York: New Directions, 1957), 64.

in the trench had believed an old lie. They had perished, as the modernists saw it, *non dulce et non decor* "for two gross of broken statues...for an old bitch gone in the teeth."[107]

Literary modernism was a tool of cultural critique not an agent of social cohesion. One cannot picture little children, arms-linked, dancing in a circle singing "Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table."[108] Modernism was not interested in cutesy rhymes (not unironically at least). It was self-consciously difficult and prided itself on internal complexities that lent themselves to careful and deliberate study rather than impassioned recitation. Its spirit was antithetical to the playing fields of Eton and the hot blood of those young boys who hungered for adventure. Modernism was cold, elusive, despairing. It stalked the lonely streets like a tall, gaunt shadow. As Eliot put it, "We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult....The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning."[109] Of course, this wasn't promising for the culture of memorization. To start, poems like "The Waste Land" are not very fun. I can't picture many 8-year-olds settling down with a German dictionary to decode *The Burial of the Dead* on a Saturday afternoon. Modernism often functions not to comfort and edify but to shock and disturb—this is why its practitioners are so fond of juxtaposing the high and the low, the innocent and the grotesque, the noble and the monstrous. They hoped that the psychological jolt might wake us from our dogmatic slumber and open our eyes to the rot and decadence around us.

Modernism was opposed to many of the goals of memorization, it was about alienation not commonality; it was dark and disturbing and perhaps unfit for many for many lower grades; it challenged the classical morals like duty and honor that had been held high and canonized by the Victorians; it was lonely, anarchic, anti-democratic. The locus of meaning and self-realization for the modernists was not in the heart of common culture—it was at the fringe, in the deserted hinterlands beyond the utmost bounds of civilization. The barriers were thus several. First, the general struggle to ensure comprehension was exacerbated by materially difficult poets. Eliot and Pound and Yeats were much more challenging than Tennyson and Longfellow. Second, the ethos of modernism seemed aesthetically, and perhaps also morally, opposed to a culture of memorization that sought to preserve a stable literary tradition. Teachers might have persisted in assigning the old Victorian poets, and this was the case in America until about the 1960's, but poetry had fundamentally changed. The poem was no longer a fable or a psalm—all pedantic moralizing had been banished. The age of the image had arrived, and the poem was now, as Ezra pound remarked, "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."[110]

As we've now seen, the educational initiatives and aesthetic evolutions of the early twentieth century attacked the justifications for memorization on all fronts. These developments

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[107] Pound, *Selected Poems*, 64.
[108] T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1952), 3.
[109] T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Co., 1932), 248.
[110] Gerald Sanders, John Nelson, M.L. Rosenthal, *Chief Modern Poets of Britain and America*, vol. ii, (London: Macmillan, 1970), 2.

did not begin as a concerted effort to destroy the ancient practice of rote learning, but when new dogmas and orthodoxies that valued experimentation instead of tradition, rebellion instead of reverence began to take hold, memorization was doomed to become backward and outmoded.[111] The precise moment of memorization's demise cannot be marked on the calendar. It ended not with a bang but with a whimper; it smoldered like a stubborn fire until only smoke and ash remained. A few surviving documents attest to the decline of rote learning but do not denounce the practice entirely. The change is marked only by a conspicuous absence, by what no longer appears in the text. Slowly, like the name of someone who has died, "memorization" was mentioned less and less until there was only an empty space where once poetry and recitation had been. In 1967, a report from the British Department of Education and Science reflected on the decline of poetry and memorization in the classroom:

> Until fairly recently it was common to find class sets of poetry books including far too many of the traditional anthology 'pieces' and too much tinkling verse about fairies and elves written specially for children. A period was usually set aside for poetry each week: at best children made individual anthologies and memorised some of the poems they chose to copy out: at worst the whole class copied a poem a week from the blackboard and poetry became little more than a writing lesson. Occasionally, choral verse speaking brought some vitality to the poetry period.... Now the class sets of poetry books are disappearing fast....poetry is poorly represented in teachers' reference libraries and is often confined to collections intended only for school use. Some good teachers lack conviction about the value of poetry and are more confident about giving children opportunities to write poems than about nourishing them with great poetry. Few children learn poems because, once the nursery rhyme stage is past, few teachers speak poems to them. [112]

We can see here several of the themes I've identified: the slow decline of recitation as a tool of moral teaching, the impotent instructor unable to inspire students to delight in poetry, the progressive educational model valuing experimentation and creativity above careful replication and imitation of the old masters, etc.[113] This report reflected the state of education twenty-three years after Britain's 1944 Education Act removed recitation from the required curriculum.

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[111] I stress the opposition of progressive moral education only to indicate that memorization is an intrinsically conservative practice—it is an act of aesthetic preservation. It creates, in the mind, an exact replica of the work. There are no evolutions between iterations of the memorized poem. Deviation from the original is antithetical to rote learning. "Two paths separate in the jungle, and I took the one more infrequently trodden" is not Robert Frost, nor is it poetry.

[112] *Children and their Primary Schools: A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education,* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1967), 216-217.

[113] Of course, this tactic (insisting students act before thinking, do before learning) makes no sense at all. Children must be taught to shade and sketch before they can be commanded to draw. Likewise, we cannot merely give students some paper and insist that they write—yet this is common practice in many schools. Last summer, I observed a class at Phillips Exeter Academy in which the students were instructed to write a poem or short story for their first assignment. Without any model to structure their work, without any thought given to the pace or the arc of

> ...in Great Britain, the elementary school, the institution that had hosted recitation in one way or another since the introduction of the Revised Code in 1862, was abolished by the 1944 Education Act. Its replacement, the primary school, founded itself upon a set of social ideas and teaching philosophies that had little tolerance for what were perceived as either the activities or the modes of instruction of the past; in consequence, the compulsory performance of a memorized poem had no place here.[114]

That poetry still had any enduring power by 1967 is a testament to its significance in language and culture, but as the years went on, the practice continued its steep decline. By 2013, the only mention of "memory" or "memorization" in Britain's National Curriculum for English Language states that in year one and two of schooling, children should learn to "write from memory simple sentences dictated by the teacher."[115] This is not rote learning; this is just a check for basic comprehension and a general facility with language. Even the requirements for more advanced elementary years are not much more rigorous. According to the statutory requirements for years one through six, students should be able to "listen and respond," "ask relevant questions," "articulate and justify answers," "maintain attention and participate," "speak audibly and fluently," "select and use appropriate registers," and "consider and evaluate different viewpoints."[116] There is no mention of speaking or reciting from memory, no mention of learning to read with passion and correct intonation, or of using poetry as an aid to develop proficiency with the spoken word. The National Curriculum later remarks that students should "gain knowledge, skills and understanding associated with the artistic practice of drama," but at no point does it indicate that this should require any memorization.[117]

In America, the death of memorization is slightly harder to trace. As Catherine Robson noted, "the absence of any centralized governmental directives meant that mandatory poetry memorization was neither created as a national practice with a stroke of the pen on a given date, as it was in Britain, nor brought to an end when the institution that hosted it was written off in a

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a story, without any conception of plot or theme, the students, of course, floundered, produced hideous pieces of prose, and nigh unintelligible poetry— "but at least they were being creative!" modern teachers insist. I disagree—blindly scribbling is not my idea of creativity.

