

# Ágora

**Estudos Clássicos em Debate**

*Ars memorativa*



**N.º 24.1**

**2022**



## Ficha Técnica

*Título: **Ágora. Estudos Clássicos em Debate** 24.1 (2022)*

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*Design da capa:* Serviços de Comunicação, Imagem e Relações Públicas da Universidade de Aveiro

*Edição:* UA Editora — Universidade de Aveiro

*Impressão:* Editorial Sindéresis

*Tiragem:* 475 exemplares

*Depósito legal:* 136497/99

**ISSN: 0874-5498**

*Contactos:*

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*URL:* <https://proa.ua.pt/index.php/agora>

*Preço:* € 20.00

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Este volume foi publicado com o apoio de:

Fondo Europeo de Desarrollo Regional/Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades - Agencia Estatal de Investigación (proyecto FFI2017-82101-P)



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A revista *Ágora. Estudos Clássicos em Debate* está indexada em: **Arts and Humanities Citation Index – ISI Web of Knowledge; C.I.R.C.; DIALNET; DOAJ; ERIH PLUS; L'ANNÉE PHILOLOGIQUE; LATINDEX; MIAR; QUALIS; SJR.**

**EBSCO Publishing**

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## For a Mnemotechnical Reading of Guido Casoni's *Della Magia d'amore*

### Para uma leitura mnemónica de *Della Magia d'amore* de Guido Casoni

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**Abstract:** In *Della Magia d'Amore* (1591) the poet Guido Casoni showed a deep philosophical awareness, although the treatise has been mostly read as a mere *divertissement*. Indeed, in those years, Casoni attended to the refoundation of the *Accademia Veneziana*, which presented the heterodox aim to reorganize the system of knowledge through mnemotechnical strategies. The aim of this work is to focus on the mnemotechnical tools in *Della Magia d'Amore* to restore its philosophical design, in coherence with the cultural aim of the Academy. The memory and practical application of love theories are reinterpreted according to a particular declination of Neoplatonic anamnesis.

**Keywords:** Guido Casoni; Love Philosophy; Magic; Art of memory; Renaissance Philosophy; Venetian Academies.

The venetian poet Guido Casoni (1561-1642) has been rediscovered in his historical importance during the twentieth century, but it was only around the nineteen nineties that his prose works elicited a real critical interest. In particular, his first important work, the dialogue *Della magia d'amore* (1591), which had a significant number of reissues until 1626, has been explored by the expert works of Pasquale Guaragnella, Armando Maggi and Elisabetta Selmi. These scholars have overcome the limiting historiographic approach, which interpreted the dialogue as a mere pre-baroque literary *divertissement*<sup>2</sup>.

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Text received on 05/04/2022 and accepted on 11/05/2022.

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<sup>2</sup> On Guido Casoni's life and works, see MUTINI (1978) and DOGLIO (2008). The first book on Casoni was ZANETTE (1933), which today is outdated in some parts, in particular the first chapter, dealing with *Della magia d'amore*. Indeed, Zanette's general overview, which considered the dialogue a literary *divertissement*, was based on a wrong historiographical conception of the intellectual paradigm during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Specifically on *Della magia d'amore*, see GUARAGNELLA (1997); GUARAGNELLA (2003); MAGGI (1997); SELMI (2006). The edition which we have used is G. CASONI (2002), edited by Selmi. We have also seen the edition by A. Maggi, G. CASONI (2003), which includes a useful introduction.

The aim of this work is to broaden the research on *Della magia d'amore* to remark its philosophical and cultural importance in the scenario of the late Italian 16<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, to demonstrate this, it will be fundamental to observe the peculiar use of the art of memory that emerges from the dialogue, of which Guaragnella has mainly observed some technical aspects<sup>3</sup>. As I will try to demonstrate, the mnemotechnical traces used by Casoni in this work are not simple rhetorical expedients, but reveal a peculiar link with the so-called Renaissance tradition of *occult memory*, to use the category coined by Frances Yates<sup>4</sup>. In this sense, memory and its art were used as the imaginative instrument to trigger the magical practice. To demonstrate this, it will be important to investigate, in addition to the practical mnemotechnical devices, the heterodox sources of them, but also the cultural *milieu* around Casoni at this time. Indeed, only two years after the publication of the dialogue, which should have had more parts which however were never written, Casoni was among the cofounders of the second *Accademia veneziana*, which renewed the *encyclopedic* and suspiciously heterodox aims of the first *Accademia veneziana*, or *della Fama*. It is useful to remember that the *Accademia della Fama* included among its members a considerable number of followers of Giulio Camillo Delminio, probably one of the most representative authors with regards to the *occult memory*. All of this could confirm a heterodox and magical-operating reading of *Della magia d'amore* through its mnemotechnical tools.

