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JOHN DONNE AND THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY MAPS

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The study of intertextuality brings into the open the dialogue character of a lierary work. Texts do not exist in isolation but they belong to what one may call a signifying community of the library. The reader of Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose* learns that the library is not a silent repository of books but a place where the books are engaged in the ongoing debates. For Adso, a young novice from Eco's novel, the library becomes the place where books conspire against man, a hostile labyrinth which he would rather refrain from entering:

> Until then, Adso concludes his discovery, I had thought each book spoke of the things, human or divine that lie outside books. Now I realized that not infrequently books speak of books: it is as if they spoke among themselves. In the light of this reflection the library seemed all the more disturbing to me. It was then a place of a long, centuries old murmuring, an imperceptible dialogue between one pergamine and another, a living thing, a receptacle of powers not to be ruled by human mind, a treasure of secrets emanated by many minds, surviving the death of those who had produced them or had been their conveyors. (Eco 1983: 286)

Drawing a plan of this labyrinth and exploring the implications of the dialogue which Eco describes in metaphorical way is what the study of intertextuality seeks to perform. The present paper which is based on the above stated accounts is intended to deal with a few examples of such dialogues between various texts as it foregrounds the parallels between the poetic works of John Donne and the design of the sixteenth and seventeenth century maps as well as considers the implications of these similarities for our reading of Donne's poetry.

References to maps are in Donne's poems surprisingly frequent, suffice here to mention his "Hymn to God, may God in my Sicknesse", "The Valediction, Forbidding Mourning", "The Good Morrow" and the elegies: "To His Mistresse, Going to Bed" and "Loves Progresse".

There can be no doubt that Donne's involvement in the English expeditions to Cadiz in 1596 and to the Azores in 1597 may account for the poets

knowledge of the sixteenth and seventeenth century cartography (for more detailed information concerning these biographical data see Rhodes Dunlop's article "Donne as Navigator", *TSL*, 1946). However, one needs to remember that such interest in geography was nothing unusual among the poet's contemporaries.

The atlases which Donne must have been well familiar with still at his times functioned "journalistically", as almost every new edition of a given map brought in more information about the currently discovered or explored lands. Being "an index of contemporary geographical knowledge" the sixteenth century maps and globes illustrated "the gradual modification of the Ptolemaic world picture to admit new concepts derived from discovery – the outlines of Africa, India, Asia as revealed by the Portuguese voyages; the unbroken extension of America from the Arctic Circle to Magellan Strait, the existence of a longitudinal span of the Pacific Ocean, disclosed by Magellan" (Encyclopaedia Britannica vol. 14 1963:850). Hence the titles of atlases such like *Spieghel der Zeevaerdt* (English edition was published in 1588 under the title *The Mariners' Mirrour*), *Speculum Britanniae* or *Speculum Orbis Terrarum* which, like the titles of the twentieth century popular newspapers advertised their texts as photographic, undisguised reflection of reality.

Yet, for the seventeenth century man reality itself was a disguise and the world was nothing but a theatre, a stage where to play the tragedy of human life:

What is life? a play of passion,
Our mirth is the music of division,
Our mothers wombes the tyring houses be,
Where we are drest for this short Comedy,
Heaven the Judicious sharpe spectator is,
That sits and markes still who doth act amisse,
Our graves that hide us from the searching Sun,
Are like drawne curtaynes when the play is done
(in Gardner ed. 1986:35)

Thus the mirror held up to the world reflected the stage design of the Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, as read the title of a popular sixteenth century Flemish atlas of the world (Ortelius 1569). The frontispiece of this atlas presented accordingly the fabulously designed tableaux which showed the personifications of the four continents, all set up against the background of a richly decorated arch. The following prologue explained the meaning of the allegorical frontispiece. On the next pages the reader was confronted with the images of various mythical monsters: bearded whales, tritons, sirens, gods and goddesses of all kinds with the help of which the cartographers were "colonizing" the vast areas of the new worlds. In this way the sixteenth and seventeenth century maps combined the descrtipive nature of a journalistic mirror with the performative, ritualistic nature of a theatre.

