



FRANCES A. YATES

Bassano & Vandyk

Frances Amelia Yates

1899–1981

WHEN FRANCES YATES was elected to the Fellowship in July 1967 her qualities as intellectual historian, long appreciated internationally but within a restricted circle, had begun to be recognised as widely as they deserved. This was in large part the result of the two books she had recently published. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* of 1964 and *The Art of Memory* of 1966 were then the latest in a series of studies notable for adventurous argument and scope of learning. Though they had been long maturing, the rate at which they had finally been produced and had followed each other into print was remarkable; *Bruno* had actually been written in well under a year—with time out for holidays and an important Oxford lecture—and *Memory* in about the same time. Remarkable also is that she was already in her sixty-fifth year when the first was published and in her sixty-seventh when the second appeared. Both have had a lasting effect on the study of the European Renaissance.

Neither the success of these two books and of the round half-dozen that followed nor the controversy which parts of them engendered was a surprise either to those who knew Frances Yates, or quite to herself. In her teens she had made up her mind that she would succeed as a writer and had begun reading hard.¹ Her innate tendency to self-deprecation, reflecting the genuine personal modesty and diffidence which made her

¹ Diary entry quoted by J. N. Hillgarth, in Frances A. Yates, *Ideas and Ideals in the North European Renaissance: Collected Essays*, 3 (London, 1984), pp. 276–7. There is a list of her writings in this volume, pp. 323–36.

characterise her work as only a beginning, did not impair a conviction of her fundamental rightness. This was a function of her candour and independence of mind, as well as of a certain stubbornness, concealing vulnerability. In the end, however, she could hardly disguise from herself that she had fulfilled her ambition. Basing herself on a huge acquaintance with primary sources, verbal and visual, she wrote vividly and readably. Despite her moments of self-doubt, especially at beginnings, she never lacked intellectual courage. Always prepared to take the risks of exploration, she was undeterred, if not untroubled, by the size and intransigence of the historical problems she set herself to clarify. She would fling herself at them, 'jump in and splash around', as she put it, relying on her own exertions and on the help and guidance of those she trusted where she knew herself to be out of her depth. Entering the past through an intense imaginative effort and in a sympathetic spirit, she recreated its intellectual life by insights and arguments that upset accepted ways of thinking and opened or reopened many doors that had been judged either not to exist or to have been sealed for good.

Frances Yates's qualities as historian had been nurtured and sustained within a rather secluded, liberal, enlightened, serious but not unsociable, closely-knit, observantly Anglican and intensely English small family; later, she would write appreciatively of its Arnoldian valuation of poetry, its unpriggish highmindedness, sense of duty and exaltation of individual 'effort'. Her consciousness of herself was not fundamentally altered by association with the Warburg Institute during almost the last fifty years of her life, though she was always ready to acknowledge what she owed to its members and their approach. Both family and Institute fostered her preoccupation with ideas and her choice of subjects that were either uninvestigated—in English at least—or had been investigated by routes calculated not to fall foul of those whom Aby Warburg had derisively described as the border guards of the academic disciplines.

Nevertheless, the way that Frances Yates made, she made largely for herself. Born in Southsea on 28 November 1899, she was by some years the youngest child of a naval architect. James Alfred Yates, her father, began life with no advantages but, entering Portsmouth Dockyard at the age of fourteen, rose eventually to the rank of Chief Constructor. He took an important part in the shipbuilding programme of Sir John Fisher, supervising the building of the Dreadnoughts and, from retirement, called back to the Admiralty in 1916 for special service. His moves from dockyard to dockyard meant that Frances Yates's early formal schooling was intermittent; her education owed much to her family's discernment of

promise and, in particular, to her mother and two elder sisters, one a graduate teacher who was also a novelist and the other a trained artist who became a missionary in Africa. In later life, each sister in turn saw to Frances Yates's domestic arrangements. Particularly after the death in action of her only brother in 1915, the family had centred its expectations on her. Following the setback of failure to follow her brother to Oxford, she began to work, from Worthing, for a London external degree in French. Helped by a correspondence course and a few classes at University College, she graduated with a first in 1924 and went on, this time as an internal student of the same college, to take her MA in 1926 with a thesis on the French social drama of the sixteenth century.² Her choice of French for both degrees must have been influenced by family Francophilia, expressed in holidays in France, and her concentration on the drama perhaps by family devotion to Shakespeare reinforced by a conviction of acting ancestry. To improve her spoken French she spent time in the Loire Valley.

In 1925 James Yates bought The New House in Coverts Road, Claygate, then an old-world village in Surrey. In it Frances Yates was to live uninterrupted until a few weeks before her death on 29 September 1981. The move to Claygate improved access to London, where she had begun to use both the British Museum Library and the Public Record Office from Worthing; and she joined the London Library, always a mainstay. In 1930 finances were eased by a modest bequest from an aunt; and later there was a minuscule grant or two. Intermittent periods of teaching French at North London Collegiate School during the late 1920s and 1930s, however, were her only salaried posts until 1941, when Fritz Saxl made her part-time, ill-paid Editor of Publications at the Warburg Institute. She had been informally associated with the Institute since 1937 and, when it was incorporated in the University of London in 1944, she retained her post, being appointed Lecturer in 1950, promoted to Reader in 1956 and redesignated Reader in the History of the Renaissance in 1962. In 1967 she formally retired, to be welcomed back the same year as Honorary Fellow and occasional teacher and to continue so until the end. Her sister Hannah had long ago pointed out to her the advantages of her

² Of her life up to this time and indeed up to the 1930s there is little documentary evidence except the thesis itself, a teenage diary and the charming record of childhood and some other reminiscences, written in her seventies and early eighties. The diary and a copy of her thesis are among her papers in the Warburg Institute Archives; for her reminiscences, see *Ideas and Ideals*, pp. 275–322.

lack of success in applying for jobs and the freedom this had left her to exercise a preference for solitary reading and writing and a mild resentment at disturbance of her routine. Mondays and Thursdays were her regular days to see friends and visitors, to discuss their work with the pupils over whose progress and problems she would agonise, to consult sympathetic colleagues at the Institute about shared interests and her own writing, and late in her career to hold seminars; and she would also appear, a little reluctantly, on Wednesdays during term to deliver a public lecture or to listen: ‘old bore’ was her judgement on an eminent historian of cosmology. For the rest, inclined always to think of herself as an outsider in conventional academic circles, she felt most comfortable reading in the British (Museum) Library or reading and writing at home (impractical in many ways she was, until her very last days, her own typist). She trusted above all the reactions to her work-in-progress of her sisters and of individual Warburgians—Fritz Saxl, Rudolf Wittkower, E. H. Gombrich, Charles Mitchell and, especially, Gertrud Bing and D. P. Walker.

Family satisfaction in the publication of Frances Yates’s first learned article, ‘English Actors in Paris during the Lifetime of Shakespeare’, in the initial volume of the *Review of English Studies* (1925), was enhanced by the *Times Literary Supplement*’s commendation of the ‘new and lively light’ it had thrown on the external conditions of contemporary drama. This new light having come from a Public Record Office document, she borrowed more from the same source (and from her thesis) in 1927, using her finds and Antoine de Montchrétien’s play on Mary Queen of Scots, which considers Mary’s fate both from the English and the French viewpoint, to illuminate specific intellectual as well as political issues. More State Paper discoveries led her to John Florio, second-generation religious refugee and language teacher, dictionary maker and translator of Montaigne; she began to pay special attention to English, French, and Italian rivalries in and out of the Sidney–Leicester circle (John Eliot in particular, with his assault on pedantry; the mysterious H. S., whom she identified as Henry Sanford; Gabriel Harvey, and Thomas Nashe). A couple of articles, one of them establishing Florio’s close connection with the French Embassy in London, were followed in 1934 by her first book, *John Florio. The Life of an Italian in Shakespeare’s England*, in which her verve and enthusiasm are already evident. Preparations for this first biography of Florio included teaching herself Italian with the aid of a grammar and a long forgotten novel, Tommasina Guidi’s *Il curato di Pradalburgo* (Florence 1915); they involved family journeys in pursuit of John Florio’s father Michelangelo, Protestant refugee and Italian teacher to Lady Jane

Grey; and they showed that Florio *figlio* had never himself been in Italy. They also introduced Frances Yates to Giordano Bruno, another religious refugee though (he maintained) a Catholic one, and also associated with the French ambassador.