I've attempted to solve this problem in my own course here at UVA by asking my students to imitate one of our authors in their first paper. It is astounding how much their prose improves when attempting to mimic Nietzsche or Emerson. Suddenly they are full of lively imagery; they speak with conviction and passionate intensity; they are not afraid to tell a story or use a metaphor. For the second half of their paper, I ask them to explain why their passage is particularly Nietzschean or Emersonian, and their prose again becomes dry, sterile, and lifeless, as if they have been awakened from a spell and cannot recollect that strange figure who had written before with such wild ferocity. The paper becomes a flat desert—no variation, no hot springs bubbling to the surface, no wild, undiscovered caves—just sand, everywhere the same desiccated earth. Obviously, I have not perfected this teaching technique. I cannot inspire them to always write with the vitality they briefly display when mimicking Nietzsche, but I know now at least that they have the potential. They are capable of letting some hidden, Dionysian force carry them aloft to undreamt heights. And perhaps, I hope, they know this too.

[114] Robson, 80.

[115] U.K. Department of Education, *English Programs of Study: Key Stages 1 and 2*, (London: September 2013), 13.

[116] Ibid, 7.

[117] Ibid, 4.

similarly definitive fashion."[118] But by the 1960s, "recitation in the American classroom was well on the way to becoming a fringe pursuit."[119] In his 1982 article in the New York Times "Use of Memorization in Schools Fading," Gene Maeroff reflected on the recent decline:

> For generations of schoolchildren, memorizing...was a standard requirement, a kind of mental gymnastics that meant endless practicing until the words were indelibly fixed in one's mind. It was a ritual that often concluded with a solo performance, the anxious student standing at the front of the class and reciting the painfully learned lines....[But] the only common body of memorized school material for many students today seems to be the multiplication tables, if that.[120]

Principals and teachers from the surrounding New York schools were happy to offer comments on the recent shifts in pedagogical practice. Lester Speiser, principal at the local Bayside High School in Queens, "said he had never observed a lesson at his school in which memorization and recitation were part of the assignment."[121] "'Memorization is a luxury that isn't used anymore,'" Speiser noted.[122] "'We have fundamental goals to accomplish with our youngsters today. We have to practice in dealing with ideas so that they can conceptualize and draw conclusions.'"[123] Committing literature and poetry to memory, Maeroff remarks, was once "a unifying force that endured for a lifetime, cementing the bonds of shared experience."[124] But now "'Memorization has come to be regarded as a kind of drudgery and is not as popular as it used to be,' said Anita Dore, director of communication arts for the New York City public schools."[125] Near the end of his piece, Maeroff is eager to mention some of the old hands still clinging with white-knuckled grip to the old days of rote learning, but it's clear, even to Maeroff, that memorization had reached its weary senescence: "Even guidelines promulgated at Board of Education headquarters no longer emphasize literary memorization."[126] By the 80s, schools cared about practical skills and quick conclusions—they wanted students to check the right box, fill in the right blanks, and indicate to a faceless commission that "concepts" had been "mastered." Instructors abandoned those "Poet's imaginings / And memories of love" that had inspired the daring young minds of the past.[127] The school was now under new dispensation: pale bureaucrats and bloodless technicians reclined under dim fluorescent lights and peered down through thick glasses at sterile classrooms and white-washed halls. Some part of humanity had been lost and was replaced by an unnatural world ruled by machine men with machine minds.

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[118] Robson, 8.
[119] Ibid, 8, 80.
[120] Maeroff, "Use of Memorization in Schools Fading."
[121] Ibid.
[122] Maeroff, "Use of Memorization in Schools Fading."
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Yeats, *Selected Poems*, 108.

Nearly twenty years later, Alice Quinn, poetry editor at *The New Yorker*, observed the same trend and worried that "that the nourishment provided by poems, the heights captured by great poets, [had] been jettisoned for more utilitarian and spiritually barren skills."[128] Memorizing a poem, she told *The New York Times*, "gives them a great sense of how the thing is made, the sounds, how the words are chiming, a great sense of the current of the thought and the beautiful labor poems achieve...High school is a place where poetry could be taught more fervently."[129]

Near the end of the piece, Quinn expresses interest in creating a website to promote the study and revival of poetry. In more recent years, many of these dedicated poetry websites have popped up including poetryfoundation.org, poets.org, and allpoetry.com, but they seem to have done little to spark any newfound fervor. According to Google trends, online searches for "poetry" have declined or stagnated every year since Google began keeping records in 2004. Overall, searches for poetry have declined 90% in the past eighteen years.[130]

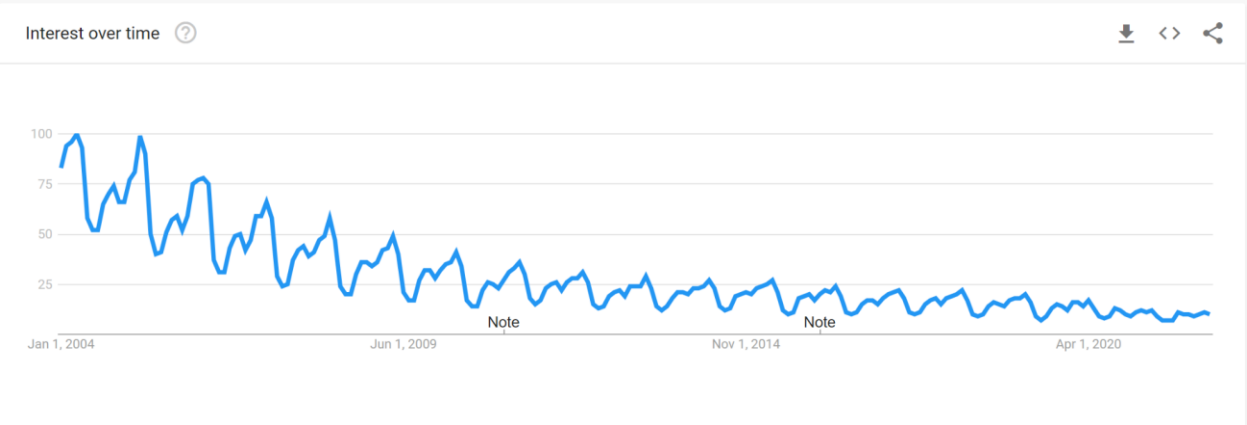

Fig. 2: Interest over time in "poetry" according to Google Trends

At first, I thought this might be some statistical abnormality—perhaps "poetry" was an infrequent search because people were googling specific poets. Alas, searches for "Yeats," "Robert Frost," "Keats," "Emily Dickinson," and "T.S. Eliot" all follow the same trend, and some have even more dismal results: searches for Eliot have declined 98% since April 2005, and searches for Robert Frost have declined 95% since March 2004.[131] The interest in reading, let alone memorizing, poetry is now vanishingly small. The only art activity less popular than reading poetry, according to the national Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, is attending

[128] Chris Hedges, "Public Lives; Poetry as Armor Against the Highs and Lows of Life," *The New York Times*, March 18, 2001.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Google Trends, Google, 2022.
[131] Ibid.

the opera. Poetry is less popular than jazz concerts, weaving, classical music, and ballet, all of which command tiny audiences on their own.[132]

Perhaps the last remnants of the old memorizing culture still survive today in the primitive poetry of lullabies and nursery rhymes. Parents still hum to their babies and children still chant in the schoolyard. Long before the children understand "ashes, ashes, we all fall down" their developing minds are instinctively drawn to the music of these phrases. Michael Knox Beran observes this phenomenon in his essay "In Defense of Memorization."