### 1) Academies and Love Treatises

In this sense, it is helpful to start the inquiry right from the second *Accademia veneziana*, which has been inexplicably overlooked in the studies about Casoni, and, more in general, from the relation among academies, memory and love treatises in Italy during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is now established that the Renaissance love treatise tradition started from Ficino's *De Amore*, his comments

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<sup>3</sup> See GUARAGNELLA (1997) and (2003). This mnemotechnical aspect is also mentioned in SELMI (2006), though the article is mainly devoted to reconstructing the philosophical traditions that Casoni rewrote in his dialogue. For a general overview regarding the art of memory, I just report the two classic ROSSI (2000) and YATES (1966); for some historiographic corrections see MATTEOLI (2019).

<sup>4</sup> See YATES (1966).

to Plato's *Symposium*, and that this constituted a sort of manifesto of the new Florentine Platonism, strongly focused towards the syncretism between Christian religion and platonic-hermetic philosophy. The themes of love, conceived as the cosmic *trait d'union* among all the ranks of Creation, and the human being in love as microcosmos and universal *artifex*, constituted the theoretical framework of the most heterodox philosophy of the time. Indeed, the continuity of Creation goes hand in hand with the continuity between religion, philosophy, and magical practice<sup>5</sup>. However, in addition to Ficino's *De Amore*, Giovanni Pico's *Commento sopra una canzone de amore* and Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore*, this philosophical tradition became a literary genre through the fundamental Bembo's *Asolani* and Castiglione's *Cortegiano*. During the century this production, which became a real trend among courtiers, stagnated towards poorly original reworkings, until it decayed becoming a pedant matter or the subject of educational counter-reformist treatises<sup>6</sup>.

The progressive decadence of this literary and philosophical genre was parallel to that of the academies, which were the scenario where love treatises had begun to develop. Indeed, the heterodox aim of Ficino's philosophy was accomplished in the context of his *Accademia*, i.e., a sort of brotherhood of co-philosophers. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century this cultural space was exported throughout Italy and Europe, in more structured and institutionalized forms, but not ever the academies were spaces of disagreement with the university tradition<sup>7</sup>. From their initial aim to constitute a new system of knowledge, they became «luoghi di una elegante, ma oziosa "conversazione" »<sup>8</sup>. Anyway, the academies involved in this cultural renewal project frequently utilized the theoretical devices offered by the hermetic-platonic tradition and the reborn rhetoric. If on one hand the new philosophy had established the operating range of human beings and the importance of the psychological faculties of *imagination* and *fancy* (with which memory is involved), on the other rhetoric, of which the art of memory was a part, and a new dialectic<sup>9</sup> had coherently become

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<sup>5</sup> See for example GARIN (2006).

<sup>6</sup> See mainly GARIN (1966); POZZI (1975); CANONE (1996); MAGGI (2018).

<sup>7</sup> See mainly VASOLI (1983) and TESTA (2015).

<sup>8</sup> VASOLI (1983) 430.

<sup>9</sup> See VASOLI (2007).



the best tools to reorganize the knowledge. As Cesare Vasoli synthesizes, the cultural basement of these academies

*si manifestò nelle forme e nei modi più diversi, spesso mediati, però, da un comune impegno di costituzione o «ricostruzione» enciclopedica. Non si spiegherebbe altrimenti perché fossero così frequenti [...] i tentativi di elaborare «topiche», «teatri», «palazzi», «templi» o «piazze» di carattere mnemotecnico, entro i quali si potessero raccogliere e ordinare gli elementi di un sapere sin troppo ricco e disorganico ai quali antiche e rinnovate credenze metafisiche o miti esoterici fornivano ancora uno «sfondo» unitario e universale<sup>10</sup>.*

In this sense, the *Accademia della Fama* was one of the most representative academies. It combined the aim to refund and reorganize the entire system of knowledge with the aspiration to political cultural domination<sup>11</sup>. The fusion between the hermetic tradition, which animated the Academy, and the political issue was a typical example of restoration of the three greatnesses of Hermes Trismegistus' figure, i.e., magical-philosophical knowledge, religion and political power. This enormous encyclopedic project was structured in a mnemotechnical way that could be even seen in the disposition of the buildings of the Academy. Every branch of science was collocated in a specific edifice, and, all together, they reproduced the harmony of the human body; this said the official document<sup>12</sup>. This great pansophical and political project counted Giulio Camillo's *theatre of the memory* as an illustrious precedent, thus it is not a surprise that several academics, who were related to the *Accademia della Fama*, were also related, in different ways, to Camillo (for example: Alessandro Citolini, Lodovico Dolce or Francesco Patrizi)<sup>13</sup>. Unfortunately, the Academy was soon closed, probably for bankruptcy but also for suspicious contacts with reformed circles and maybe some excessively dangerous texts in their catalogue.

If we read the official documents of the second *Accademia Veneziana*, immediately founded after the death of Federico Badoer in 1593 (the founder of the *Accademia della Fama*), we can evidently find an analogous aim to consti-

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<sup>10</sup> VASOLI (1983) 456-457.

<sup>11</sup> See mainly BOLZONI (2001) 3-22 and GUARNA (2018).

<sup>12</sup> See BADOER (1808) 49-68.