What put *Florio* above the ruck of literary biographies was the concern for the extra-literary, European dimension which was to be Frances Yates's distinguishing mark. Here she was already the intellectual historian, exploring not only contemporary notions concerning language and their practical issue but also religious thought and experience. C. J. Sisson had helped her as she worked; G. B. Harrison recommended the book to Cambridge, who published it (with a subsidy from London); reviewers everywhere, from Desmond McCarthy, Harold Nicolson, and Mario Praz in the weekly press to the heavies, united in praise; the British Academy awarded its Rose Crawshay Prize. The book is still standard.

Included in Frances Yates's account of Florio was a summary of the *Cena de le ceneri*, in which Bruno describes a real or pretended philosophical discussion of the Copernican and the Ptolemaic world systems which had taken place in London, either (as represented in the dialogue itself) in the house of Fulke Greville or (as Bruno told his inquisitors) in the French Embassy. Florio was present, as the carelessly dressed Bruno's exposition of Copernicanism carried the day against a pair of magnificently robed, pedantic, mistakenly Aristotelian Oxford doctors. That was Bruno's account, at any rate; only long after Frances Yates had written was Oxford discovered to have hit back with an account of his Ficinian plagiaries there. With hindsight, she was inclined to self-castigation for not having immediately recognised the true significance of Bruno, let alone the importance of Hermes Trismegistus, who is not even mentioned. Bruno was still present in her immediate attempt to follow up initial success, but still in a supporting part to the language teachers and even more to the leading man. 'It's all aimed at Willie, you know' she would sometimes say, facetiously, about her life's work, which was to culminate in the comprehensive book on Shakespeare that she never wrote. This was to have seen him by the light of the intellectual conditions in which the poems and plays had been written and performed and to which they had themselves contributed.

What Frances Yates had then to say about Shakespeare was incorporated in *A Study of Love's Labour's Lost*, published in 1936, again by Cambridge, in A. W. Pollard's and J. Dover Wilson's Shakespeare Problems series. Early notices were respectful, with reservations. William Empson called the book's argument 'wandering but fascinating', seeing

'its great interest in the view it gives of the Elizabethan intellectual climate' but finding its biographical suggestions about Shakespeare 'very doubtful'.³ She had proposed to add to the already accepted shadowy presences in the play the Wizard Earl of Northumberland; John Eliot as opposer of the pedantry represented by Holofernes-Florio; Bruno as Florio's fellow-critic of English barbarism and ignorance and, more particularly, the upbraider of Sidney for writing sonnets to Stella (whence the insistence on the connection of stars and ladies' eyes). Subsequent Shakespearians have united in rejecting these, judging longer accepted connotations with the so-called 'School of Night', Harvey and Nashe and the Gray's Inn Revels to be sufficient. Frances Yates herself was equally dismissive later of this classic case of second book syndrome. Though she never quite abandoned the Holofernes-Florio identification, which had first been advanced by Warburton in the eighteenth century, or the conviction that the play reflected current attitudes to poetic and pedantic language, she lamented her lack of grasp in the broader context of Renaissance thought and, despite the space Bruno occupies in the book, her ignorance of his true importance.

She continued, all the same, to believe that 'this apparently rather ridiculous play' might 'touch on something deep', the choice between ways of life, for example; it might even have a bearing on the contemporary politico-religious situation in France and on contemporary ideas about how it might be improved. In it, the King of Navarre urges the formation of a sort of academy, whose learned investigations of the arts of peace, laying bare the intellectual and spiritual bases of cosmic harmony, would show the way to compose wars and factions. Following up this perception by asking herself whether such academies had existed Frances Yates went, as her custom was, directly to the original sources named in by then outdated accounts. *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* was something new, a first mature demonstration—she was already nearly fifty when it appeared—of her powers in her own genre, the analysis of movements of thought and sentiment as political forces, no less real for their invisibility or their frustration. The French author of one favourable review of *French Academies* found it a little humiliating to his countrymen that such a study should appear in English; she was herself disappointed that it was not translated into French in her lifetime (not until 1996). No other critic uncovered more than minor false

³ *Life and Letters Today*, Sept. 1936, p. 204.

emphases in her account; it too has never been surpassed or superseded. It is the first comprehensive description of a particular milieu, in which Medici-Valois court ceremonies and festivals, conceived as the serious embodiments of aspirations to politico-religious peace, were nourished by encyclopedic learning, with the accent on music and poetry. Tracing the French Renaissance academic tradition, which retained the medieval objective of a synthesis of religion and philosophy but aimed to achieve it by the way of Neoplatonism rather than that of Aristotelian logic, she showed how it developed ultimately from the example of Marsilio Ficino's Platonic Academy in Medicean Florence. She mapped the routes by which this new academic approach had been transmitted to France and the Pléiade by Symphorien Champier and others. Baïf's Academy of Poetry and Music, founded in 1570, was followed, in the days of Henri III, by the Palace Academy and that was in turn succeeded at Vincennes in the penitential phase of Henri's attempt to bring about reconciliation between Huguenots and Catholics. Such academies could, she showed, have existed only at a time before the discarding of certain assumptions about the nature of the universe and the consequent partition of the encyclopaedia of knowledge into self-contained disciplines. As theorist-in-chief of the earlier French encyclopaedic ideal, she identified the humanist bishop and scholar Pontus de Tyard. Tyard was the intermediary between painters and poets; his efforts to draw together poetry, music, natural and moral philosophy were comprehended within the ambition to recover the 'effects' of ancient music, to use the almost magical power of music to temper the soul to a perfect condition of goodness and virtue and the state to political and religious harmony. Her demonstrations of how all the disciplines—the visual arts, rhetoric, poetry, music, philosophy, and religion—were expressed in commemorative or celebratory festivals, elaborate funerals or religious processions, culminated in her description of the most famous of court entertainments, the *Balet comique de la Royne* of 1581. To form a just estimate of the size and originality of Frances Yates's achievement in this study, it is necessary to remember not only that this was a new field but also that she was turning to triumphant advantage the virtually complete destruction of conventional documentation during the Wars of Religion: the immense detail of her narrative had its source in contemporary descriptions of ceremonial, in the music which was so important a component, and in the writings, poetic and theoretical, of the academicians themselves.

