

The matter of invention in Hawes' *Passetyme of Pleasure*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to consider what may be deduced about literary invention in the early sixteenth century through an examination of the way in which the word 'invention' is used in Hawes' *Passetyme of Pleasure* (1506). Despite much recent argument to the contrary, the assumption is still sometimes made that in England it was not until the mid or late sixteenth century that there was any sustained interest in literary invention in a form which is still understood – that is, one in which the source of the writer's work and the work's authority is his own power of mind, rather than an *auctor* or set of *auctoritates* external to himself. Examining the connotations of 'invention', I shall argue that the use of the word in the Hawes' work suggests that there is a need to modify the reading of late sixteenth-century poetics.

As presented in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word 'invention' first appears in the classical sense of 'discovery' (a1350), with its subsense, rhetorical invention 'the finding out or selection of topics to be treated' first appearing in 1509. The senses which are now more familiar, 'the action of devising, contriving, or making up' and 'the faculty of inventing or devising; power of mental creation or construction; inventiveness' appear slightly later, in 1526 and 1576 respectively. This is not to say that these senses were not available before; rather, it says something about the availability and interpretation of evidence at the time at which the original *OED* entry for 'invention' was first published, in 1901. The *OED* entry itself includes a citation from Caxton's *Esope* (1484) in which the word takes the sense 'a work or writing as produced by exercise of the mind', implying the prior existence of 'invention' in senses related to the action of the mind. The more recent *Middle English Dictionary* entry for the same word includes a quotation from Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* (a1439) in which 'invention' is clearly seen to involve the treatment of the poet's material as well as its initial selection: "Of poetis, this the sotil fourme, Be newe invencion thynges to transfourme." In the *MED* this appears as only an isolated instance of the

word in a sense that implies the process of working on the material, rather than the fact of its selection. However, I shall here argue that there is evidence from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century which forges a link between Lydgate's use and the reappearance of the word towards the end of the latter century with an emphasis on senses relating to power of mind. There is a famous indication of this in Henryson's carefully balanced deliberation in *The Testament of Cresseid* (late fifteenth-century), when he writes of the supposed source of his narrative that he "wait nocht gif this narratioun / Be authoreist, or fenzeit of the new / Be sum poeit, throw his inuentioun" (Fox 1987:113).¹ In speaking of invention as a process of mind rather than as the material to be treated, Henryson's use of the word foreshadows later sixteenth-century usage. In the later period the earlier, rhetorical use of the word is not, of course, entirely superseded; rather, various senses co-exist. In his *Brief Apology for Poetry* (1591) Harington treats 'invention' and 'imitation' as synonyms when he writes that "by the authoritie of sacred Scriptures both parts of Poesie, inuention or imitation and verse, are allowable" (Smith 1904:2:207), yet elsewhere in the same treatise he speaks of one of "the two parts of Poetrie" as "inuention or fiction" (Smith 1904:2:204), and of "some inuention of mine owne" (Smith 1904:2:218) as opposed to translated matter. In the first instance, 'invention' involves the writer's selection of his material from a pre-existent source; in the second, it is his own devising of the material; and in the third, it has connotations both of the action of devising and the thing devised, "a writing [...] produced by exercise of the mind." Harington's juxtaposition of these different senses in a single work demonstrates the practice of his period in microcosm. When Nashe writes in his Preface to Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (1591) that "wee neede doe no more but sette an olde goose ouer halfe a dozen pottle pots (which are as it were the egges of inuention) and wee shall haue such a breede of bookes within a little while after, as will fill all the world with the wilde fowle of good wits" (Smith 1904:2:227) he contrasts the idea of invention as a reworking of existing material with the newer sense. His use reveals the continued existence of the original, rhetorical sense of the word, but at the same time implies that true invention lies elsewhere: good wits produce not golden geese, but wild-fowl. This emphasis on invention as creation recurs constantly; for example, Thomas Churchyard writes of the 'invention of wit' in his *Pleasant Discourse of Court and Wars* (1596), Harvey in *Pierces Supererogation* (1593) of the "superexcellent wit that is the mother pearle of precious Inuention, and the

¹ The same quotation is dated 1593 in the *OED* entry for 'invention, n.', due to the dictionary's practice of giving the date of publication or manuscript rather than the date of composition.

goulden mine of gorgeous Elocution" (Churchyard 1816:sig.C3v, Smith 1904:2:250), and Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1589), without using the word itself, summarizes the view contained in these uses in its statement that the poet "makes and contriues out of his owne braine both the verse and matter of his poeme" (Smith 1904:2:3).