<sup>13</sup> On Camillo and his cultural context see mainly YATES (1966) 129-172; BOLZONI (1984); BOLZONI (2015), which also includes a very rich further bibliography.

tute a political cultural hegemony and an encyclopedic system<sup>14</sup>. If that were not enough to demonstrate the direct link between the cultural and philosophical background of the two academies, we can find exhaustive evidence among the co-founders of the Accademia Veneziana. Indeed, along with Casoni, there was Fabio Paolini, the well-known author of *Hebdomades sive Septem de Septenario libri* (1589), a sort of encyclopedia of magic oratory, built on a peculiar mnemotechnical system, which reminds us of Camillo's one<sup>15</sup>. This was the cultural address of the Academy that Casoni co-founded two years after *Della magia d'amore*. Moreover, considering the long drafting time (at least seven years) and the presence of heterodox sources (from Ficino and Pico to the more heterodox Cornelius Agrippa)<sup>16</sup>, it seems hard to conceive this work only as a literary *divertissement*.

## 2) The theoretical framework

From the subtitle of the work, it is immediately evident the encyclopedic essence of the dialogue, but also its hybrid nature. Casoni prepared a text that merged the most authentic tradition of love treatises (with its hard philosophical baggage) and the tradition of technical-encyclopedic texts. Indeed, in the subtitle, Casoni said that he would demonstrate the nature of Love as, *metafisico, fisico, astrologo, musico, geometra, aritmetico, grammatico, dialetico, rettore, poeta, istoriografo, iurisconsulto, politico, etico, economico, medico, capitano, nocchiero, agricoltoe, lanifico, cacciatore, architetto, pittore, scultore, fabro, vitrearario, mago naturale, negromante, geomante, idromante, aeremante, piro-mante, chiromante, fisionomo, augure, aurispice, ariolo, salitore and genetliaco*<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> On the second Accademia Veneziana see MAYLENDER (1930) 444-446 and TESTA (2015) 122-124. In particular, Testa has corrected the wrong idea of certain past scholars that had considered the continuity of the editorial plans between the *Accademia della Fama* and the second *Accademia Veneziana*.

<sup>15</sup> On Paolini see WALKER (1958) 126-144 and VENDRUSCOLO (2009). It is important to notice Vendruscolo's error regarding the second *Accademia Veneziana*. Indeed, he has written that this academy and the *Accademia degli Uranici* were the same (see p. 1923), but they were two different institutions. In particular, the second was founded in 1587 and concluded its activity around in 1593, when the first started; see VASOLI (1983) 455.

<sup>16</sup> See SELMI (2006).

<sup>17</sup> CASONI (2002) 1.

This long list of arts, as Love's attributes, mostly followed the schemes offered by the well-known compendiums of arts by Tomaso Garzoni, in his *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo* (1585), and Pierre Grégoire, in his *Sintaxes artis mirabilis* (1583-7)<sup>18</sup>.

But the main aspect to consider, as we were saying, is revealed in the main title, *Della magia d'amore*, which shows the dependence of Casoni from the link between love and magic, codified in a fundamental passage by Ficino's *De Amore* (VI-10)<sup>19</sup>, a long explanation of *Symposium* (203 e), where Socrates said that Love is a mage<sup>20</sup>. Thus, Ficino developed this argument to the point of considering love as the engine of the magical practice: if love was the breath that animated and connected everything, magic was the art for an expert operator, who knew the system of attractions of Creation, to artificially apply love attraction in the world<sup>21</sup>. Ficino deeply explored the magical operativity not in the *De Amore* but in the three books of *De vita* (1489). In this work he showed the indissoluble bond between philosophical knowledge and practical capacity, *theoria* and *praxis*<sup>22</sup>; the same bond that major academies had chosen as an ensign, as we have seen.

Casoni developed to the extreme consequences this point, so not only traditional magical disciplines, but all the arts system became part of magic. In this way, all human activity depended on the power of love, and Casoni carried forward a precise and doctrinally dangerous *anthropological* design. However, as we will see, the theoretical perspective was not platonic neither in traditional Renaissance terms, nor in a Counter-Reformation sense. The typical topics of love treatises, summarized in the dialogue, were mainly declined in a worldly

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<sup>18</sup> On Garzoni see CHERCHI (1996) and COLLINA (1996). On Grégoire see ROSSI (2000) 79-81.

<sup>19</sup> FICINO (1987) 143-144: «Oltr'a questo si chiama l'Amore sophista e mago [...]. Ma perché si chiama l'Amore mago? Perché tutta la forza della magica consiste nello amore».

<sup>20</sup> PLATO (2008) 39-40 (203 c-e): «Since he [i.e. Love] is the son not only of Poros but also of Penia, he is in this position: [...] a lifelong lover of wisdom, clever with magic and potions [*φαρμακευς*], and a sophist».

<sup>21</sup> See FICINO (1987), pp. 143-146. For a general overview regarding the theme of magic during the Renaissance, we just report the classic WALKER (1958); ERNST – GIGLIANI (2012) it is also useful. For the link between love and magic, with particular attention to Ficino and Giordano Bruno, see COULIANO (1987).