The book's journey to publication had been long. Beginning in the question she had asked herself about the existence of such academies, it

had first taken form in lectures delivered at the Warburg Institute early in 1940, the first of them to an audience of less than half-a-dozen in a freezing, lightless, and transportless London. The invitation to lecture had come from Saxl and from Edgar Wind. Saxl's influence as she worked, she said, had meant most to her; she took greatly to heart his infinitely laborious attention to accuracy and detail and his humility, both as a person and in his attitude to the past; Wind's philosophical knowledge and flair made a large contribution. Writing was complete in 1941; publication was impeded by the endemic money and paper shortages that were also holding up Praz's two volumes of *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery*, on revising which Frances Yates had spent much time and energy. When *The French Academies* finally came out early in 1948, she acknowledged in her preface both her relief and the difficulty of recapturing 'the atmosphere in which the French academies of the sixteenth century first presented themselves as a steadying subject in a disintegrating world'.⁴ She had done what she could in a practical way to arrest disintegration, contributing to the financial support of an Italian Jewish scholar, for instance. She joined first-aid classes and the ARP scheme, exchanging experiences with her friend K. M. Lea, of Lady Margaret Hall, who described to her how she had put on her gas mask to read Ariosto, so as to discover whether she would be fit to drive an ambulance while wearing it.

As she continued her own reading and writing, Frances Yates found her sympathy growing with what she called the encyclopaedic ideal of the Warburg Institute, not least the article of its faith which held that the documents of history were visual as well as verbal. A feature of all her work came to be the skilful use of the evidence to be found in works of art. Her innate tendency towards *histoire à part entière* was enhanced, too, by Warburgian inclinations towards a European rather than a national view of the Renaissance, seen also in terms of applied humanism as well as pure. Perhaps finding a parallel with her own comparative academic isolation in her own country, she would later briefly perceive the Institute as in some sense a modern incarnation of the academies she had described. They had been introduced to each other later in 1936. That was almost exactly the moment when, the initial three-year period of its invitation to England—a blind to get it out of Nazi Germany—being about to expire, the Institute's adherents in this country were few and its

⁴ *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1947 [1948]), p. v.

foothold again precarious. She had got to know it as the indirect result of a meeting with one of its early English friends, Dorothea Waley Singer, wife of Charles Singer, the historian of science. Mrs Singer had responded to her appeal to fellow Brunonians, if any, in the *Times Literary Supplement* for help with the *Cena de le ceneri*, which she had been attempting to translate. Mrs Singer, whose own translation of Bruno's *De l'infinito* was much later published as part of her book on Bruno's life and thought in 1950, invited her to a house party at the Singers' home at Par, in Cornwall. There she met Wind, in his hand a copy of her *Study of Love's Labour's Lost*, 'which he appeared'—she later wrote mistrustfully—'to be studying'.⁵ Wind invited her to the Institute, where she met its other members and began to use its library, finding there a comprehensive collection of works by and about Bruno which included both books and articles she had already used and many that were unknown to her. Most had been acquired by Warburg himself towards the end of his life; towards the end of her own life, she treasured a copy of *Degli eroici furori*, presented by Warburg to Gertrud Bing. Bing, from having been Warburg's assistant, had become successively the Institute's Assistant Director and then Director; she was to be Frances Yates's closest friend, ally, confidante, and critic outside her family. At that time the Warburgians were, Mrs Singer apart, virtually the only people in England with an interest in Bruno—or in ideas and their history, it has been suggested.⁶ She found congenial and stimulating company, almost a second family, in a collegiate ambience where shop-talk about one's work and intellectual interests were the norm rather than the discouraged exception. Even when the Warburg Library had to be packed away and its staff and associates to take refuge in the Buckinghamshire countryside, there were still Saxl, Bing, Wind (for a time), and Wittkower to counsel and hearten her, and to draw her into the Institute's activities. She served, by her own account, a difficult but highly rewarding apprenticeship, mastering a huge programme of new reading; she also slaved at indexing and at Englishing essays more sophisticated in conception and vocabulary than any in her experience so far. Most had been written for the new *Journal of the Warburg Institute*; on her own account she published in its first volume an article on the Italian teachers of Elizabethan England and she remained one of its editors until death.

⁵ 'Autobiographical Fragments', *Ideas and Ideals*, p. 313.

⁶ By Arnaldo Momigliano, 'A Piedmontese View of the History of Ideas', *Sesto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico; Parte prime* (Rome, 1980), p. 329.

Though Frances Yates retained her interest in the refugee language teachers of Elizabethan and later England, especially those who were putting the Italian polish on uncouth natives, these were already, when she was introduced to the Institute, in a fair way to being replaced at the centre of her immediate concerns. She had become fascinated by Bruno's ideas and his significance in his time. Before the publication of *A Study of Love's Labour Lost*, to relieve the anxieties of her father's serious illness and convalescence, she had set about translating the *Cena de le ceneri* and expounding its significance. The result, unreadable and unpublishable though she later judged it, revealed to her clearly a Bruno who differed radically from the received image of him; he was neither atheist and martyr to free thought, nor modern philosopher in conflict with reactionary medievalism. This was the beginning of the long process of revaluation which occupied so much of her time, energy, and imaginative strength for more than forty years. When Cambridge turned her translation down she found consolation in discussions with her new friends and mentors, who showed her that there was more to Renaissance ideas about the cosmos than she had gleaned from Pierre Duhem's admirable *Système du monde* and encouraged her reading in Renaissance Neoplatonism. She was able to salvage and expand parts of the introduction she had written to the *Cena* in three articles, all published in early numbers of the *Warburg Journal*: on Bruno's conflict with Oxford, on his religious policy and on the imagery of his *Degli eroici furori*.⁷ These were her first attempts to see Bruno in his true international, intellectual-religio-historical context. The last, discussing *Degli eroici furori* in relation to Neoplatonism and the emblematic mode, gave to scholarship on Petrarchism, anti-Petrarchism and the Elizabethan sonnet sequences a thematic dimension, a concern with the nature of imagery and with the ideas and attitudes behind it which was lacking in the merely literary accounts of which she never ceased to be forthrightly critical. In the other two articles, she was still more original. She saw Bruno's disagreements with the Oxford doctors as critical of them for rejecting medieval philosophy as a whole rather than for retaining outmoded medieval beliefs; and she found, in his defence of the Copernican hypothesis against the Ptolemaic, a reference both to the Eucharist and to the eirenic religious policy proposed by one whom she would later call 'this rather threatening advocate of toleration'. She seems to have sent an offprint of the Oxford doctors article to C. S. Lewis. Lewis

⁷ Republished in her *Lull and Bruno: Collected Essays*, 1 (London, 1982), pp. 134–209.

thanked its unknown author for diverting his mind from the current international situation and for confirming his view of humanist philistinism in regard to philosophy in general; he concluded with the customary polite enquiry as to the nature of the Warburg Institute. That Frances Yates's and Lewis's estimates of Elizabethan Oxford have been shown to be flawed in different ways does not diminish her impact. As ever, she had opened up a subject.

To a little later belongs an essay, arising out of Frances Yates's interest in Bruno's unorthodox eirenism, on the role of England and Venice in a political and religious configuration marked by the ascendancy of Spain and by the post-Tridentine papacy's increasing assertion of its claim to control secular affairs. 'Paolo Sarpi's *History of the Council of Trent*', published in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* for 1944, was a groundbreaking exposition of Sarpi's critical attitude towards Trent and its failure to reunite Christendom; it made clear also how that critical attitude was echoed in James I's sponsorship of the book's publication. The Catholic Republic was maintaining under interdict its liberties and its claim to an earlier Christian religious tradition; Protestant England, likewise in defiance of the Pope, was likewise claiming descent in the apostolic tradition. Here was an opportunity for eirenic leadership from England, bringing the Anglican Church again into communion with Rome. The chance was not taken.