This location of invention as an activity of mind is anticipated in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century not only in practice, as in Henryson's line, but in theory, as is evident from Hawes' use of the word 'invention' in his *Passetyme of Pleasure*. In this fusion of romance and philosophical instruction, the hero is warned by Fame that his quest for La Belle Pucelle will be a difficult one; as well as overcoming a number of temptations in the form of many-headed giants, he must at the very outset undergo a rigorous process of instruction in the seven Liberal Arts: grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy. Such fusion of romance and didacticism has precedents, most notably in the fifteenth-century *Court of Sapyence*, which Hawes (mistakenly) attributes to Lydgate. However, Hawes' description of the part played by invention within the art of rhetoric is wholly his own. Hawes initially seems to follow the pattern laid down in classical theory, and in later works such as Geoffrey de Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova* (c1210). Like these, he declares that rhetoric has five parts (invention, disposition, elocution, pronunciation, and memory) and that "The fyrste of them / is called inuencyon" (l.701). After this canonical introduction his elaboration is startling. Invention, he says,

... sourdeth / of the most noble werke
Of .v. inwarde wyttes / with hole affecyon
As wryteth ryght many a noble clerke
With mysty colour / of cloudes derke
How comyn wytte / doth full well electe
What it sholde take / and what it shall abiecte.

(Mead 1928:33)

The idiosyncrasy of Hawes' treatment is immediately obvious. The *OED* cites the first two and a half lines of this stanza as the first recorded instance in English of 'invention' in its purely rhetorical sense 'the finding out of matter to be treated.' In view of the general context in which Hawes uses the word, this is the only possible sense assignment. However, the immediate context shows that Hawes' use of the word carries a connotation of other senses, most notably 'the action of devising, contriving, or making up' and 'the faculty of inventing or devising.' In his declaration that invention "sourdeth of the most noble werke / Of .v. inwarde wyttes" Hawes conflates the classical rhetorical tradition with the equally ancient tradition of faculty psychology, derived from Aristotle's *De Anima*, according to

which the phenomena of the mind are controlled by mental faculties such as fantasy and reason. Although a full description of faculty psychology is found in one of Hawes' sources, Gregory Reisch's *Margarita Philosophica* (1496), it is there kept entirely separate from the discussion of rhetoric. Rhetoric, treated in a thoroughly Ciceronian fashion as the art of the lawyer, is the subject of book three of Reisch's work, as the third of the liberal arts. The inward wits are described in book ten, long after the artes have been dealt with, as part of the discussion of the powers of the soul. The human mind is said to have five internal senses, or inward wits, corresponding to the body's five physical senses – common wit, imagination, fantasy, estimation, and memory. Common wit, found at the front of the brain, mediates between the mind and the outside world, receiving impressions from the external senses, and distinguishing between things and the sensations they induce. It has no power of retention, but passes the impressions back to the imagination, whose task is to give them a fixed form and store them. Estimation, found still further towards the back of the head, makes judgements based on these impressions, while memory, at the very rear, gives both impressions and judgements permanent storage. In this respect, it functions like the imagination, but unlike the imagination, whose images exist in an eternal present, it has a sense of chronology. Whereas the imagination receives impressions from the common wit alone, memory receives them from both the common wit and the estimation, so that there is at once a parallelism between the functioning of the front and back parts of the brain, and a cumulative processing of information received. The fantasy stands slightly outside this chain of communication. Although it too is assigned a position within the head – like the imagination, it is situated immediately behind the common wit, but a little higher – it is perceived as a roving faculty. Reisch emphasizes that is independent, not wholly reliable, at its most powerful when estimation (or reason) sleeps, and given to inventing or fabricating sense impressions (Reisch 1503:10:23: sig.H2v). Writing slightly earlier, in the 1440s, Reginald Pecock similarly presents it as a faculty whose office it is

for to forge and compowne, or to sette to gedir in seemyng, þingis whiche ben not to gedir, and whiche maken not oon þing in kynde: As if a man feyn a beest to be made of an horsis heed and of a kowys body and of a lyouns taile (Hitchcock 1921:10)

Although Pecock is writing solely of the function of the mind, the way in which his fantasy combines things which are naturally distinct, bears a startling resemblance to Horace's famous comments on the dangers of poetic feigning in his *Ars Poetica*:

Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam
iungere si velit, et varias inducere plumas
nudique collatis membris, ut turpiter atrum
desinat in piscam mulier formosa superne,
spectatum admissi risum teneatis, amici?