> I tried reciting to my three-year-old, over the course of a couple of weeks, Shakespeare's sonnet "That time of year thou mayst in me behold," and Blake's poem "Tyger, tyger, burning bright." She could understand only a very few of the words; but when I recited one of the lines, she soon delighted in reciting the line that follows as nearly as she could. The music of the verse was as entrancing to her as to any grown-up. Without knowing it, a child who has learned a scrap of verse has been drawn into the civilizing interplay of music and language, rhythm and sound, melody and words...[133]

Carol Muske-Dukes, a professor in the graduate program in writing at Columbia, observed the same penchant for verse when she visited children in preschools and speculated that the lack of early exposure to verse has contributed to what she called the "lost eloquence" of our age.[134]

> Lately I've been dropping in at a local preschool and have been reminded how much even little children love to memorize poems. They absorbed rather effortlessly Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Swing" (How do you like to go up in a swing?/Up in the air so blue?), accompanied by gliding hand and body movements. They loved the repetition, the chiming of the words and images.[135]

Children naturally enjoy rhythm and rhyme, and left to their own devices, they will memorize little songs and chant them with their fellows. The creation of verse is a bizarre emergent property of human communities—not all civilizations will create calculus or astrophysics, but they will almost certainly create music and poetry of some kind. Engaging in the oral tradition is an organic process that retains some deep hold over our minds. That which presents itself to us in song or verse ingrains itself in memory and has a special ability to penetrate all the layers of the mind. When I was thirteen, I was required to memorize the Shakespeare sonnet "Let me not to the marriage of true minds." Not only can I still recite the poem, but I can recall the textbook, the classroom, and the notebook where I scrawled again and again "love is not love which alters when it alteration finds." Even earlier, I remember one particular afternoon in my kindergarten

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[132] Christopher Ingraham, "Poetry is Going Extinct, Government Data Show," *The Washington Post,* April 24, 2015.
[133] Michael Knox Beran, "In Defense of Memorization" *City Journal*, Summer, 2004.
[134] Carol Muske-Dukes, "A Lost Eloquence," *The New York Times,* December 29, 2002.
[135] Ibid.

classroom where, one-by-one, we all sang “Do you know the muffin man?” I remember choking down my dry saltines before beginning a nervous performance. For the rest of my life, whenever I hear that song, I will always be in that preschool classroom with my crackers and a cup of apple juice.

When reminded of the words I know by heart, I am driven back down all the winding roads of my life, and I watch through a foggy window as my remembered days flicker like the frames of a film before my eyes. All of us have this experience at one time or another: a faint sound is heard as though from beneath a pool or behind thick glass. You wander through the trim halls of memory searching for the source, listening at every corner until finally a door swings open flooding the corridor with light, and there before you is the perfect image of a moment that stands isolated, frozen, lost in time. It dances before you, sweet and solemn, just beyond your grasp. But then the door slams shut, and you are wrenched back through time hurtling past all the corridors and broken wreckage of remembered thought until awakening finally to the grim present: “O Lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again.”[136]

What happens if we have no words to remember, no corridors of memory to explore like some forgotten maze? What if there are no poems, no quotes, no books that appeal to the sympathies of all and unite us in common experience and shared memory? Will we be able to live together in a society? Will we still be able to think? I fear that we approach this condition today: a state where men shall sit down at the table of brotherhood to find that they can appeal to no common affections, that the sounds which excite the rhythm of their hearts are but senseless noise to their neighbors. If this should come to pass, I see only two tragic fates ahead. Perhaps men shall stumble back from the table in horror and crawl towards the cold mountains to commence their years of solitude. Or perhaps they shall lose their identity, become a stranger to themselves and others and wander like Prufrock through the empty streets, unable to put thoughts to feelings or words to emotions. And on the stillest of nights, they shall be heard at every turn murmuring in lonely frustration, “That is not it at all, / That is not what I meant, at all.”[137]

[136] Wolfe, 48.
[137] Eliot, *Complete Poems*, 6.

Chapter 3

Memory as Equipment for Living

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And what if my descendants lose the flower
Through natural declension of the soul,
Through too much business with the passing hour,
Through too much play, or marriage with a fool?
May this laborious stair and this stark tower
Become a roofless ruin that the owl
May build in the cracked masonry and cry
Her desolation to the desolate sky.

—W.B. Yeats, "My Descendants" [138]

The continuous thread winding throughout these chapters is my contention, borrowed from Rorty and Bloom, that possessing the world by memory enables us to have fuller and richer lives. The memories we gather, the thoughts we retain are a bulwark against the suffering and loss we must all endure in this life. I could take these final pages to adduce a series of studies attesting that memorization has certain cognitive benefits; I could discuss brain chemistry and point to the recent papers suggesting that memory games stave off Alzheimer's disease, but this would imply that the value of memorization is merely instrumental, that it's useful for attaining a high IQ but holds little intrinsic value. This, I believe, would be an ill-conceived defense of memorization, one whose inadequacies we can reveal with a simple thought experiment. If you could take a magic pill that ensured you would experience no cognitive decline and that you would turn out just as well-developed and intelligent as anyone who had endured years of rote learning, would memorization still be a worthwhile endeavor? To anyone who has ever loved a quote or underlined a paragraph in a book, the answer should be clear. We do these things because they are good for us, but more importantly, because they are enjoyable and enriching in themselves. Memorization thus belongs among what Socrates called "the finest goods," those special things valued "both because of [themselves] and because of what comes from [them]."[139] Any purely material justification (it helps us develop, it prevents mental atrophy) neglects the spiritual dimension of art and remains an incomplete picture of its value. It will thus be my goal here not to burden these final passages with tables and analytics but to convey in clear language why learning the great works is essential to a life well-lived. Essentially, I shall reveal why memory is equipment for living.

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[138] Yeats, *Selected Poems,* 112.
[139] Plato, *Republic,* 34.

In 1818, Percy Shelley published perhaps his best-known work, the sonnet "Ozymandias." Commenting on the poem in his essay "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" William Butler Yeats noted that Shelley "could hardly have helped perceiving that an image that has transcended particular time and place becomes a symbol, passes beyond death, as it were, and becomes a living soul."[140] Yeats was haunted by questions of memory, legacy, meaning and endurance: What shall we remember? What shall remain when the dust has settled? What shall poke out from the "lone and level sands" that "stretch far away?"[141] For Yeats, to be remembered meant that one had escaped the apocalyptic unraveling of the world and achieved, through the transformative power of art, a Grecian perfection, a body of "hammered gold."[142] To imprint the "soul's unchanging look" into reality was to pass beyond death and collapse the cycles of life into a boundless eternity.[143] The words that passed "from father unto son," the traditions that "through the centuries ran/ And seemed unchanging..." held within them the power to break free from the mortal realm, to escape ""[a]ll of that worst ignominy/ Of flesh and bone."[144] Memory was a way to commune with that ethereal realm beyond the flesh, to defy the laws of time and reality through sheer will. Monuments, swords, paintings, sculptures, even Yeats's medieval tower, preserved the memory of the craftsman, and in these mystic symbols of adamantine endurance, Yeats thought, lurked the secrets of eternity. Through memory and preservation, we could mock the weathering sands of time and fulfill our role in the eternal *agon,* the great struggle of life—order against chaos. As Whitman put it, "Oh me! Oh life! of the questions of these recurring, / Of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities fill'd with the foolish / ...What good amid these, O me, O life? / *Answer*. / That you are here—that life exists and identity, / That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse."[145] In memory, one could preserve the souls of others, and others could preserve our own. In the end, Juno's peacock shrieks; the fabric of reality is unwound; the epoch is torn apart by the violence of its own passions—yet amidst this anarchy "loosed upon the world," man remains.[146] He crafts symbols of timeless endurance and leaves footprints and impressions in the paths where he has tread: "the mountain grass / Cannot but keep the form / Where the mountain hare has lain."[147] We who remember, we who endure—that is our role in the universal play. To forge a memory is to make sense out of chaos—it is our one weapon against the forces of entropy, our one light amidst the great darkness that gathers on the horizon. As Lord Byron put it, "My mind may lose its force, my blood its fire, / And my frame perish even in conquering pain; / But there is that within me which shall tire / Torture and Time, and breathe when I expire."[148]

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[140] W.B. Yeats, *Ideas of Good and Evil*, (London: A. H. Bullen, 1903), 115.
[141] Percy Shelley, *The Complete Poetry of Percy Shelley*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), 326.
[142] Yeats, *Selected Poems*, 103.
[143] Ibid, 112.
[144] Ibid, 111; W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats,* (Great Britain, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994), 180.
[145] Whitman, *Complete Poems*, 298-299.
[146] Yeats, *Selected Poems*, 89.
[147] Ibid, 63.
[148] Lord Byron, *The Major Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 187.