Frances Yates's choice of Sarpi and his *History* reflects her own religious position at about this time, which she defined at the end of a remarkable letter to Philip Hughes, apropos his *Rome and the Counter Reformation in England*, as that of

an Anglican, who takes the historical view that the Nazi revolution of 1559, and all the miserable complications which ensued, deprived me of part of my natural and native inheritance as an English Catholic.⁸

Later, though the religious sentiment, Anglicanism in particular, was always of prime importance and the need for sectarian peace carried a heavy emphasis in her historical investigations, she was only an occasional churchgoer. Her concept of the lost opportunity of the time and circumstances in which the *History* was published in turn embodies what was to become one of her great underlying themes. In her Sarpi essay, as in the books she published during the 1970s, the reign of James I is seen as embodying England's failure to act in the true larger interest, prevented

⁸ Yates Archive, Warburg Institute.

from doing so by a sort of Counter Renaissance which acted in the wake of the Counter Reformation to stifle the reformed imperial idea, which had been embodied in Elizabeth I, James's Protestant predecessor.

Frances Yates's lifelong concern, almost yearning, for the ideal of a truly reformed and eirenic religion, visible in the Sarpi essay and in *The French Academies*, her understanding of the figurative and mythic dimension of the imperial idea, and her acquaintance with the serious intellectual content of court ceremonial were embodied about this time in another long and remarkable essay, also groundbreaking and still not surpassed for its vision and its grasp of implications. 'Queen Elizabeth as Astraea', published in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* for 1947, had begun as a lecture in 1945 to F. S. Boas's Elizabethan Literary Society which was, with *The French Academies*, her first real attempt to use visual evidence. Centred on Queen Elizabeth I, in whom the poets, dramatists, devisers of festivals, religious and political propagandists, and artists of the age had seen the virgin who would restore the Golden Age of justice and peace, it is perhaps the single essay of hers which has been most influential, on students of literature especially. The theme of spectacle and its significance broached here and in *The French Academies* evoked some of her finest and most cogent writing as she described the possibilities envisaged by those who were involved in such manifestations in England and in France. These matters continued to be addressed in studies of the allegorical portraits of Elizabeth and the tilts celebrating her accession day, of masquing costume and of the 'magnificences' at the wedding of the duc de Joyeuse, of the entries into Paris of Charles IX and his queen, and of the dramatic religious processions in the same city. In 1974 she published, with an introduction, a facsimile of Simon Bouquet's account of Charles IX's entry into Paris in 1572. The next year most of these festival essays, many of them based on lectures given during the war and in the immediate post-war years, were drawn together, much revised and expanded, in a single volume entitled *Astraea. The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*.

In 1975, also, there had been a second edition of her most sustained and exciting single exercise in the genre, her monograph *The Valois Tapestries*, first published in 1959 by the Warburg Institute, which shows at its best her ability to recreate the historical moment by understanding it. This great series of eight tapestries, woven in Flanders, is now in the Uffizi, having been taken to Florence by the granddaughter of Catherine de' Medici, Christina of Lorraine, on her marriage to the Grand Duke Ferdinand I in 1589, which was itself the occasion of splendid festivals.

The series is French in its reference to the richly dressed and often identifiable personages, the masquerade combats, the water festivals and *ballets de cour* that are figured. Reflected here, and in related drawings by Antoine Caron, are magnificences commissioned long before by Catherine, to glorify her progeny, on two separate occasions. The first was when she met her daughter Elizabeth, queen of Spain, at the Bayonne interview of 1565 and the second when she received, in Paris, the ambassadors who had come to offer the crown of Poland to her son, the future Henri III, in 1573. A prime difficulty is that, though the festivals recorded belong to the reign of Charles IX, there is no sign of him in the tapestries. Their record must be a memorial one and an additional political purpose must lie behind them. This purpose, it had already been conjectured, was revealed in the discrepancies between Caron's drawings and the tapestries, which indicated that the occasion for their weaving was the brief and disastrous intervention in the Netherlands of a less happy scion of the Valois, Elizabeth's suitor the duc d'Anjou, who appears in the tapestries but not in the drawings. Frances Yates boldly extended this hypothesis by identifying the artist responsible for other drawings, now lost, on which the tapestries had been based, as the Netherlander Lucas de Heere, working in the confidence of William of Orange. For her the weaving of these superb objects and their presentation to France represented a plea to Catherine and her son Henri III to continue a *politique* policy, steering Europe through the crisis of division into hostile factions after Trent and bringing together Catholic and Protestant; specifically, the tapestries embodied the hopes of moderate men and women and a request to support Anjou against Spain.

A large part of Frances Yates's legacy, hugely important among literary historians and critics in particular, is the result of this preoccupation with Italianate French and English festivals, the architecture, music, poetry, and prose that accompanied them and the records in word and image both of their physical aspect and their spiritual and political purposes. *The Valois Tapestries* and the revised essays in *Astraea* show her at her best in meeting the need for historical interpretation of sources which do not satisfy the precise and explicit criteria so beloved of high-and-dry historians. As she points out, no surviving document bears witness to the political purpose she defines for the tapestries, just as there had been none for the French academies. The tapestries are themselves the evidence, historical documents which, interpreted with knowledge, skill, and sympathy, will give access to historical, artistic, and spiritual movements at a deeper level than can be got from more conventional sources. Ultimately

her legacy was Warburg's and her gift for this kind of research had been fostered by Saxl, Bing, and her other colleagues in the Institute, but she herself greatly enhanced it. She was its pre-eminent, for many years along with D. J. Gordon—also Warburg-influenced—virtually its sole practitioner in England, until those she had set on their way and encouraged—Sydney Anglo, Margaret McGowan, and Roy Strong in particular—achieved their own reputations.

In Frances Yates's understanding of the symbolic dimension in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century religion and politics, as manifested in these writings of the 1940s and 1950s, Giordano Bruno was a shadowy background presence; she had been worrying away at him intermittently since the 1930s. After the publication of *The French Academies*, she began to work on Bruno in earnest, fired by a new perception of his importance which she could not yet fully articulate. Reading prodigiously in his Latin works and, as was her way, taking copious notes and making explicit summaries, she found herself deflected by his frequent references to Ramon Lull. In *Florio*, referring in passing to Bruno's French lectures on the art of memory propounded by 'Lully', she had not concerned herself with the significance of the medieval Catalan mystic and philosopher. But she was always inclined to go back to beginnings and it was now clear to her that an investigation of Lull and Lullism was necessary in order to understand Bruno. Once again, she was on her own, in a phase of European history that was all but unknown outside Spain. As with Bruno, there was little that would guide her in scaling the 'huge, unclimbed mountain' of Lull's thought, let alone the nature of his European influence in the sixteenth century. In the England of the 1920s, there had been E. Allison Peers, but neither his biography of Lull nor his translations were a help with the nature of the Lullian Art; their concern, like that of Spanish writers, was literary, and more with Lull's works in Catalan. Nor was there much to be got even out of the monumental survey of Spanish philosophy from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century by the brothers Carreras y Artau of 1939–43. Neither the Majorcan Schola Lullistica nor the Raimundus-Lullus-Institut of the University of Freiburg-im-Breisgau had yet wrought their transformation of Lullian studies; and E.-W. Platzeck's two volumes in German would not be available until 1962–4. Her first article, however, soon brought her enthusiastic support and informed criticism from her solitary Lullian sympathiser in Britain, Robert Pring-Mill; he was followed by J. N. Hillgarth, whose study of Lull's influence in fourteenth-century France, published in 1971, filled an important gap in the story of transmission and by Anthony