<sup>22</sup> See for example FICINO (1989) 236.

direction<sup>23</sup>. If on one hand the Florentine platonic tradition revalued the human practical operativity, on the other its principal aim was the domain of the Hyperuranium. The Counter-Reformation, in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, transformed this philosophical aspiration in a religious and devotional device<sup>24</sup>. In contrast, Casoni shows the worldly applications of platonic love doctrine by leading the focal point to the natural sphere. Both consideration on love and magical applications were deprived from mystical and excessively transcended aspects. This philosophical rewriting was not so far from the one that another peculiar platonic philosopher had perpetrated some years before: Francesco Patrizi<sup>25</sup>. This was the theoretical framework where the strong attention dedicated to human love, and to the force of imagination, fancy and memory, found a place, among mnemotechnical devices strengthened by a wide and learned reuse of the love poetry tradition to summarize and *depict* hard philosophical concepts. The memorable, the *visible* and the communicable were the same, and now we can see it directly from the text.

### 3) The narrative framework: occult mental architecture between sight and memory

The dialogue quickly revealed references to the occult memory tradition. After a vivid, almost visible description of a beautiful garden, where the dialogue would be conducted by Giovanni Minucci (spokesman for Casoni), the attention of this gentleman was captured by the fascinating palace of Sertorio Pancetta, the garden's owner and sometimes Minucci's counter-voice. Indeed, from the windows of the palace some beautiful women looked out, guided by the music that was played in the garden. The images of the ladies, nestled in the palace as mnemotechnical *imagines agentes* in their architectural space, elicited love in Giovanni, as we can read:

*Il Signor Giovanni, ch'avea già vedute le finestre del palagio che rimiravano in quella parte adorne con prezioso ornamento di molte e bellissime gentildonne, [...] fissando gli occhi nel Signor Sertorio graziosamente disse: "Mentre contemplo, nobilissimo ospite, come, porgendo quelle gentildonne cibo a l'orecchie con la soave armo-*

<sup>23</sup> SELMI (2006) 214, even classifies this tendency as *pantheistic*, but it seems quite exaggerated if we consider the first chapter of the dialogue.

<sup>24</sup> See MAGGI (2018).

<sup>25</sup> This interesting similarity is also noted by SELMI (2006) 225, in an *aesthetic* direction.

*nia de quegli instrumenti, prestino agli occhi miei caro alimento con la celeste armonia nata dalla conformità de' loro bellissimi volti, e che lo spirito tratto dal core per gli occhi vada drieto al pensiero a festeggiar tra loro, ond'io quasi altro Ensona, senza spirito e vita, morendo rinasca, parmi ch'io possa con verità affermare che quello sia il palagio degli incanti e io l'incanato*<sup>26</sup>.

This *palace of enchantments*, articulated in a succession of beautiful images, reminded the readers both of the mnemotechnical tradition and mainly of the occult memory one. On one side Pietro da Ravenna, in his famous *Phoenix sive artificiosa memoria* (1491), had likewise thought to use beautiful women as *imagines agentes*<sup>27</sup>, on the other the best-known magical palace with divine images was Camillo's Theatre, especially in the Venetian area, even if Sertorio explicitly remembered in this sense only Atlante's palace, in the *Orlando furioso*, and Garzoni's *Palagio degli incanti*. Anyway, the traditional description of the love enchantment pronounced by Giovanni merged with the theme of memory, because the discussion about magic and its relation with love started from this passage, as if the women had reminded Giovanni of this matter, according to the functioning of real *imagines agentes*. Indeed, after Giovanni had reminded the listeners of the articulate divisions of the arts as magic, he specified that «già era aperta la *cella della memoria* ove essa magia risiede»<sup>28</sup>.

Moreover, there are also two themes that remind us of a mnemotechnical reading of this passage: the first is the image of the window<sup>29</sup>, the other is that of the relationship between music and visibility, a peculiar mnemonic device originally codified by Ficino in the double drafting of the *Letter to the mathematician Banco*<sup>30</sup>. Regarding the window, this reminds us of the Socratic topic of the little aperture on the heart to see a person's real disposition, which would have had a great success in the tradition of love poetry and treatises<sup>31</sup>. As in a sort of mirrored game, the windows of the palace revealed its precious mnemonical content, and Giovanni, after he had entered it through

<sup>26</sup> CASONI (2002) 6-7.

<sup>27</sup> See RAVENNA (1491) 88v-89r. Regarding this parallelism see GUARAGNELLA (1997) 149-150.

<sup>28</sup> CASONI (2002) 9 (italics mine).

<sup>29</sup> See GUARAGNELLA (2003) 186-189.

<sup>30</sup> See CASTELLI (1986).