Yeats knew that there is immense power in memory—without it, "things fall apart; the center cannot hold."[149] But there are dangers here too: Emerson worried that memory might lure us into a false consistency, leaving us chained to the ghost of our former selves, a "corpse of memory" that we would drag throughout life.[150] If you remember too much, Emerson suggests, you cannot think; you cannot change. "Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst....I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system."[151] Man's "libraries overload his wit" and permit him to voice only the thoughts which others have thought.[152] Through memory and books, we cannot discover that "divine idea which each of us represents."[153] Nietzsche too recognized reading as a great intellectual narcotic. One must read for wisdom and inspiration, but too much time with the printed word and one's own voice would be lost in the choir; one's thoughts would become only recollections. As he notes in *Ecce Homo*, "I was delivered from the 'book'; for years I did not read a thing—the greatest benefit I ever conferred on myself.—That nethermost self which had, as it were, been buried and grown silent under the continual pressure of having to listen to other selves."[154]

Harold Bloom, as much as he admired Nietzsche and Emerson, seemed to dissent from the old masters on this point: "[y]ou can't think at all clearly or well without memory. And it matters a great deal what you remember. And if what you remember is mediocre stuff, you're not going to be able to think very well."[155] If what you remember is "[Harry] Potter and Stephen King, you haven't got anything to remember. If you have Shakespeare and Jane Austen and George Eliot and Emily Bronte to remember, then you've got something to remember and a better chance to learn how to think."[156] All his life, Bloom was fond of reciting beloved poems. Particularly in restless hours of the evening, he would recall the great works by Milton and Eliot. "Even as an undergraduate, I would recite all of *Paradise Lost* to myself during many sleepless nights...Frequently at night, feeling my exhaustions, I recite T. S. Eliot's 'Little Gidding' to myself, alternating it with 'La Figlia Che Piange.' At his strongest, Eliot comforts me...."[157] Bloom believed that those who knew the masterworks by heart were "haunted by great visions;" they were given a lasting "metaphysical comfort" even in the face of the deepest suffering.[158] "At 84," Bloom notes, "I lie awake at night, after a first sleep, and murmur Crane, Whitman and Shakespeare to myself, seeking comfort through continuity, as grand voices somehow hold off

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[149] Yeats, *Selected Poems*, 89.
[150] Emerson, *Essays*, 183.
[151] Ibid, 88.
[152] Ibid, 200.
[153] Ibid, 176.
[154] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Ecce Homo" in *Basic Writing of Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York, The Modern Library, 1992), 743-744.
[155] Harold Bloom, "How to Read and Why," interview by Charlie Rose.
[156] Cassandra Atherton, "An interview with Harold Bloom: Deep Subjectivity," *Writing on the Edge*, vol. 17 no. 2, Spring 2007, 37.
[157] Harold Bloom, *Possessed by Memory*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2019), 153, 378.
[158] Harold Bloom, *How to Read and Why*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 274.

the permanent darkness that gathers though it does not fall."[159] This was also Nietzsche's understanding of the value of great art: it allowed the proud soul to stare "boldly right into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history" and respond with an "unbroken reply to the vicissitudes of fortune, a triumphant response to suffering, and a celebration of life as 'at bottom in spite of all the alternations of appearances, indestructible, powerful, and joyous.'"[160] When the world seems so vast and dark before us, it is an act of courage to go on and venture into the fray. Often, memory provides us that courage—the thoughts of our lonely betters reside somewhere deep in our heart and keep us warm like a small flame on a winter's day. Even as the icy winds whip across the hills and the bitter storm batters against our door, we may turn again to that little spark within us and nurse to life the glowing embers.

Memory, Bloom indicates, is the source of all character. It is the deep well at the bottom of consciousness from which all thoughts are drawn. We may synthesize new ideas or observe new phenomena, but we are, in some way, always beholden to those deep currents that run beneath the surface and stretch back, winding into the past. We are always haunted by what Bloom called "the anxiety of influence"—the pure work of art is impossible; there are no virginal texts, untouched by the hands of others. All men are "born too late" to create the original work. There is always a heritage—no one, save God himself, is entirely "self-begot, self-raised" (*PL:* V. 860).[161] We are forever at the crossroads of two facts of identity: the inability to keep our deeply interior selves *in* and the inability to keep the world *out.* We are supple, malleable, porous, fluid. Infinite identities pass through us to become part and parcel of our mortal soul. As Percy Shelley observed,

> Every man's mind is, in this respect, modified by all the objects of nature and art; by every word and every suggestion which he ever admitted to act upon his consciousness; it is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected, and in which they compose one form. Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors, and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and, in another, the creations of their age. From this subjection the loftiest do not escape.[162]

All writers are marked, however unconsciously, by their primary creative influences. Nietzsche was the ephebe of Schopenhauer and Socrates, Yeats the ephebe of Shelley and Nietzsche, Aristotle the ephebe of Plato. The path of maturation is attended by the writer's effort to define himself in opposition to his precursors. "Poems rise not so much in response to a present time," Bloom notes, "but in response to other poems."[163] There is, in every strong poet, "a personalized Counter-Sublime, in reaction to the precursor's Sublime."[164] In consummation of the Oedipal

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[159] Skafidas, "Harold Bloom: Preposterous 'Isms' are Destroying Literature."
[160] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 110.
[161] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 99.
[162] Ibid, 104.
[163] Ibid, 99.
[164] Ibid, 15.

myth, the mature creative attempts to slay the intellectual father and, perpetuating the *agon* of literature, struggles to distinguish himself through violent rebellion against the past. He desires to be "a solitary genius without precedents and borrowings; he would be new under the sun."[165] But he cannot ever fully escape his servitude. Like the Oedipal myth, the son's rebellion is enabled by the "quickening power" of the father (*PL:* V. 861). The life-force that animates the anarch does not exist without the endowments of the father. Within the repudiation is thus the confession of a debt. Nietzsche repeatedly acknowledged this: "Socrates, to put it frankly, is so close to me that almost always I fight a fight against him."[166] The quest for individuation and independence of soul drives man to recreate himself in opposition to the love-object with which he identifies. Nietzsche seemed to believe with Oscar Wilde that all men kill the thing they love or perish in the attempt.[167] This "conception of love" writes Nietzsche "distinguishes a work of art among thousands."[168]

In Bloom's formulation there are thus several consequences attending the dissolution of memory. Without it, there is no father, and without the father, no rebellion, no art. In the absence of memory, there is no material with which to construct a dialogue, and the sublime/counter-sublime dialectic is undone. To engage in the genuinely creative act, we need to be supplied with raw material. There must be a vast sea of preconscious images and memories that shape our understanding of art itself. Imagine a child who has never read a book is presented with pen and paper and asked to write a novel. He is offered no guidance and is not permitted to consult any existing books. I imagine the child would find this a completely impossible task, and I believe Bloom would agree. "I tell every writer I've ever known," says Bloom, "either they are deep readers, or they cannot become real writers."[169] All art is "the artist's struggle against art."[170] To be without memory is to attempt to create in a vacuum—doomed from the start.