Bonner, much later. For the moment, though, there was nothing for it but a solitary frontal attack. She embarked on the vast bulk of the Latin writings, using the eighteenth-century edition of Ivo Salzinger and eighty-odd manuscripts in Rome, Milan, and Paris—one at least of them superbly illustrated—and she taught herself to read Spanish and medieval Catalan as she went along. Uncovering for the first time the cosmological basis of Lull's philosophy, she showed how the Lullian universal Art or key, divinely revealed to him as the means to congruence with God, was built on the elemental patterns of nature which could be brought into accord with the divine patterns or attributes by means of a system of wheel diagrams. The Lullian Art, working on all steps in the ladder of being, had been intended by its inventor to give access to a truth so sure and irrefutable that Islam and Judaism both would be compelled to assent to Christianity and the world be made one again. Even when it had wholly or partially lost its missionary impulse, it could be shown to have retained importance for the history of the art of memory and, Francis Bacon's objections to it notwithstanding, for the history of method at large. Expounding the Lullian system unaided Frances Yates considered the hardest task she had ever undertaken; her account, published in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* for 1954, was long unrivalled as an introduction to the Art. It concludes with a ringing call for unsparring effort

This article has concluded nothing, for it is not an end but a beginning. . . . My aim has been to re-open the problem of Ramon Lull and his Art through suggesting some fresh ways of approaching the problem. To prove these suggestions either right or wrong will involve stirring up, sifting, and bringing to light the Lullian material, and that is bound to be an instructive and illuminating process.

Lullism is no unimportant side-issue in the history of Western civilization. Its influence over five centuries was incalculably great. . . . Surely it is time that we . . . should . . . try to learn more of the true nature of this great monument which towered for so long over the European scene . . .⁹

In a sequel of 1960, also in the *Warburg Journal*, she showed how this might be done by proposing that the connection made in Lull's art between elemental theory and divine attributes had its source in the broad tradition of Neoplatonism, and specifically in the work of the ninth-century Neoplatonist and translator of the ps-Dionysius, Johannes

⁹ *Lull and Bruno*, pp. 66–7.

Scotus Erigena.¹⁰ Erigena being also at that time far from adequately investigated, this was another characteristically bold and suggestive attempt to respond to questions not merely unanswered hitherto but not even proposed. Rather uncharacteristically, she circulated it widely, anxious for reactions to such a novel linking in a continuum of two philosophers who had been studied in isolation from each other, in so far as they had been studied at all.

Besides opening a new way, Frances Yates's Lullian studies gave her the hope of one day making clear, by a study of the occult accretions subsequently suffered by Lullism, how Lull might be said to have prefigured the Renaissance magus. This magus figure is omnipresent in her subsequent work. In the form of Bruno he dominates her next two books; in various guises, as John Dee in particular, he permeates the rest. There is a sense in which Bruno has an important role in everything she wrote, from *Florio* onwards, and one of her achievements is to have put study of him on a new footing, not only in Anglophone scholarship but also in both his native country and in France. In particular, Bruno links *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* and *The Art of Memory*, which are best thought of as two instalments of one book. The controversy aroused by these two sustained exercises in intellectual history was due to their re-evaluation of the larger Renaissance Neoplatonic tradition, which was essentially religious in character, in the light of magical belief and, in particular, of what she called Cabalism-Hermeticism, white magic.

When Frances Yates began seriously to study it, Hermeticism could not be said to be a new subject; she herself had even made passing reference to it in her book on *Love's Labour's Lost*, though what little modern publication there was concerning it was suspect as history. G. R. S. Mead could not be countenanced; Walter Scott's edition of the Hermetic corpus was much better, but not completely satisfactory. There had been progress in Paul Oskar Kirsteller's publication in 1938, which established a presence for Hermes Trismegistus in Italian Renaissance philosophy; and in the 1940s and 1950s his significance had been recognised in the work of Eugenio Garin and his circle. Between 1945 and 1954, as Frances Yates worked, A. D. Nock's and A.-J. Festugière's Budé provided a better text. Her contribution was to give Hermeticism a central relevance and to describe, in terms of intellectual connections, the powerful allure of the Hermetic fragments to the consciousness of Renaissance Platonists, who

¹⁰ *Lull and Bruno*, pp. 78–125.

saw them in the double false perspective of a fictitious dating and of a fundamental religious truth. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* was an attempt to define the character and trace the influence of Hermeticism's strange and aberrant gnostic mysticism. Chiefly, she showed it working towards a heterodox, illuminist, magical religion dominated by the stars, and offering initiates the possibility of transformation into powerful magi, interpreting and harnessing celestial influences. As she acknowledged, her perceptions were much indebted to the analytic work of Walker, especially to his *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* of 1958, but her interpretations went beyond his. She began by taking her story from the Hermetic corpus itself to Marsilio Ficino as, at the command of Cosimo de' Medici, he laid aside his translation of Plato into Latin in order to make accessible in the same language the Greek elements of the corpus. Ficino's role was decisive: he found in the Hermetic writings, especially the *Asclepius*, not only a reinforcement of Christianity but a guide to ways in which human powers might be strengthened by magical operations which would draw down to earth the life of the heavens. The Ficinian synthesis of Christian philosophy, optimistic gnosis and animistic belief was decisive for the succeeding century and a half. His system, building on the relations believed to exist between macrocosm and microcosm, took on another dimension in the syncretic philosophy of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, particularly in its conversion to Christian purposes of the Hebrew *Kabbalah*. This was further enhanced by Johann Reuchlin and Cornelius Agrippa, likewise applying Hebrew truth to illuminate Christian. Continuing into the later sixteenth century, despite theological and humanist objections, religious Cabalism-Hermeticism reaches a sort of apogee in Bruno, who in turn influences both Tommaso Campanella and, in England, Dee. All are united by their determination to harness magical powers for the amelioration of Christianity and humankind. Finally, after 1614, there is the legacy of a Hermes debased by Isaac Casaubon's demonstration that he had no place among the pre-Christian witnesses to a *prisca theologia*. This is the Hermes who survives, in varying forms and degrees, in such occult system-builders as Robert Fludd, the alchemists and, less centrally, in the Cambridge Platonists.

This remarkable, documented study of an important part of the Renaissance Platonic tradition which had displaced the Aristotelian-scholastic in so many contemporary minds places much emphasis on the unity rather than the diversity of the Hermetic tradition. Its value is seriously diminished neither by this nor by its special pleading; rather its

radically new view confirms doubts about the validity of attempts, such as P.-H. Michel's, to put Bruno's thought into a sort of rational framework, as Kristeller had done for Ficino's. Bruno was to be approached through the realisation, as one appreciative reviewer put it,

that magic, astrology and myth form the core of his thinking and that it is only by working outwards from this more primitive world of powerful symbols that we can hope to understand his apparently more rational philosophical works.¹¹

Like *Bruno, The Art of Memory* was both tour de force and the result of long preparation. When she began she was, as ever, practically on her own, apart from a couple of outdated German monographs; what is still today the only other study in depth of the topic appeared after her own was well advanced. Paolo Rossi's viewpoint in his *Clavis universalis: arti mnemoniche e logica combinatoria da Lullo a Leibniz* of 1960 (English translation, 2000) was, moreover, different from hers and his historical vision less adventurously rich, so that *The Art of Memory* is still a pioneer book. It is also one of her best in its demonstration of the relevance of a seemingly unimportant and virtually unknown element in the intellectual tradition deriving from Antiquity to larger issues in medieval and Renaissance thought, in particular to those that concerned the making of images and their deployment in verbal and visual structures. She traced the continuum of the art of memory from its invention by the Greeks and transmission to Roman rhetorical theory and practice, to its descendants in the broad European tradition as far as Fludd and its application to the development of scientific method. As she went, she considered the role of Augustinian psychology and of Scholasticism, with accounts of the *Divina Commedia*, Lullism, and Ramism as memory systems of a non-Hermetic kind and, at length, the relation of memory images to talismans in Giulio Camillo Delminio and in Bruno. To the Roman rhetoricians, artificial memory had not been a mere technique of rote or verbal recall; their concern was with how to form 'images' which, once indelibly imprinted within the mind, would act by association forcefully to remind a prosecutor of the points of an argument. An example she made famous is the images recommended by the author of the ps-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium* in a prosecution for murder by poison: a man in bed (the victim); a man standing beside him (the murderer); holding a cup (the