<sup>31</sup> See mainly RIGONI (1974) and BOLZONI (2010).

the *spirit* in love, opened his *cella della memoria* to the listeners. But the theme of the window in the heart had explicitly been used in a mnemonic context about fifty years before; once again we have to turn back to Camillo. In a precious letter written by Viglius ab Aytta to Erasmus, he described a sort of tour in a prototype of Camillo's Theatre, and specified that «hoc autem theatrum suum auctor multis appellat nominibus, aliquando mentem et animum fabrefactum, aliquando *fenestratum*»<sup>32</sup>.

Notwithstanding the presence of these elements from the classical art of memory, when Giovanni opened his memory regarding the division of arts-magic, we did not find a mental architecture crowded with images, but a simple dialectical diagram from Petrus Ramus' tradition<sup>33</sup>. It is significant that in the same work we can see the classical devices of the art of memory but also the Ramist method, which traditionally opposed the former. It seems that, as a sort of suggestion to the readers, Casoni combined these two mnemotechnical strategies for a common aim, a more effective retention. However, the fusion of these two strategies had to be concluded by the reader, coherently with the classic mnemotechnical treatises that emphasized their creative autonomy. It was the reader that had both to depict mnemonic images on the general diagram and put the numerous images offered by Casoni during the dialogue on it. All these strategies were summarized at the end of the introduction through the theme of the true sight on the world.

In a previous passage, Giovanni had talked about the primordial unity of the magical activity and its subsequent division and weakening caused by the corruption of humans' moral and knowledge. So, Giovanni's mission was to demonstrate the unity of human art as magic in the paradigm of love<sup>34</sup>. If on one hand it was probably impossible to revive this golden age, on the other outlining the primordial unity of arts could resurrect in part their ancient operating power. The devices of this reconstruction included the imaginative power, which reconducted the sensible and dispersive sight to the unity of the mental one, and we can easily add mnemotechnical strategies

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<sup>32</sup> AYTTA (1941) 29 (*italics mine*).

<sup>33</sup> See YATES (1966) 231-242 and especially VASOLI (2007).

<sup>34</sup> See CASONI (2002) 7-9.

to this, as the tools of imaginative organization. Giovanni with no modesty said, concluding the initial part of the dialogue:

*Ma sì come gli antichi facilmente videro l'opere di natura, che con infinita meraviglia loro gli erano appresentate dinanzi agli occhi sensuali, se ben dipoi difficilmente con lungo studio e diligenti osservazioni apersero gli occhi intellettuali alle cause producenti, penetrando con sommo gusto gli intimi secreti loro, così facilmente è stato il vedere Amor mago ne l'operazioni sue; ma come egli sia mago celato in gran parte fra l'ombre della difficoltà è giaciuto, e ora sarà da me tratto alla luce, seguendo l'ordine proposto<sup>35</sup>.*

Also in this case, Camillo's esoteric precedent emerged between the lines. He had clearly written that his Theater «fa non solamente officio di conservarci le affidate cose [...] ma ci dà anchor la vera sapienza, ne' fonti di quella venendo noi in cognition delle cose dalle cagioni et non dalli effetti»<sup>36</sup>, concluding the passage with the image of the mnemonical and knowledge domain as the view from the top of a hill to the bottom of a forest. The mental sight that could see the unity of the World had mnemonic-magical powers. It is no surprise that often, during the dialogue, Giovanni's act of reminiscence was described in terms of a *holy* anamnesis<sup>37</sup>.

Thus, through all these aspects investigated so far, it seems possible to affirm three main points, namely:

1) The aim of the work was to offer an encyclopedic outline for a new knowledge system, coherently with the purpose of many academies.

2) Casoni, in this work, unsystematically used different mnemotechnical strategies that the reader had to systemize to master the matter.

3) These aids for memory were not only rhetorical but referred to the Renaissance tradition of occult memory. Therefore, the correct retention of the text could activate some magical-imaginative mechanisms.

The last two points in particular will be more evident going on in our reading of the dialogue.

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<sup>35</sup> CASONI (2002) 11.

<sup>36</sup> CAMILLO (2015) 151.

<sup>37</sup> See for example CASONI (2002) 13: «Qui tacque il Signor Giovanni, e quasi immerso in un profondo pensiero, in breve silenzio molte cose rivate alla mente, rasserenato il volto, così disse». See also CASONI (2002) 21 and 65.

#### 4) Mnemonic Images

As we have said, Casoni's project was not accomplished; the dialogue published examined only six of Love's attributes: metaphysics, physics, astrology, music, geometry and arithmetic. This could be attributed to the difficulty to treat such a broad matter, to Casoni's development of orthodox and specifically poetic interests (even if in his mature age the mnemotechnical procedures, without the occult essence, would be maintained). In any case, even with only six attributes, the magical-mnemonic purpose of the project is evident, particularly in the description of the first attribute, in which it seems that Casoni gave precious advice on the way to read the others. Indeed, all the matter is enclosed in a big mnemonical image and summarized in a poetical quotation. In the other parts of the dialogue, there is not a large unique image to sum up the theoretical content, but there are a lot of little images that represent the relation between love and the science examined, nearly always accompanied by poetical quotations. For example, regarding the Aristotelian principle of *matter*, examined in the part of the work about physics, after Giovanni had explained its division in *first matter* (pure passivity) and *second matter*, he used two peculiar images to reveal their love essence. The first matter is compared to the heart of a young person who has never fallen in love, the second matter is compared to a lover that transforms themselves in the beloved<sup>38</sup>.