Then there is the inspirational value of memory. The image of a great work or the lines of a fine poem preserve the glittering image of something perfect and wholly achieved to which we may return when the world around us feels empty and barren. This can be a lasting source of comfort; it can give us the courage to go on in reckless pursuit of ever higher, ever rarer peaks until we stand gleaming and unbreakable "6000 feet beyond man and time."[171]

But Bloom's most puzzling contention is that memory enables thought. Perhaps he follows Wittgenstein here to suggest that language determines the limits of reason and comprehension—thus, we can only think as well as the words we remember— but this doesn't seem to be Bloom's entire point. Rather, it seems that thinking is so intertwined with recollection as to be coextensive. This seems feasible if we understand thinking as a process of systematizing,

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[165] Reed Whittemore, "The Family Romance: Dissecting Harold Bloom's Theory of Originality," *The New Republic,* February 10, 1973.
[166] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche,* 340.
[167] Oscar Wilde, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol,* (London, Leonard Smithers, 1898), 2.
[168] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche,* 335.
[169] Daniel D'Addario, "10 Questions with Harold Bloom," *Time,* April 30, 2015.
[170] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, 99.
[171] Nietzsche, "Ecce Homo," 751.

of connecting the dots between relevant points of data to create a coherent image.[172] Much of thought is thus a kind of assortative pairing at the level of abstraction. This is easy to see if you follow any conversation between two people. The topics are strings of subconscious associations— this thing is like this other thing—which at bottom, is a function of memory. I notice this in my own thoughts quite frequently. Someone will say something to me, and a relevant quote will appear spontaneously in my mind. Often the quote is something someone else has said, but equally often it is a thought I have already had. In these instances, it seems that my mind is saying, "this concept is like this other concept;" it is performing an automated sorting function enabled by memory. Data retention ultimately augments the power of these systematizing functions. More memories means more potential pairings. In the expansive mind, every experience is subjected to a compendium of theories. Innumerable modes of interpretation are employed to understand the world, and thus, the complexity of any given analysis is multiplied. When someone asks me about justice, I no longer stare back blankly and puzzle over an idea that seems both so intuitive and so mysterious. If I remember my Plato, I can respond that justice is when all things fulfill their proper role. I can then weigh this claim against others, comparing it to Nietzsche, Mill, and Simone de Beauvoir. Without memory, I must begin anew at every turn; I would be cursed to wander in naïve perplexity, like a newborn babe or like Adam on the first morning.

At a more fundamental level, this memory and identification function is essential for basic concept formation. When I encounter a brick, I expect it to be like other bricks I have encountered: hard, made from fired clay, probably used in construction. If every brick I encounter has entirely different properties, or if I cannot summon other encounters with this object to mind, then the concept loses all value. If I pick up one brick and it spontaneously turns into a butterfly, and the next one I pick up is gooey and turns into a slug, then the concept of "brick" or the quality "brickness" is meaningless. Similarly, if someone says, "this is made of brick," but I cannot ever recall encountering such a substance, then the word is just an empty sound. Thus, reformulating Bloom's phrase, we might say that without memory, without rote learning, one cannot think at all, or at least, one cannot think beyond the level of the lowest animals: a kind of minute-by-minute perception that permits no concepts or abstractions.

This is perhaps why, in the past, the loss or absence of memory was greatly feared. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates tells of a great Egyptian king who rejects the gift of writing offered by the gods and denounces the ibis-faced inventor of letters:

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[172] Seemingly there are also other forms of reasoning or thinking that differ from the systematizing or identity function of consciousness (this thing is like that thing). For instance, deductive reasoning seems to be more than just identifying like and unlike parts. To borrow a classic logic problem, if I am in a line, and everyone is wearing a hat, and the colors of the hats alternate black, white, black, white down the line, I can assume that if the man in front of me is wearing a white hat, I am wearing a black hat. Though this seems a different cognitive function than just identifying pairs, it does still rely on the systematizing function. For this deduction to work, I must assume that this rule about alternating hats is like other rules I've experienced in life. I must assume that this reality is one in which hats do not spontaneously change color. In other words, I must assume that all elements of the problem— the hats, the rules, reality itself— are like other instances of these elements that I've experienced in the past. This, of course, presupposes memory.

> [T]his discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves...you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality."[173]

I remember, as an undergraduate, I would come every week to the office of my thesis advisor, Dr. David Ross, and we would chat about poetry and art. I would open the office door, his daughter would be reading Victor Hugo in the corner, and David would lean back in his chair and say: "Hmm, well, let's see, what is there to say?" He would then begin to speak at length about Yeats, romanticism, and dystopian novels. David was not merely a hearer of many things; he possessed that reality of wisdom which Socrates admired. He didn't need to read to me from a library—the knowledge he possessed had become a physical part of his body and soul; it lived within him. The Egyptian myth ultimately reveals that only those facts known by heart can guide us in the everyday and become part of that rich store of "practical wisdom" Aristotle so often praised.[174] I am perhaps more grateful for the printed word than old king Thamus, but our goals remain the same—to possess the spirit of a work of art and do away with the tattered book which is only the meaningless vessel, the paper cage of a once-great mind. In the end, Socrates tells us, we are only as wise as what we remember.

I have now advanced several theories which suggest that memory enables thought and permits us to glimpse a higher realm of being. Yeats opines that memory allows us to fulfill our essential telos in reality, to play our part on the world stage and battle against the gyral unraveling of the world by immortalizing the living soul and holding together time and reality in the human mind. In the Yeatsian scheme, we are all statues of Ozymandias defying the flowing dunes that bury all in blank obscurity. Emerson and Nietzsche fire back with high-flown rhetoric, insisting that memory is too much with us, that it surrounds man in a dense fog. We choke on a soporific miasma until we burst from the room and cry out with Nietzsche: "Bad air! Bad air!"[175] Bloom takes a third route. He sees life and memorization as an invitation to a great tradition, one that ultimately cannot be escaped, even by those stubborn rebels who declare themselves to be without precedent. We must remember the past—without it, we cannot think, and we cannot achieve our destiny.

But in some way, these are almost all second-order concerns. Many of them sit atop a foundation of presupposed sentiments: that it is meaningful and satisfying to engage in the grand struggle that is existence, that we must confront the unknown and all that lies beyond our comprehension, that a life full of artistic creation and aesthetic pleasure is one worth pursuing,

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[173] Plato, *The Works of Plato*, vol. III, trans. B. Jowett, (New York: Dial Press, 1936), 442.
[174] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terrence Irwin, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 95.
[175] Nietzsche, "Genealogy," 479.

etc. We have seen how memory can help us achieve these ends, but it is also memory that helps us establish them at the start. At bottom, our ends, our ideals are a collection of the oldest things we know, a panoply of sacred feelings endeared to us by time and repetition. In some way, we are always chasing after our past, stiving to uphold those first noble feelings of youth. Give a child visions of power and pride—knights at the roundtable, Leonidas at the hot gates, Caesar triumphing at Alesia—and this will become the red ingot from which a character is born. The hours of our youth forge our sense of life; they shape those implicit metaphysical convictions that lie at the base of every personality. You may no longer sense these ancient memories, but they are there, lurking in the unconscious recesses of the mind—and with some effort, you may invite them to rejoin you in the waking realm.