¹¹ D. P. Walker, in *Modern Language Review*, 61 (1966), 719–21. Among other favourable reviewers was the late H. R. Trevor-Roper (Lord Dacre of Glanton), to whose continued advocacy and encouragement, practical as well as intellectual, Frances Yates was always conscious of a particular debt.

poison); tablets (inheritance as a motive); and, dangling from the fourth finger of his left hand (*digitus medicinalis*), a ram's testicles (*testes*; witnesses). Recollection of these images, and so of the points to be made and of their sequence, was to be assisted by setting the images on 'places', the rooms in a building for example. The more graphic the images and the more familiar the building and its ground-plan the stronger the mnemonic power of both. Such a technique was clearly important in itself in the period before printing; then and later it was equally important in the invention of imagery and the broader field of intellectual conditioning. Consciousness of the artificial memory and its operations could thus be invaluable in modern study of medieval and Renaissance art, literature and philosophy. The lesson has been widely absorbed.

In demonstrating this, she had much at heart the hermeticisation of the art in Camillo and Bruno. By her own account it was in 1950, soon after she had begun in earnest on Bruno, that E. H. Gombrich put into her hands the book that made the difference, leading her to the assessment of the Hermetic tradition that would dominate her work for the rest of her life. This was the Hermetically influenced *Idea del teatro* of Camillo, first published in 1550.¹² She lectured at the Warburg Institute in 1952 on Bruno and artificial memory and on Camillo's memory theatre in 1955; in the latter year her seminal essay on 'The Ciceronian Art of Memory' appeared in a volume dedicated to Bruno Nardi, the Dantist and student of medieval thought, who was one of her heroes. In Cicero, memory had already been given a kind of ethical role as one of the components of moral virtue; this was accentuated when St Augustine made it one of the powers of the soul; and within Scholasticism's emphasis on order its ethical dimension was further enhanced. In Camillo's theatre, which is also Solomon's house of wisdom, the basically planetary images preserve eternally, in themselves and in their 'high and incomparable' placing, the eternal nature of things; in Bruno's memory system Frances Yates saw, along with a debt to Lull, a kinship to Camillo, a magical use of images and the adumbration of a new and eirenic universal religion.

In *The Art of Memory* Frances Yates ventured into the minefield of received opinion concerning Elizabethan theatre buildings with a chapter on Fludd's memory theatre and Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in Southwark. She continued her trespass the same year with a revised

¹² *Art of Memory*, p. xiv; cf. Hilary Gatti, 'Frances Yates's Hermetic Renaissance in the Documents held in the Warburg Institute Archive', *Aries*, NS, 2 (2002), 193–210.

version in *New York Review of Books*, following it in 1967 with another in *Shakespeare Studies*. At least one student of the Globe allowed that 'certain ideas' in Fludd's theatre engraving were 'too significant to be disregarded' and that Fludd's insistence on the use of real rather than imaginary buildings for artificial memory was a point in her favour.¹³ She was innocently surprised, however, by the reactions of most traditional Shakespearians and theatre historians to her alternative to the native inn-yard tradition. Why, she wondered plaintively to a correspondent, had the mere attempt to say something new and different about the Globe aroused opposition of a sort that she had never before encountered in a long and blameless life of scholarship?¹⁴

This essay was followed in 1968 by a more general one on architecture and the art of memory and by her book *Theatre of the World* of 1969. Here she set out in detail her views on the applicability of ultimately Vitruvian architectural principles to English building. As ever, she was in quest of assumptions basic to Renaissance thought. Much influenced by what she had long ago learned from Wittkower, she introduced an intellectual element, demonstrating the importance and relevance of the theatre as metaphor for the universe, a microcosm consonant in its structure with the proportion and harmony of the macrocosm.

If historians of the theatre retain a certain wariness towards Frances Yates's ideas about theatre architecture, many are conscious that recent excavations and reconstitutions leave us still knowing less than had been thought to be known and other students have found enough in her expositions to trouble accepted notions and to extend consciousness. Her views on the Globe in Southwark are embodied in the Globe in Tokyo; they have influenced modern architects, such as Sir Denys Lasdun at the National Theatre on the South Bank; and, as usual, they have fruitfully penetrated literary studies.

Theatre of the World, third of a series carrying the themes in Frances Yates's study of the Renaissance further than *Bruno* and *Memory*, is not theatre history as such. It is theatre history embodied, according to her habit, within the conceptual terms of the European tradition, history rather of thought and outlook, its ultimate aim an approach to Shakespeare. It sees in Fludd and in Dee the influential representatives of Renaissance philosophy in England. Dee is the more powerful, as math-

¹³ C. Walter Hodges, *The Globe Restored. A Study of the Elizabethan Theatre*, 2nd edn. (London, 1968), p. 119.

¹⁴ Yates Archive, Warburg Institute.

ematician and, in his apprehension of the power of mathematics, magus as well. His importance is encapsulated in his mathematical preface to Billingsley's Euclid of 1570, its praises of architecture drawn from Vitruvius and from Leon Battista Alberti making it a seminal text for the transmission of 'Vitruvian subjects' to Fludd and so to Inigo Jones. It is also the means of transmission of these ideas to practical builders.

Dee remains a key figure in the next stage of Frances Yates's advance in the thought world of Shakespeare. This was initially by way of her special Ford Lecture in Oxford in 1970, which took for subject James I and the unhappy outcome of the marriage of the Princess Elizabeth, the Winter Queen, with the Elector Palatine, Frederick V of Bohemia. In the ensuing book of 1972, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, she argued for the importance of a phase she detected in European civilisation at just that time. Its fundamental documents, mysterious in origin, were the so-called 'Rosicrucian Manifestoes' and the spiritual ancestor, in the Bohemia of Rudolf II, was Dee. She would have nothing to do either with modern Rosicrucianism, as presented both by its devotees and in the historically unreliable writings of such authors as A. E. Waite. Nor was her enlightenment the more tangible and fully documented Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. What she described, in a brilliantly sustained balancing act, was a movement intermediary between the Renaissance and the so-called scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, in which the enlightened liberal thought of the Hermetic-Cabalist tradition had received an influx from another Hermetic tradition, that of alchemy. Fludd again shares with Dee the leading role, as the brief reign of Frederick and Elizabeth becomes a Hermetic golden age, its philosophy nourished on Dee's *Monas hieroglyphica* and on the alchemical activity and writings of Michael Maier. Frances Yates's concern is with how this European 'Rosicrucian' movement, with its striving for illumination and for the advancement of knowledge, failed in its effect and slipped out of history when disowned by James I.