Going back to the part regarding metaphysics, Giovanni explained that like this science, also love lead the human being to God<sup>39</sup>. However, to explain the traditional theory of the *scala amoris* he told the myth of Dasone and his beloved Clarina. To use Casoni's words: «per osservare modo più facile che possibile sia, riferirò quello che più volte ho udito narrar di lui stesso l'innamorato Dasone, il quale, tutto beato nella contemplazione della bellissima

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<sup>38</sup> CASONI (2002) 22: «La prima materia, o principio naturale conosciuto atto a ricever la forma da questo grande fisico [i. e. Amore] è il cuore d'un giovinetto che non ancora abbia provato l'amoroso foco, poiché insegna, imprimendo in quello l'immagine de l'amata in modo *Che mai si saldo in marmo non scrisse*, com'egli con quella s'adorni di cara e gradita forma». CASONI (2002) 24: «Io dissi la materia seconda esser quella che si compone d'un'altra c'ha forma, e questa essere propinqua e remota. Nelle scole amorose non s'apprende che questa materia sia l'oro di che è formata la statua [...], ma s'intende essere l'amante, che tutto ardente d'amoroso ardore è atta materia a trasformarsi ne l'amata».

<sup>39</sup> See CASONI (2002) 13.



Clarina, suole talora con soave canto trattener le lucide onde del Mischio»<sup>40</sup>. It is also significant that Dasone was placed near the Mischio, a river of Serravalle, the city of Casoni<sup>41</sup>. This reminds us of the mnemotechnical strategy to set the *imagines* in a well-known space<sup>42</sup>. In this case, the reference to the Mischio had to trigger the memory of both the writer and the readers that knew the area.

Dasone was eager to learn metaphysics from the god Love and, after he arrived in Cyprus

*fu caramente accolto dal sapientissimo maestro Amore. Il quale inteso il suo desiderio [...] il condusse in una gran stanza tutta rispendente per il prezioso ornamento d'alabastrine figure, d'oro e di purissime gemme, ove egli dimostrò nel più eminente loco posta una statua di tanta beltà che la famosa statua di cui già Pigmalione s'accese sarebbe apparsa vicina a questa da indotta mano scolpita [...]; e in quella fisando l'occhio, disse a Dasone che già tutto intento mirava con non più goduta soavità la mirabile, anzi celeste, bellezza: "Non debbo, né voglio che 'l generoso tuo pensiero resti ingannato, onde ti prometto nel corso di sei giorni far sì che dotto e contento partirai da questa scola"<sup>43</sup>.*

The description of this sort of *Wunderkammer* and mainly of the statue representing Clarina, as a mnemonic image in its *locus*, confirmed the mnemotechnical aim of the myth. After the speech by Love, in which he had promised to teach metaphysics to Dasone in six days, the training process, which traced the steps of the *scala amoris*, was represented. Love taught to purify the perfect physical beauty of the statue to arise from this to the perfection of Intellectual beauty<sup>44</sup>. Thus, the statue was the mnemonic image that enclosed the theory of the *scala amoris*, and so Dasone's training was nothing more than a magic mnemonical exercise. Indeed, at the end

*le quali cose intese dal giovinetto Dasone, e conosciuto esser giunto il termine nel quale partir si doveva, fisando gli occhi nella bellissima statua della sua Clarina disse:*

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<sup>40</sup> CASONI (2002) 16.

<sup>41</sup> Casoni had also dedicated some verses to the Mischio; see Maggi's note in CASONI (2003) 189.

<sup>42</sup> This was a strategy broadly used during the medieval age by the preachers in their sermons to facilitate listeners' retention. See mainly BOLZONI (2003).

<sup>43</sup> CASONI (2002) 16.

<sup>44</sup> See CASONI (2002) 16-17.

*"Ben conosco vera la dottrina del mio precettore [...]; onde lieto portandoti scolpita nel core [...] felice e beato mi parto"*<sup>45</sup>.

Once again, the love topic of the windowed heart overlapped with the mnemonic principle of remembrance as an image imprinted in the soul. In the end Dasone was happy and blessed because the magical mnemotechnical operation had given him an interior sight of the ideal beauty. It is evident that the proportions of the statue, magical for their nearness to the transcendent world, had triggered a holy anamnestic process. Moreover, the theme of the magical sculpture, beyond the myth of Pygmalion, remembered by Casoni, could lead us to more heterodox sources. On one side it could remind us of the famous passage of the *Asclepius* about the Egyptian statues, animated thanks to their measures (that Camillo reported in the *Discorso in materia del suo teatro*<sup>46</sup>), on the other of the statues of Giordano Bruno's art of memory<sup>47</sup>.