Like many of the old and unfashionable educators who have come before me, I do not have faith that children will discover noble sentiments or the great, transcendent truths on their own. I do not trust that they will become connoisseurs of the higher pleasures and have the strength to drive their chariot towards the heavens and resist that horse of "ignoble breed" who tries, at every turn, to pull us back down to the low and the earthly.[176] If you value art, if you seek inspiration and creativity, if you believe we must barricade ourselves against time, if you know that thought and contemplation are illustrious occupations, then memory is your great ally.[177] But men are not born with this knowledge—they must be shown the lighted path. This is the great goal of education: to illuminate the darkened woods and supply a trusty map for the long road ahead. The task, in this sense, is fundamentally normative. We, as educators, must climb down from our post and point the way: "There is the path to undreamt heights that roams along the lonely peaks. There you shall find a pyramid of cold granite, and, for a moment, you may stand atop and rule above the level plains—that is greatness." Without this guidance our youth will wander sightless and afraid until they stumble and fall through miles of empty space down into the depthless bottom. Perhaps you protest that this is their right: "we must let every man plot his own course." I do not think so. To paraphrase Socrates, no man has the right to throw away his soul. It is a shame for a man to grow old without seeing the beauty and strength of which he is capable. It is our duty to use memory to establish ends, to expose students to certain feelings, to endear them by repetition, until a certain sense of self and of life remains fixed in the mind. But this is not all. We must show them too that this work is valuable in itself. Memorization is the consummate expansive act, the embodiment of that "incarnate will to power" Nietzsche first identified as the animating force of all life.[178] To memorize is to envelop an idea in the tendrils of the mind— it is an act of spiritual growth; it is domination of all that is alien and strange. This furious dynamism of the human spirit, this indomitable vitality of youth is the essence of life itself, and it is good for its own sake.

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[176] Plato, *Works of Plato*, 403.
[177] We cannot really think about whether thinking is valuable since this would seem to beg the question. Presumably one who is thinking has already decided that it is an activity worthy of his time, but permit me this point with the understanding that I mean "thought" in the broader sense.
[178] Nietzsche, "Beyond Good and Evil," 393.

Most men shall never lead a great battle charge; they will not hear the proud horns of a symphony bellow in the hall, commanded to the pitch of their own music; they will not write a verse that shall triumph for a thousand years. But if they can have their glimpse of some human soul at its utmost height, they shall have a taste of that glory, and they shall be infused with some rejuvenating power that never leaves the blood. "Since it is so likely that [children] will meet cruel enemies," C.S. Lewis tells us, "let them at least have heard of brave knights and heroic courage. Otherwise you are making their destiny not brighter but darker."[179] I believe that memorization of the greatest literature can develop for our children that heroic disposition that is now so rare in this life. It may be that conquests were not won by poems nor riches had by the humble bard. But the poem can teach us to reach out, like Yeats, for that "inviolate rose," that overwhelming force at the very heart of nature, that specter from the realm of pure passion.[180] Though its ruby flesh may remain forever just beyond our grasp, to read a poem brings us close; to know it by heart brings us closer still until we can almost feel the breath of the muse upon our neck and grasp, for a fleeting moment, the dancing train of terpsichore. Here, we encounter the divine in man, the best that is within us, and we soar higher and higher seeking that "lonely impulse of delight" until we, mere mortals, pierce the empyrean veil and brush the pearly gates.[181] There, we bask in the white heat, quivering in "sun-intoxicated rapture" and for a moment, dwell far-off "beyond the stir / And tumult of defeated dreams;" in a land where wine brims the flowing cups and a heavy rain of golden tinsel glimmers in the boundless sky.[182]

[179] C.S. Lewis, *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, (New York: Harcourt, 1994), 31.
[180] Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 56.
[181] Yeats, *Selected Poems*, 55.
[182] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans, Thomas Common, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 240; Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 56.

Appendix A:

TABLE II—A SELECTED LIST OF POEMS AND PARTS OF POEMS MENTIONED FIVE OR MORE TIMES IN FIFTY COURSES OF STUDY

No.	Author	Title	Times Mentioned	Cities Mention'g	Weighted Value
1	Smith	America	59	30	207
2	Longfellow	Children's Hour, The	44	39	135
3	Field	Dutch Lullaby	43	41	136
4	Longfellow	Village Blacksmith, The	42	39	134
5	Stevenson	My Shadow	42	40	130
6	Jackson	September	41	36	125
7	Scott	Breathes There a Man	40	38	129
8	Key	Star Spangled Banner	38	26	135
9	Stevenson	Wind, The	38	32	112
10	Browning	Songs from Pippa Passes	35	30	105
11	Hunt	Abou Ben Adhem	35	35	111
12	Jackson	October's Bright Blue Weather	35	32	109
13	Longfellow	Arrow and the Song, The	35	33	116
14	Stevenson	Bed in Summer	35	33	102
15	Lowell	First Snowfall, The	34	26	104
16	Bennett	Flag Goes By, The	33	27	101
17	Hemans	Landing of the Pilgrims, The	33	30	101
18	Ingelow	Seven Times One	33	33	96
19	Tennyson	Sweet and Low	33	31	103
20	Whittier	Barefoot Boy, The	33	31	102
21	Wordsworth	I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud	33	27	96
22	Stevenson	Swing, The	32	31	102
23	Rands	Great, Wide, Beautiful, Wonderful World	32	29	93
24	Field	Night Wind, The	31	29	92
25	Tennyson	Bird and the Baby, The	31	30	94
26	Holmes	Chambered Nautilus, The	30	28	97
27	Child	Thanksgiving Day	29	26	85
28	Field	Why Do Bells for Christmas Ring?	29	25	82
29	Drake	American Flag, The	28	21	94
30	Miller	Blue Bird, The	28	24	81
31	Thaxter	Sandpiper, The	28	21	82
32	Emerson	Concord Hymn	27	24	85
33	Holmes	Old Ironsides	27	27	86
34	Howe	Battle Hymn of the Republic	27	19	94
35	Larcom	Brown Thrush, The	27	25	77
36	Longfellow	Hiawatha's Childhood	27	24	82
37	Sherman	Daisies	27	24	85
38	Stevenson	Land of Story Books, The	27	26	76
39	Field	Little Boy Blue	26	26	76
40	Moore	Visit from St. Nicholas, A	26	24	77
41	Tennyson	Bugle Song	26	24	77
42	Whittier	Corn Song, The	26	23	78
43	Bryant	Robert of Lincoln	25	23	75
44	Longfellow	Day is Done, The	25	23	78
45	Miller	Columbus	25	24	76
46	Tennyson	Brook, The	25	20	73

TABLE II—(*Continued*)