In the last decade of Frances Yates's life there were essays and reviews on her favoured people and themes—Bruno, Copernicus, Cornelius Agrippa, Dee, Erasmus, Lull, Nostradamus, Rabelais, artificial memory, festivals, Hermetist-Cabalist magic, iconoclasm, the idea of an imperial reform, religion and magic's decline. It also saw two more books, best thought of as the last two parts of her synoptic investigation into the influence—and its frustration—on Renaissance thought of hermetic-cabalistic and hermetic-alchemical preconceptions. *Shakespeare's Last Plays: A new Approach* appeared in 1975, the same year as her revised

Astraea, and four years before her final attempt at a synthesis at book length, *The occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* of 1979. In the first, which is based on the Northcliffe Lectures in Literature at University College, she explained *Henry VIII*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*, with Ben Jonson as a foil, in terms of Shakespeare's intellectual situation 'amid the currents and cross-currents of magic and religion, Reformation and Counter-Reformation, whipped up . . . towards the oncoming storm of the Thirty Years' War'. The plays are interpreted through the typically Yatesian concept of a Europe profoundly affected by the failure of an Elizabethan revival in contemporary Bohemia—Frederick and Elizabeth—and Jacobean England, with its vision of a wide imperial peace about to be realised—Prince Henry, Michael Drayton, Inigo Jones, court masque and courtly chivalry. This liberal revival reaches a peak of poetic expression in *The Tempest*, with its masque symbolic of chastity; it is nullified by Counter Reformation absolutism, reflected even in the Jonsonian masque. The hard heads win again as James takes the Spanish line in keeping England out of the fury of war and leaving Protestant Europe to lament the loss of a leader.

There is no doubting either the originality of the thesis that, in the background to Shakespeare's last plays, there is a late outburst of the esoteric and magical thinking typified in Dee, in a world where such non-conformist ideas were in danger, or the ardour with which it is argued—or the perilous leaps required in pursuing it. Frances Yates was always at her best and most exciting in describing what might have been. *The occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* is the final rapid summation of her long ponderings on the thought behind the religious and political history of the sixteenth century. Comparison of this brief, radical and summary historical study with her book on *Love's Labour's Lost* of 1936 and a prentice piece on Shakespeare and the Platonic tradition of 1942 show how far her own thinking had come since then. Her title borrows the title of Agrippa's most famous book, *De occulta philosophia*, at once defining the mystical, white-magical *philosophia Christi* that had long been her central preoccupation and rescuing Agrippa from the vulgar, denigratory image of him as diabolist black magician. Fundamental to the occult philosophy itself are Hermetic Neoplatonism as revived by Ficino and christianised Jewish *Kabbalah* as added by Pico; this synthesis, tending towards liberalism and reform in religion, reaches a peak in Reuchlin, is continued in the magi Agrippa, Bruno, and the Franciscan Francesco Giorgi (the last, as influencing Edmund Spenser, the subject of her lecture to the Society for Renaissance Studies in 1977), Fludd and Dee as the prophets

of a Protestant-cabalistic messianism, culminating in Milton. Her admiration for the great expert on Jewish mysticism Gershom Scholem, another of her heroes, and for Chaim Wirszubski, which had been making itself felt for some time, is particularly strong in her emphasis on the decisive influence of Jewish thought in Europe from Ferdinand and Isabella's expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 to their return to England in the seventeenth century.

Some of the directions in which Frances Yates had been taken as she wrote she described as unexpected by herself, even alarming. Rejecting the dissuasions of friends, worried that her reputation might suffer from the sweep of her argument, the length of its historical perspective and the audacity of its connections and conclusions, she insisted on its essential rightness. As her best seller, it has carried her ideas, in this condensedly suggestive form, more widely than any other of her books.

The broadening of Frances Yates's reputation, beginning with the stir made in 1964 by *Bruno*, had borne out her hopes. Her position had been quickly consolidated by an invitation to contribute to the then newly established *New York Review of Books*, which became an important new forum for her. Continuing her long-established appearances as occasional reviewer in the learned journals, the monthlies and quarterlies and the *Supplements to The Times* she had now, for almost the last two decades of her life, a regular platform and a larger audience, for which she was deeply grateful. Joined in the *Review's* pages first by Gombrich, whose obituary tribute to her was published there in 1983, and later by Walker, she made it seem like a sort of fief of the Warburg Institute.¹⁵ Her first essay, appearing in the issue for 19 November 1964, was a critical account of the unacceptable narrowness of Kristeller's concept of humanism and the history of philosophy as represented in his *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance*. Her last, laudatory piece on Charles Nicholl's *The Chemical Theatre*, sub-editorially titled 'An alchemical Lear', was published posthumously seventeen years later to the day, in the *Review* of 19 November 1981. In between, that journal's liberality, coupled with her own willingness—not always confident, as her intermittent, skeleton diary entries show—to grapple with whatever was presented to her, her facility in expounding complicated issues, her readiness in forthright re-statement of her ideas about intellectual historiography, not to mention her scrupulous meeting of deadlines, resulted in more than twenty

¹⁵ Gombrich's obituary is reprinted as 'The Evaluation of esoteric Currents' in his *Tributes* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 211–20.

substantial essays, besides the piece on the Globe Theatre. These concerned over thirty books: Felix Gilbert on Machiavelli and Guicciardini, a translation of Guicciardini's *Ricordi*, Craig Thompson's translation of the *Colloquies* of Erasmus and P. E. Memmo's of Bruno's *Eroici furori*, C. G. Nauert on Agrippa, J. A. Mazzeo on Renaissance and revolution, Herschel Baker on the race of time, Rosalie L. Colie on paradox. A. Bartlett Giamatti on the earthly paradise and the Renaissance epic, Giuseppe Prezzolini on Machiavelli, Werner Gundersheimer on Louis Le Roy, Paolo Rossi on Francis Bacon, Brian Vickers and Joan Webber on seventeenth-century prose, Bacon's included, Mikhail Bakhtin on Rabelais, George Huppert on the idea of history, Peter French on Dee and Wayne Shumaker on the occult sciences in the Renaissance, Walker on the ancient theology, John Phillips on iconoclasm, Charles Webster on the Great Instauration, Marion Leathers Kuntz's translation of Jean Bodin, Brian Copenhaver on Symphorien Champier, Robert Klein's Renaissance essays, and Michael Dummett on the tarot. Many were republished in the final two volumes of her *Collected Essays* (1983–4); she is often at her liveliest and best in them, despite an increasing preoccupation with her own interests and unease with other approaches than her own.

These *New York Review* essays played their part in the almost cult status that Frances Yates had achieved internationally by the end of her life. In her own language she reached a wider readership than most scholars. Her books were translated into Dutch, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Polish, Russian, and Spanish (in Latin America); she even makes brief appearances in contemporary fiction. Posterity has enhanced her reputation. To it, her living presence was an appropriate match: unselfconsciously dignified and impressive, it reflected a seriousness that was without guile concerning important issues in scholarship and in life, offset by a certain public and private shyness. Once she was sure of her company this would be dissolved into laughter by an almost schoolgirl sense of the ridiculous. She was deeply attached not only to her family but also to their house, which became hers, and to its garden, with its weeping willow which she liked to believe had sprung from a slip of a tree beside Napoleon's grave on St Helena. She was deeply attached also to her friends, who were beneficiaries of numberless acts of kindness and consideration—tea or Sunday lunch in the garden at Claygate, little lunch- or dinner-parties at her or her sister's club in London, where she would regularly stay a few nights for shopping, a lecture, a play or an opera; gifts of books, or of wine from that family recourse, the Army and

Navy Stores (usually Pouilly-Fuissé, a favourite, along with the Chianti demanded in an Italian context). She enjoyed congenial company, but was happiest working alone. The greatest of her pleasures was reading, which she names in *Who's Who* as her recreation, along with travel (in France, Italy and Britain); for music she had old favourites on her gramophone.