(Rushton Fairclough 1970:ll.1-5)²

Pecock's simile thus provides a useful background against which to consider Hawes' treatment of the fantasy and of invention as a foreshadowing of that in later writers.

By conflating the classical rhetorical tradition with that of faculty psychology, Hawes' 'invention' emphasizes not the pre-existence of the material to be selected, but the writer's activity of selection, treating as literal and physical what was previously only implicit in metaphor. Geoffrey de Vinsauf, for example, says of the process of invention that "[t]he mind's hand shapes the entire house before the body's hand builds it," and speaks of the writer's material being "made pliant" by "the mind's fire" (Faral 1924:198,203).³ As has been seen, Lydgate too speaks of the writer's activity as one of transformation. However, Hawes is the first to translate such metaphors into the terms of the science of the day. In doing so he suggests that the metaphor is less a figure of speech than an image of truth with its basis in fact, locating invention firmly as an operation of the mind through a series of fully realized parallels. "Comyn wytte" performs the task normally described as rhetorical invention; it "dooth [...] electe / What it sholde take and what it shall abiecte" (Mead 1928:33). This, however, is only the beginning: the process of invention also involves the imagination, which must "drawe [the] mater" (Mead 1928:33); the fantasy, which must "exemplify" the poet's "newe inuencyon mater" (Mead 1928:34); the estimation, to control and abbreviate it; and finally, the memory, to give all this its permanent form. The operation of the faculties is made to correspond to the five parts of rhetoric, in a transposition of psychological functions into rhetorical terms which vastly extends the meaning of invention. From being merely the first part of rhetoric, it becomes the whole of rhetoric in

² "If a painter chose to join a human head to the neck of a horse, and to spread feathers of many a hue over limbs picked up now here now there, so that what at the top is a lovely woman ends below in a black and ugly fish, could you, my friends, if favoured with a private view, refrain from laughing?"

³ "Si quis habet fundare domum, non currit ad actum Impetuosa manus: intrinseca linea cordis Praemetitur opus, seriemque sub ordine certo Interior praescribit homo, totamque figurat Ante manus cordis quam corporis"; "Formula materiae, quasi quaedam formula cerae, Primitus est tactus duri: si sedula cura Igniat ingenium, subito mollescit ad ignem Ingenii sequiturque manum quocumque vocarit, Ductilis ad quicquid."

microcosm; it is not only the selecting of the matter to be treated, but the whole treatment of it that makes it the poet's own. Although a description of the other four parts of rhetoric follows, this is inevitably coloured by their original treatment as functions of the mind. When *dispositio* is described as the art of "gyuyng[e] [...] place" to "the maters founde" (Mead 1928:38), it has already been defined as the means "To make of nought / reason sentencyous." Similarly, memory is not only "The whiche / the perfyte mynystracyon Ordynatly causeth / to be retentyfe Dryuyng[e] the tale," but also "inwarde / a recapytulacyon Of eche ymage the moralyzacyon" (Mead 1928:52); it does not only store the writer's material, but provides it with its meaning. Just as the parts of the mind are interconnected, working on the same material simultaneously and in parallel to produce a perfect understanding of it, so too the parts of rhetoric work not separately but in conjunction, in Pecoock's terms, "forging" and "compowning". As in the late sixteenth century, invention is treated as the product of the writer's own wit.