No.	Author	Title	Times Mentioned	Cities Mention'g	Weighted Value
47	Bryant	To a Waterfowl	24	23	76
48	Kipling	Recessional	24	24	76
49	Longfellow	Paul Revere's Ride	24	22	70
50	Shakespeare	Mercy Speech (Merchant of Venice)	24	23	77
51	Bunner	One, Two, Three	23	22	64
52	Carlyle	To-day	23	23	73
53	Cary	November	23	18	63
54	Coolidge	How the Leaves Came Down	23	20	64
55	Hogg	Boy's Song	23	23	67
56	Holland	Gradatim	23	22	71
57	Longfellow	Builders, The	23	21	67
58	Rossetti	Wind, The	23	23	67
59	Taylor	Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star	23	23	65
60	Whitman	O Captain! My Captain!	23	22	72
61	Brooks	O Little Town of Bethlehem	22	20	67
62	Brown	Little Plant, The	22	22	64
63	Longfellow	Psalm of Life, A	22	20	68
64	Stevenson	Rain	22	22	62
65	Stevenson	Where Go the Boats?	22	21	64
66	Tennyson	Charge of the Light Brigade	22	22	66
67	Emerson	Fable	21	20	75
68	Longfellow	Hiawatha	21	18	56
69	Lowell	Vision of Sir Launfal, The	21	17	61
70	Stevenson	Windy Nights	21	19	57
71	Alexander	All Things Bright and Beautiful	20	20	61
72	Allingham	Wishing	20	19	56
73	Bjornson	Tree, The	20	19	59
74	Cary	Suppose	20	19	60
75	Jackson	Down to Sleep	20	20	58
76	Payne	Home, Sweet Home	20	13	67
77	Stevenson	Cow, The	20	20	54
78	Bryant	Planting of the Apple Tree, The	19	19	75
79	Field	Norse Lullaby	19	19	56
80	Gould	Frost, The	19	18	49
81	Houghton	Good-Night and Good-Morning	19	18	48
82	Houghton	Lady Moon	19	18	56
83	Kingsley	Lost Doll, The	19	19	54
84	Pierpont	Warren's Address	19	17	59
85	Whittier	Snow Bound: A Winter Idyll	19	18	48
86	Aldrich	Marjorie's Almanac	18	17	53
87	Cooper	Come, Litle Leaves	18	16	52
88	Whittier	In School Days	18	17	53
89	Allingham	Fairies, The	17	17	43
90	Cary	Nobility	17	17	53

TABLE II—(*Continued*)

No.	Author	Title	Times Mentioned	Cities Mention'g	Weighted Value
91	Field	Duel, The	17	17	46
92	Finch	Blue and the Gray, The	17	16	51
93	(From the German)	Sleep Baby Sleep	17	16	54
94	MacDonald	Baby, The (At the Back of the North Wind)	17	17	47
95	Riley	Old Glory	17	16	54
96	Rossetti	Boats Sail on the Rivers	17	16	51
97	Thaxter	Spring	17	17	49
98	Allingham	Robin Redbreast	16	16	46
99	Allison	Which Loved Best?	16	16	45
100	Child	Who Stole the Bird's Nest?	16	15	43
101	Field	Japanese Lullaby	16	16	47
102	Field	Rockabye Lady, The	16	16	46
103	Longfellow	Daybreak	16	13	45
104	Longfellow	Hiawatha's Sailing	16	16	48
105	Longfellow	Ship of State, The	16	16	52
106	Morris	Woodman, Spare That Tree	16	15	46
107	Bryant	March	15	14	41
108	Burns	For A' That and A' That	15	15	44
109	Holmes	Last Leaf, The	15	14	45
110	Sherman	Four Winds, The	15	14	42
111	Sill	Opportunity	15	15	42
112	Wadsworth	Over in the Meadow	15	15	39
113	Aldrich	Before the Rain	14	14	43
114	Bryant	Thanatopsis	14	13	39
115	Lear	Owl and the Pussy Cat, The	14	13	43
116	Procter	Sea, The	14	13	38
117	Shakespeare	Under the Greenwood Tree (As You Like It)	14	12	38
118	Shelley	Cloud, The	14	13	36
119	Sherman	Dewdrop, A	14	13	40
120	Stevenson	Autumn Fires	14	14	40
121	Stevenson	Land of Counterpane, The	14	13	47
122	Addison	Spacious Firmament on High, The	13	13	36
123	Bryant	Gladness of Nature, The	13	13	36
124	Bryant	To the Fringed Gentian	13	13	38
125	Cary	Don't Give Up	13	13	40
126	Coleridge	He Prayeth Best	13	12	35
127	Emerson	Snow Storm, The	13	11	37
128	Emerson	We Thank Thee	13	11	33
129	Field	Sugar Plum Tree, The	13	12	37
130	Follen	New Moon, The	13	13	36
131	Longfellow	Rain in Summer	13	12	34
132	Lowell	Day in June, A	13	11	36
133	Lowell	Fatherland, The	13	13	39
134	Stevenson	My Bed is a Boat	13	12	36
135	Stevenson	Sun's Travels, The	13	11	36
136	Tennyson	Break, Break, Break	13	12	40
137	Tennyson	Crossing of the Bar	13	13	40
138	Whittier	Barbara Frietchie	13	13	36

TABLE II—(*Continued*)

No.	Author	Title	Times Mentioned	Cities Mention'g	Weighted Value
139	Coleridge	Answer to a Child's Question	12	10	34
140	Longfellow	Excelsior	12	12	34
141	Lowell	Fountain, The	12	11	30
142	MacDonald	Wind and the Moon, The	12	12	35
143	Riley	Sudden Shower, A	12	10	28
144	Shakespeare	Polonius to Laertes (Hamlet)	12	11	36
145	Stevenson	Lamplighter, The	12	12	31
146	Taylor	I Like Little Pussy	12	12	33
147	Taylor	Violet, The	12	12	34
148	Wordsworth	To a Butterfly	12	11	42
149	Brooks	Christmas Everywhere	11	10	32
150	Browning	Incident of the French Camp, An	11	11	29
151	Fields	Ballad of the Tempest, The	11	11	30
152	Hopkinson	Hail Columbia!	11	4	31
153	Longfellow	Building of the Ship, The	11	10	29
154	Read	Sheridan's Ride	11	11	35
155	Riley	Little Orphant Annie	11	11	30
156	Sherman	Golden Rod	11	9	32
157	Tennyson	Owl, The	11	10	29
158	Thaxter	March	11	11	24
159	Blake	Lamb, The	10	10	31
160	Holmes	Union and Liberty	10	10	37
161	Hugo	Good Night	10	10	30
162	Kingsley	Farewell, A	10	10	31
163	Krout	Little Brown Hands	10	10	28
164	Longfellow	Rainy Day, The	10	10	28
165	Lowell	To the Dandelion	10	8	25
166	Newman	Lead Kindly Light	10	10	31
167	Perry	Coming of Spring, The	10	10	27
168	Riley	Song, A	10	10	27
169	Shelley	Sky Lark, The	10	10	28
170	Sherman	Leaves at Play	10	10	27
171	Stevenson	Foreign Children	10	9	25
172	Stevenson	Foreign Lands	10	10	28
173	Tate	Christmas	10	9	23
174	Tennyson	Ring Out, Wild Bells	10	10	30
175	Wordsworth	Written in March	10	10	26
176	Browning	Child's Thought of God, A	9	9	23
177	Bryant	Death of the Flowers, The	9	9	25
178	Bryant	Song of Marion's Men	9	9	23
179	Cone	Dandelions, The	9	8	26
180	Garabrant	Dandelion	9	9	24
181	Gray	Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard	9	9	22
182	Jewett	Discontent	9	9	24
183	Kipling	White Seal, The	9	9	24
184	Macauley	Horatius	9	9	18
185	Riley	Knee Deep in June	9	9	27
186	Shakespeare	Hark, Hark! the Lark (Cymbeline)	9	9	23

TABLE II—(*Continued*)