On her 'days' at the Warburg Institute she would arrive about eleven and stay often quite late in her study in South Kensington or Bloomsbury, discussing their work with pupils or receiving visitors; more often than not with a cigarette—Craven 'A', for as long as the brand existed—jutting from its holder and with her hands in motion to assist the making of an especially important or abstruse point. Or she would progress through the Library, pupil or visitor in tow; ranging along the shelves there and elsewhere before seizing the book she needed 'like one of the more ample gun dogs'.¹⁶ She would collect great armfuls, carloads almost, of books to carry home; it was not always easy to reclaim them. In public, she had always to control her diffidence but had been from quite early days an effective lecturer, clear-voiced and upstanding, her hair always threatening to escape from its securing pins or from the hat which she would sometimes wear for really formal occasions. Besides her Warburg lectures of the 1940s and 1950s, she made memorable contributions to symposia on Sidney and on Chapman at Reading; when she came into her own after the publication of *Bruno* and *Memory*, she had much success in London and in Oxford, as well as in the USA. During one triumphal American tour in the spring of 1966 she lectured at Johns Hopkins, the Folger Shakespeare Library, Bryn Mawr, Columbia, Harvard, MIT, the Newberry and Chicago and Northwestern Universities before winding down with a restful week at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study. She was visiting professor at other universities, notably Cornell. At the Warburg in the 1960s and 1970s she gave postgraduate courses: festivals and empire again; or seminars on the hermetic tradition; in addition to weekly small reading parties on individual texts—the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Macrobius on the *Somnium Scipionis*, *The City of God*, Luther and Erasmus, and two presentations of academic study as useful rather than the reverse: Bartolomeo Delbene's *Civitas veri*, dedicated to Henri III, and Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*. Dante's *Convivio* and *Monarchia* were also considered, Dante being always an object of

¹⁶ Elizabeth Mackenzie, *The Brown Book* [of Lady Margaret Hall], 1982, p. 37.

reverence. A little souvenir-shop image of him stood on her desk; one of her finest earlier essays was one in the *Warburg Journal* of 1951 on the significance of the story of Ugolino and the Tower of Hunger from the penultimate canto of *Inferno* for writers and artists in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁷ The *Divina Commedia* is important, also, in her account of the medieval phase in the theory and practice of artificial memory. At her death she was planning a further study of the *Commedia* in relation to the Thomist synthesis of knowledge and its visual manifestation in the Spanish Chapel of Sa Maria Novella.

Despite being somewhat taken unawares by fame and despite a certain lack of comfort—rather surprising in a student of ceremonial—in public manifestations of it, Frances Yates enjoyed the translation to eminence which the impact of her books had won for her. She was always firm, however, in rejecting invitations to write little books on The Renaissance and the like. Her honorary doctorates from Edinburgh, Oxford, East Anglia, Exeter, and Warwick, her foreign membership of the American Academy of the Arts and Sciences and the Royal Netherlands Academy, her Senior Wolfson History Prize in 1973, and her Premio Galileo Galilei in 1978, as well as her Honorary Fellowship of Lady Margaret Hall, gave her much pleasure. Likewise her OBE in 1972 (announced at the end of ‘columns of very small print about footballers, dentists and other worthy and deserving citizens’) and the DBE which followed in 1977. There was deeper satisfaction in her London D.Lit., awarded by due process of examination and assessment in 1965, on the basis of published work.

The source of Frances Yates’s distinction and her influence was the fecundity of her laborious explorations of other times than her own. She was unique in her repeated demonstrations of the vitality and animating power in their own time of ideas condemned by later ages as baseless and futile. For her, possibilities were not less great and less significant for having been denied. If her sense that she was merely opening the way for successors to follow was sometimes overtaken by overstatement, her insights had huge influence in making occultism, historically considered, a legitimate and illuminating object of study. There is, in any case, ample compensation in the inspiring example of a scholar undaunted by difficulty, transparently honest and single-minded in her ambition to chart the history of the West European Renaissance. Her work was done in a modestly circumstanced life of apparent calm but spirited and constant

¹⁷ *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 14 (1951), 92–117; repr. in her *Renaissance and Reform; The Italian Contribution: Collected Essays*, 2 (London, 1983), pp. 30–58.

intellectual activity, continued to the end, even after operations for cataract in 1978.

Frances Yates was a frank and severe critic of her own work and of that of others. Those who had got it right included, as well as selected Warburgians, Italian historians of thought such as Nardi, Garin, Cesare Vasoli and Paola Zambelli (she loved Italy and there are ways in which her approach was Italian or Italo-French rather than English). Unwilling to modify her views in any essential way, she was never afraid to indicate where others had got it wrong, however cross with her—a favourite expression—‘they’ might be made by this. She did it largely by restating her case, sincere in the often-expressed belief that her work was there to be developed by ‘nackwacks’ (= *Nachwuchs*, the new generation). Her initiatory talent is nowhere more apparent and influential than in her dealings with the secret heart of ancient philosophy as represented by the Hermetic strain of Renaissance Neoplatonism. If she was inclined to overinsistence on this one component of the tradition and to large claims for its centrality to politico-religious experience and action, she opened up an area virtually unknown to English-reading historians. She herself would deny the existence of the ‘Yates thesis’ in the crude and easily refuted form extrapolated from her writings by her critics, and much opposed by them; it was not an essential part of her endeavour to propose—as they accused her of doing—the origin of modern science in occult belief. Rather, she wanted to show how occult belief, permeating the thought of the Renaissance, had accompanied the slow growth of science, if only sometimes as a stimulus *per contrariam*. Sharing with her friend and coadjutor, Walker, a distaste for the excesses of lunatic-fringe esotericists, modern believers in astrology and magic, and misguided modern Freemasons, she shared with him also a firm conviction that belief in the possibility of magical manipulation of the correspondences had been a profound motivating force. As a component of the thought system of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, in greater or lesser degree compatible with philosophy, science, and religion, as the means of mental and emotional orientation in the human condition, it was worth historical investigation. Its intangibility, increasing the difficulty of interpretation, made it more important. For Frances Yates, as the ‘mere’ or ‘humble historian’ she liked to call herself, what was thought to be, or hoped for, was as significant as what modern opinion selects to characterise progress. She attempted above all to describe the almost inseparable combination of the irrational with the rational in the thought world of the Renaissance, still discernible in the Newtonian symbiosis of

alchemical myth, apocalypticism, astrology, Neoplatonism, and the principles of mathematics, as it had been in the mixture of eschatological detritus and navigational skills in the mind of Christopher Columbus. She concerned herself with how that combination had been arrived at in specific instances, and how it had manifested itself in specific contexts, rather than with the rise of modern science in general.

Frances Yates created her own discipline.¹⁸ Wrong-headed or wrong she could sometimes be; but there is always a kernel, an aperçu, always 'something there'. Her investigations, supported always by courageous and agile argument, are profoundly suggestive and challenging to accepted notions, especially in their adumbrations of relationships and of consequences. The conditions she experienced for protracted, individual, pure research and reflection have vanished, along with the worlds in which she moved, physically as well as imaginatively. Of her it could be written, as she wrote of Gertrud Bing, 'She staked a claim for humanity and learning and unflinchingly defended it to the end. That was her true work, a work infinitely important and invisibly lasting.'¹⁹

As well as enlivening the past, Frances Yates heartened the present; she was an earnest, impulsive, modest, warm, humorous, and generous human being. Her care extended to the future, her final act of generosity and vision being her bequest to the Warburg Institute, which ensured that her personal library would be incorporated in the Institute's Library and her working papers in its Archives, while her residual estate would be used to found research fellowships there in her name.

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¹⁸ H. R. Trevor-Roper, quoted by J. N. Hillgarth in Frances A. Yates, *Ideas and Ideals*, p. 277.

¹⁹ *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 27 (1964), p. [vi].