This portrayal of the five parts of rhetoric as inseparable then provides the means of tracing a further resemblance between Hawes' theory and the treatment of invention in the later sixteenth century. Hawes' encompassing of all the parts of rhetoric under the heading of invention is repeated in a more discursive fashion under the heading of elocution, the part of rhetoric which he presents as the responsibility of the fantasy (Mead 1928:41-50). In giving a prominence to the fantasy equal to that allowed to the seat of invention, common wit, Hawes' treatment foreshadows the prominence which that faculty is given in later sixteenth-century poetics. In these later works fantasy is presented as that power of mind on which the poet's power of creation, fiction, feigning or invention depends. For Puttenham, for example, it is that part of the mind which

being well affected [...] is [...] so passing cleare, that by it, as by a glasse or mirrour, are represented vnto the soule all maner of bewtifull visions, whereby the inuentiue parte of the mynde is so much holpen as without it no man could deuise any new or rare thing (Smith 1904:19-20)

while for Francis Bacon, writing in 1604, the fantasy "doth raise and erect the mind [...] whereas reason doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things" (Wright 1957:102). Bacon's phrase recalls Sidney's reference to the 'erected wit' of the poet as his distinguishing feature (Smith 1904:1:157). Here, as before in Hawes, the operation of the fantasy is intimately associated with the operation of invention. However, Bacon, Sidney, Puttenham alike exhibit a certain wariness towards the fantasy even while commending it; like its predecessor in faculty psychology, the poetic fantasy is liable to mislead. The source of both its strength and its weakness is its

freedom from a duty of accurate representation; as Bacon says of the closely associated faculty of the imagination: "being not tied to the laws of matter, [it] may at pleasure join that which nature hath severed, and sever that which nature hath joined, and so make unlawful matches and divorces of things" (Wright 1957:101). In Hawes' treatment none of these doubts are apparent, perhaps because he presents writing as an activity of the mind as a whole, rather than of the fantasy alone, but there is nonetheless an interesting anticipation of one possible source of them in his association of the fantasy specifically with the third part of rhetoric, *elocutio*, or choice of words.

In classical works on rhetoric and their direct descendants the division between invention and elocution is almost absolute. Following Cicero, both Geoffrey and Reisch speak of words as ornament; only once the matter has been selected and arranged is it provided with the clothes in which it will appear. In Hawes' discussion of *elocutio*, there is a clear memory of this fairly inorganic relation between words and matter; he too says that the writer's choice of words "exorneth" his subject (Mead 1928:40). Nonetheless, his discussion of *elocutio* under the heading of invention suggests that the division between the two is untenable, and his recapitulation of the whole process of invention under the heading of elocution itself confirms that a writer's choice of words is indistinguishable from the writer's selection of matter (Mead 1928:41-50). To treat invention and elocution as separate topics presupposes that the process of writing is not a whole, but a series of processes. It also assumes that neither the process of writing nor the words a writer employs in any way alter his matter. A writer's 'sentence' or essential meaning exists independently of his phrasing, and words are agents of persuasion only in so far as they influence the writer's (or orator's) audience; they do not act either upon the writer or upon his material, but are wholly under his control. By the mid to late sixteenth century this position is evidently untenable. Wilson's *Art of Rhetoric* (1560) shows clear unease at the impossibility of separating *res* from *verba*, in his writing of tropes in particular, and by the early seventeenth century Bacon writes as if of accepted fact that "*verba gignant verba*" (Medine 1994:196-97, Spedding 1858:1:645). The origins of this heightened awareness that the relation between words and matter is not one of straightforward representation have frequently been traced to the teaching methods of the sixteenth century, which were intended to make students eloquent Latinists, and which emphasized *verba* over *res*. An early and famous example of the technique is of course Erasmus' *De Copia*, with its series of detailed illustrations of the many guises in which a single sentiment may be presented. As Kinney has argued, such concentration on rhetorical technique led to a heightened and sometimes uneasy awareness that truth itself is a relative rather than an absolute, dependent on phrasing (Kinney 1986:17-22).