No.	Author	Title	Times Mentioned	Cities Mention'g	Weighted Value
187	Sherman	Clouds	9	9	25
188	Stedman	What the Winds Bring	9	9	24
189	Thaxter	Wild Geese	9	9	20
190	Thomas	Talking in Their Sleep	9	9	24
191	Vandegrift	Sand Man, The	9	9	24
192	Wolfe	Burial of Sir John Moore	9	9	27
193	Wordsworth	To a Skylark	9	9	23
194	Browning	How They Brought the Good News	8	8	18
195	Campbell	Hohenlinden	8	8	22
196	Edwards	Child's Prayer, A	8	8	21
197	Field	Seein' Things	8	7	18
198	Herford	Elf and the Dormouse, The	8	7	17
199	Higinson	Four Leaf Clovers	8	8	20
200	Howitt	Voice of Spring, The	8	8	17
201	Larcom	If I Were a Sunbeam	8	8	24
202	Longfellow	Bell of Atri, The	8	8	18
203	Longfellow	Evangeline	8	8	19
204	Longfellow	Old Clock on the Stairs, The	8	8	22
205	Longfellow	Wreck of the Hesperus, The	8	8	20
206	Lowell	Heritage, The	8	8	21
207	Lowell	Yussouf	8	8	23
208	Riley	Brook Song, The	8	8	22
209	Scott	Lochinvar	8	7	21
210	Shakespeare	Good Name (Othello)	8	8	23
211	Sherman	Snowflakes	8	8	17
212	Sherman	Wizard Frost	8	7	17
213	Southey	Inchcape Rock, The	8	7	26
214	Taylor	Thank You Pretty Cow	8	8	16
215	Tennyson	Flower in the Crannied Wall	8	8	22
216	Tennyson	Throstle, The	8	8	21
217	Thaxter	Little Gustava	8	8	20
218	Wordsworth	My Heart Leaps up When I Behold	8	8	19
219	Bates	Who Likes the Rain?	7	7	16
220	Browning	Home Thoughts from Abroad	7	6	17
221	Cary	Order for a Picture, An	7	7	19
222	Cary	They Didn't Think	7	7	19
223	Cooper	October's Party	7	7	22
224	Cooper	Wonderful Weaver, The	7	6	15
225	Cooper	What Robin Told	7	7	21
226	Holland	Christmas Carol, A	7	7	20
227	Hood	I Remember, I Remember	7	7	17
228	Kipling	L'Envoi	7	7	19
229	Lanier	Song of the Chattahoochee, The	7	7	18
230	Lowell	Aladdin	7	7	20
231	Lowell	Finding of the Lyre, The	7	7	17
232	Mackay	Tubal Cain	7	7	17
233	Riley	Life Lesson, A	7	7	22

TABLE II—(*Continued*)

No.	Author	Title	Times Mentioned	Cities Mention'g	Weighted Value
234	Scott	Lullaby of an Infant Chief	7	7	17
235	Shakespeare	Mark Anthony's Address (Julius Caesar)	7	7	21
236	Shakespeare	Orpheus with His Lute (King Henry the Eighth)	7	7	17
237	Sherman	Real Santa Claus, A	7	7	15
238	Sherman	Hide and Seek	7	7	14
239	Sherman	Snowbird, The	7	7	15
240	Taylor	Song of the Camp, The	7	7	18
241	Tennyson	In Memoriam	7	6	21
242	Tennyson	King Arthur	7	7	20
243	Tennyson	Sir Galahad	7	7	17
244	Tennyson	Window, The	7	7	18
245	Watts	Busy Bee, The	7	7	15
246	Whittier	Huskers, The	7	5	15
247	Wordsworth	Lucy Gray	7	7	17
248	Wordsworth	Kitten and the Falling Leaves, The	7	7	17
249	Anonymous	Laughing Chorus, A	6	6	16
250	Bangs	Little Elf, The	6	6	13
251	Blake	Tiger, The	6	6	17
252	Burns	Bannockburn	6	6	14
253	Byron	Eve of Waterloo, The	6	6	16
254	Campbell	Lord Ullin's Daughter	6	6	14
255	Cary	Leak in the Dyke, The	6	6	15
256	Emerson	Rhodora, The	6	6	13
257	Hale	Mary's Lamb	6	6	15
258	Hemans	Casabianca	6	6	12
259	Hogg	Skylark, The	6	6	15
260	Howlister	Our Flag	6	6	21
261	Jones	What Constitutes a State?	6	6	15
262	Kingsley	Three Fishers, The	6	6	14
263	Kipling	If	6	5	19
264	Lang	Scythe Song	6	6	14
265	Lear	Nonsense Alphabet	6	5	13
266	Longfellow	Courtship of Miles Standish, The	6	6	12
267	Longfellow	Ladder of St. Augustine, The	6	6	17
268	Lowell	Stanzas on Freedom	6	6	17
269	McDonald	Little White Lily, The	6	6	16
270	Mackay	Miller of the Dee, The	6	6	18
271	Nesbitt	Your Flag and My Flag	6	6	20
272	Proctor	One by One	6	6	16
273	Rossetti	Milking Time	6	6	15
274	Sherman	May	6	5	15
275	Stevenson	Happy Thought	6	6	15
276	Stevenson	Whole Duty of Children	6	6	18
277	Thaxter	Chanticleer	6	6	12
278	Wilder	Stand by the Flag	6	6	16
279	Wordsworth	We Are Seven	6	5	12
280	Alexander	Burial of Moses, The	5	5	14
281	Anonymous	Secret, The	5	5	13
282	Browning	Pied Piper of Hamelin, The	5	5	9

TABLE II—(*Continued*)

No.	Author	Title	Times Mentioned	Cities Mention'g	Weighted Value
283	Bryant	Yellow Violet, The	5	5	11
284	Burns	My Heart's in the Highlands	5	5	13
285	Byron	Destruction of Sennacherib	5	5	13
286	Cary	Obedience	5	5	13
287	Cowper	Nightingale and the Glowworm, The	5	5	12
288	Deland	While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night	5	5	15
289	Dodge	Snowflakes	5	5	12
290	Emerson	Each and All	5	5	12
291	Emerson	Forbearance	5	5	11
292	Howitt	Fairies of the Caldon Low, The	5	5	10
293	Jelliffe	Clovers, The	5	5	11
294	Keats	On the Grasshopper and Cricket	5	5	12
295	Keble	All Things Beautiful	5	5	13
296	Larcom	Calling the Violet	5	5	12
297	Larcom	Rivulet, The	5	5	12
298	Longfellow	Hiawatha's Friends	5	5	13
299	Longfellow	King Robert of Sicily	5	5	11
300	Longfellow	Sandalphon	5	5	11
301	Lowell	Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration	5	5	13
302	Milton	On His Blindness	5	5	15
303	Milton	Song on a May Morning	5	5	13
304	Moore	Minstrel Boy, The	5	5	13
305	Poulsson	First Christmas, The	5	5	14
306	Poulsson	While Stars of Christmas Shine	5	5	18
307	Rossetti	O Lady Moon	5	5	14
308	Rossetti	Swallow, The	5	5	13
309	Rossetti	What Does the Bee Do?	5	5	12
310	Sangster	We Thank Thee	5	5	18
311	Saxe	Blind Men and the Elephant, The	5	5	14
312	Scott	Lady of the Lake	5	5	7
313	Shakespeare	Ariel's Song (The Tempest)	5	5	12
314	Shaw	Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean	5	5	18
315	Sherman	Song for Winter	5	5	8
316	Southey	Little Ladybird, The	5	4	8
317	Stevenson	Good Play, A	5	5	12
318	Stevenson	Farewell to the Farm	5	5	16
319	Stevenson	Singing	5	5	11
320	Stevenson	Moon, The	5	5	15
321	Stevenson	Time to Rise	5	5	13
322	Stoddard	Abraham Lincoln	5	5	14
323	Tennyson	Eagle, The	5	5	13
324	Thaxter	April	5	5	12
325	Thaxter	Piccola	5	5	11
326	Van Dyke	Song Sparrow, The	5	5	12
327	Whittier	Three Bells, The	5	5	9
328	Wordsworth	Fidelity	5	4	9
329	Wordsworth	Pet Lamb, The	5	5	11