Going beyond the possible sources, it is important to notice that the real motor of memory and knowledge is beauty. Even if in this case beauty is referred to as a woman (as well as in all mnemonical images of the dialogue), in general the purpose of the work was to depict in the reader's soul the entire relation among all human disciplines, through a system of images, and the resulting beautiful painting reflected ideal beauty, which triggered in the soul the love for knowledge. This beauty was the magical source of the awareness of the correspondence system that gave shape to the world, and the technical capacity to reproduce it through the different arts. So, there is an indissoluble bond among memory, imagination, beauty, and love<sup>48</sup>; and from this bond derived magic operativity in a broad sense. After all, is not Mnemosyne the mother of the Muses?

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<sup>45</sup> CASONI (2002) 17-18.

<sup>46</sup> CAMILLO (1990) 31: «Ho già letto, credo in Mercurio Trismegisto, che in Egitto già erano fabricatori di statue tanto eccellenti che, condotta che aveano alcuna statua alla perfetta proporzione, ella si trovava animata da spirito angelico, perché tanta perfezione non poteva star senz'anima. Simili a così fatte statue io trovo le parole per virtù della composizione [...]. Le quali parole, subito che sono messe nella loro proporzione, si trovano sotto l'altrui prononzia quasi animate d'armonia».

<sup>47</sup> For an overview on Bruno's art of memory see MATTEOLI (2019).

<sup>48</sup> For the opposed concepts of bestial love and sick memory, see CIAVOLELLA (2002).

Moreover, the insistence regarding the imaginative sphere of the *scala amoris*, in the other parts of the work, confirmed the pragmatic, productive, and worldly declinations of the platonic love theories. Indeed, it was only in the part about metaphysics that Giovanni described the transcendent spiritual love, and, actually, after the spiritual ascending of Dasone, he concluded this first part demonstrating the superior beauty of the women in sensible terms. Recalling the syntagma *mundana scaena*, from the opening of Giovanni Pico's *De hominis dignitate*<sup>49</sup>, Giovanni talked about the centrality of human beings «nel grande teatro del mondo»<sup>50</sup>. But this passage was used to demonstrate the major presence of the ray of beauty in the women<sup>51</sup>, thus the *grande teatro del mondo* became an aesthetic sensible system, which reminds us more of Camillo's one than of Pico's. Furthermore, in the part about geometry, in particular during the examination of the optics as its component, the platonic image of Love as a blind god is completely subverted in a worldly direction. He was not blind by virtue of his transcended sight, but his blindness represented that he acted in hiding; for the rest his sensible sight is perfect, indeed he presided over optics<sup>52</sup>. In this part we also find a confirmation of the visual and mnemonical value of the numerous poetical quotations. Talking about the *mirror* as an optic principle, Giovanni said:

*Lo specchio finalmente è un corpo che, riflettendo la spezie della cosa visibile, la rappresenta al senso [...]. Quindi imparano gli amanti a specchiarsi nei volti dell'amate loro, e l'amate godono di vedere, quasi in purissimo specchio, ritratte le bellezze loro nei versi degli amanti, ove sono per risplendere eternamente [...]. E può ben chiamarsi felice quella a cui dal cielo è dato in sorte amante che le sue bellezze con vivaci carmi rappresenti, poiché così saranno anco nei secoli venturi mirate e ammirate le bellezze loro; né l'occhio interno, che in dotte e vaghe composizioni le vede e le vedrà rilucere, potrà giamai essere ingannato*<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> PICO (2012) 2: «Legi, Patres colendissimi, in Arabum monumentis, interrogatum Abdalam Sarracenum, quid in hac quasi mundana scena admirandum maxime spectaretur, nihil spectari homine admirabilius respondisse».

<sup>50</sup> CASONI (2002) 19.

<sup>51</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> CASONI (2002) 71: «Non è ch'Amor sia cieco, ma è così detto perché deve esser celato, anzi egli è precettore de l'optica, ch'appartiene al vedere». For the platonic interpretation of blind Love, see WIND (1958) 57-77.

<sup>53</sup> CASONI (2002) 75.

In this passage we could find some echoes of Ficino's theory regarding the continuity of different sensible affections elaborated by the *imagination* through a synesthetic operation. All the sensible experiences are translated in mental *representations* and, in particular, for physiological reasons, hearing can move imagination (and consequently the mental sight) more strongly than sensible sight:

*Musicam consonantia in elemento fieri omnium medio [i.e. air], perque motum, & hunc quidem horbicularum ad aures provenire: ut non mirum sit eam animae convenire, tum mediae rerum, tum motionis principio in circuitu revolubili. Adde quod concentus potissimum inter illa quae sentiuntur quasi animatus, affectum sensuumque cogitationem animae, sive canentis, sive sonantis, perfert in animos audientes: ideoque in primis cum animo congruit. Praeterea quae ad visum quidem spectant, & si pura quodammodo sunt, tamen absque motionis efficacia, & per imaginem solam absque rei natura saepius apprehenduntur: ideo parum movere animos solent*<sup>54</sup>.