For Sidney, "*oratio* is next to *ratio*," while Ascham goes still further in his lament that "ye know not what hurt ye do to learning, that care not for words but for matter, and so make a divorce betwixt the tongue and the heart" (Smith 1904:1:182, Ryan 1967:115). While for Sidney, speech and thought are seen to be counterparts, as closely connected as the terms *ratio* and *oratio* themselves, for Ascham it seems there is no matter before there are words in which to express it. In this implicit belief both may readily be seen to reflect the principles inculcated by the sixteenth-century emphasis on *imitatio* as a means of teaching Latin style. As presented in Ascham's *Scholemaster*, for example, the aim of his system of double translation was to inculcate a purely classical idiom as a standard against which variation might be developed (Ryan 1967:14-15, 83-87). A similar purpose was served by the popular use of the commonplace book in teaching; in both, complementary, systems, imitation was imagined not as slavish copying, but as a way of acquiring a classicality of one's own (Kinney 1986:11-14, Crane 1993:12-14). Each system too encouraged a tendency to think of the boundary between words and matter as indistinct, since a creative imitation, or appropriation, of style was seen to make the subject too the imitator's own. When Bacon writes that the imagination is not tied to "the laws of matter," it is clear from the context that he is in the first instance referring to the laws of nature, just as Sidney praises the poet's freedom from any compulsion narrowly to imitate the facts of history (Smith 1904:1:156-58, 164). Yet it is also possible to read Bacon's claim in a purely literary sense, where 'matter' is the subject to be imitated. This indicates that the shift in the meaning of invention from the finding out of matter to the production of new matter is in part coloured by emphasis on style. Nonetheless, Hawes' use of the word in the latter sense at a time when the teaching methods common in the later sixteenth century were found in England only in embryonic form suggests that there is an additional, perhaps less classical reason for the close association of words and matter and thus for the changing meaning of the word 'invention' itself.

At the time at which Hawes was writing, the vernacular was developing a visible history as a literary language, as was evident not only in the translation work of writers such as Hawes' close contemporary Skelton, but also in Lydgate's invention of an aureate authorial tradition, with which Hawes explicitly aligns himself. As Lois Ebin has argued, the terms of Hawes' critical vocabulary, with its emphasis on darkness and illumination, represent a conscious development of the terminology which Lydgate develops in order to describe the role of the poet, and the way in which he works upon his material (Ebin 1988:138-39, 145-47). Lydgate's use of terms such as "golden" and "aureate" underlies a passage such as Hawes' description of elocution as that which

... doth ryght well claryfy
The dulcet speche / from the langage rude
Tellynge the tale / in termes eloquent
The barbary tongue / it doth ferre exclude
Electyng wordes / whiche are expedyent
In latyn / or in englysshe / after the entent
Encensynge out / the aromatyke fume
Our langage rude / to exyle and consume

(Mead 1928:41)

Hawes' terminology is thus of interest for two reasons. In referring constantly to the transformation of the writer's material, the very terms in his vocabulary recognize the inseparability of the processes of invention and elocution. Writing is imaged as an almost physical process of transformation in metaphors drawn from alchemy and from metal-work, represented in this stanza alone by Hawes' use of terms such as "electyng" and "encensynge", and still more explicit in the previous stanza, where elocution is said to clarify the language "[a]s we do golde frome coper purify" (Mead 1928:40). Still more importantly, however, the fact that these terms come with a history of previous use suggests that such terms not only declare the inseparability of words and matter, but provide a practical example of the way in which a writer's choice of words rhetorically shapes the matter he describes. By virtue of repeating terms used in the work of previous writers, Hawes' description of eloquence becomes a statement of the poet's place in a genealogy of English and Scots poets derived through Lydgate from Chaucer, and thus a guarantee that Hawes too possesses a comparable eloquence. Such usage indicates that words are not neutral tools, but that the colour they acquire from previous usage to a large extent determines the matter they describe. Thus, Hawes' treatment of the fantasy may be seen to anticipate the practice of the later sixteenth century in a number of ways. In combining the classical rhetorical tradition and the tradition of faculty psychology, he heralds the late sixteenth-century relocation of the poet's authority in his own mind. At the same time, the way in which the fantasy, the seat of elocution, is seen to encompass all parts of rhetoric as fully as does the common wit, the seat of invention, indicates something of the fusion of words and matter which is generally thought to be characteristic of the later period. Hawes' highly idiosyncratic treatment of invention thus demonstrates that the shift in the meaning of 'invention' and the perception of the poet's authority is not attributable to humanist influence alone, but that the poetics of the late sixteenth century are in part anticipated within a wholly vernacular tradition.

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