This theory was reworked in Bruno's *Explicatio triginta sigillorum*: poetry, painting and philosophy collapsed in a unique cognitive act<sup>55</sup>. Poetry could reflect visual beauty and preserve it in the memory, where the interior sight could see its real essence, beyond temporal decay.

Love inspiration, as treated by Casoni, was quite distant from the pervasive spirituality of the Florentine tradition; the imaginative rank of human experience had, at this point, a prominent position, both in ascending through love and in the resulting practical activity. This same artificial capacity, magical in its essence, was now far away from the mystical magic of a certain platonic declination. Real magical activity could not move the stars or achieve similar *mirabilia*. As Giovanni said, in the final part of *Della magia d'amore*, «credo bene che 'l numero delle lettere amorose, de' finti pianti, di singulti, di liberali promesse e di mill'altri artifici sia il vero sortilegio d'Amore»<sup>56</sup>, while all the other *mirabilia* were only metaphors. True magic acted on the human level of the imaginative faculty, as well as on the mnemonical operation that could open the

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<sup>54</sup> FICINO (2011) 1453. Nevertheless, in Ficino's works, the hierarchy of the senses is quite unstable; see WALKER (1958) 3-11. In general, regarding the theories on imagination in the Renaissance, see mainly COULIANO (1987) 3-52 and GARIN (1988). On the presence of musical theories in *Della magia d'amore*, see HARRÁN (2001).

<sup>55</sup> See BRUNO (2009) 120-122.

<sup>56</sup> CASONI (2002) 85.

intellectual sight, as Giovanni said at the beginning, but that could never leave the link to the world.

In this sense Casoni developed a particular aspect of the Renaissance platonist tradition, i.e., the nodal point of the human being as microcosmos and the subsequent revaluation of the imaginative power as the binding force between the sensible and the transcendent, equipped with a strong productive power. The strengthening of this aspect operated by Casoni is coherent with the cultural atmosphere of the major academies, where modern poetical and artistic interests were more profoundly felt than in Ficino's time. In any case, as we have seen, this is not a typical work of the so-called *accademie oziose* that abounded at the end of the century. Casoni's philosophical declination, that acquired consistency through the peculiar use of mnemotechnical strategies, showed a specific way to build a heterodox cultural memory tradition. He knew well that to mold the memory meant to mold the social fabric; a true magic.

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**Resumo:** Em *Della Magia d'Amore* (1591), o poeta Guido Casoni mostrou uma profunda consciência filosófica, embora o tratado tenha sido lido principalmente como um mero *divertissement*. De facto, naqueles anos, Casoni preocupou-se com a refundação da *Accademia Veneziana*, que apresentava o objetivo heterodoxo de reorganizar o sistema de conhecimento por meio de estratégias mnemónicas. O objetivo deste trabalho é centrar-se nas ferramentas mnemónicas existentes em *Della Magia d'Amore* para reconstituir seu desenho filosófico, de forma coerente com o objetivo cultural da Academia. A memória e a aplicação prática das teorias do amor são reinterpretadas de acordo com uma declinação particular da anamnese neoplatónica.

**Palavras-chave:** Guido Casoni; Filosofia do Amor; Magia; Arte da memória; Filosofia do Renascimento; Academias Venezianas.

**Resumen:** En *Della Magia d'Amore* (1591), el poeta Guido Casoni mostró una profunda conciencia filosófica, aunque el tratado se leyó principalmente como un mero *divertimento*. De hecho, en esos años, Casoni se ocupó de la refundación de la *Accademia Veneciana*, que presentaba el objetivo heterodoxo de reorganizar el sistema de conocimiento a través de estrategias mnemotécnicas. El objetivo de este trabajo consiste en estudiar las herramientas mnemotécnicas existentes en *Della Magia d'Amore* para reconstruir su diseño filosófico, de forma coherente, conform el objetivo cultural de la Academia. El recuerdo y la aplicación práctica de las teorías del amor se reinterpretan según una declinación particular de la anamnesis neoplatónica.

**Palabras clave:** Guido Casoni; Filosofía del Amor; Magia; Arte de la memoria; Filosofía del Renacimiento; Academias Venecianas.

**Résumé :** Dans *Della Magia d'Amore* (1591), le poète Guido Casoni a montré une profonde conscience philosophique, bien que le traité ait été lu principalement comme un simple *divertissement*. En effet, au cours de ces années, Casoni s'est consacré à la refondation de l'*Accademia Veneziana*, qui présentait l'objectif hétérodoxe de réorganiser le système de connaissance à l'aide de stratégies mnémoniques. L'objectif de ce travail est d'examiner les moyens mnémoniques présents dans *Della Magia d'Amore* pour reconstituer son dessein philosophique, en cohérence avec l'objectif culturel de l'Académie. La mémoire et l'application pratique des théories de l'amour sont réinterprétées selon une déclinaison particulière de l'anamnèse néoplatonicienne.

**Mots-clés :** Guido Casoni ; Philosophie de l'Amour ; Magie ; Art de la mémoire ; Philosophie de la Renaissance ; Académies Vénitiennes.