The practice of interpreting the earthly geography in terms of mythical time and space found its reflection also in the poetry of John Donne whose "Hymne to God, my God, in my Sicknesse" reminds one of the maps which had their margins richly decorated with miniature paintings representing the story of redemption.

Donne's poem, written probably a few days before the poet's death, develops the motif of a mystical journey which leads the soul of the dying man to the land of the fathers:

Is the Pacifique Sea my home? Or are
The Easterne riches? Is *Jerusalem*?
Anyan, and *Magellan*, and *Gibraltare*,
All streights, and none but streights,
are wayes to them,
Whether where *Japhet* dwelt, or *Cham*, or *Sem*.
(Patrides ed. 1985:488-489)

The contours of various straights which seem to be the dominating element of the landscape drawn by the poet symbolize the perils of agony, at the same time evoking the biblical imagery of the gates of heaven: "because strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth ino the life and few there be that find it" (*Bible* 1985:Matthew, 7:14).

The story told by the poet has its equivalence in the biblical story of redemption, which took its beginning in the garden of Paradise and led to the mountain of Calvarie:

We thinke that *Paradise* and *Calvarie*,
Chriss Crosse, and *Adams* tree, stood in one
place;
Looke Lord, and finde boh *Adams* in me;
As the first *Adams* sweet surrounds my face,
May the last *Adams* blood my soule embrace.
(Patrides ed. 1985:489)

The motif of a journey, developed in the poem, may be interpreted in terms of initiation symbolism. The agony which the poet suffers becomes then a means of spiritual re-birth (the parallel between the first and the last Adam illustrates the metamorphosis from the fallen man to man, the God), while the most pronounced symptom of dying, fever, is translated into the purifying fire of the initiation rites.

Whether we accept this interpretation or not, there can be no doubt that in Donne's "Hymn" one finds the account of a mystical expansion of the self. Transcending the limits of his particular *here* and *now*, the dying man identifies himself with the whole world, the is the image, *the map of the world*:

Whilst my Physitians by their love are growne
Cosmographers, and I their Mapp, who lie
Flat on this bed, that by them may be showne
That is my South-west discoverie
Per fretum febris, by these streights to die.
(Parides ed. 1985:488)

A similar analogy between the macrocosm of the Universe and the microcosm of a man plays an important role in Donne's love poems. An interesting example of such an analogy comes from the elegy "Loves Progresse", where the poet assumes the role of a cosmographer exploring the body of his beloved lady and describing in detail the perils which await those who uncunningly set out on the journey from a wrong harbour:

But in attaining this desired place
How much they erre that set out at the face?
The hair a Forest is of Ambushes
Of springes, snares, fetters and manacles:
The brow becalms us when 'tis smooth and plain,
And when 'tis wrinkled shipwracks us again.
Smooth, 'tis a Paradice, where we would have
Immortal stay, but wrinkled 'tis our grave.
The Nose (like to the first Meridian) runs
Not twixt an East and West but twixt two Suns
It leaves a Cheek, a rosie Hemisphere
On either side, and then directs us where
Upon the Islands fortunate we fall
Not foynte Canaries, but Ambrosiall
Her swelling lips; to which when we are come
We anchor there and think our selves at home
For they seem all: there Syrens songs, and there
Wise Delphic Oracles do fill the ear;
The Rhemora her cleaving tongue doth dwell.
(Patrides ed. 1985:180-181)

The analogy between man, the little world and the macrocosm gains here an additional meaning. The comparison of woman's body to the surface of the earth brings to one's mind the archetypal representation of the mother earth and primiveal fertility deities. Yet in drawing this comparison Donne once again surprises his reader with the references to the convention of a map. Thus, on re-reading the poem we notice the "cartographic metaphors": the nose like to the first *meridian* runs and leaves a cheek, a rosie *hemisphere* on either side. No less interesting in the light of this observation prove other lines in which the poet sketches diligently the same treacherous monsters which appear on the pages of the seventeenth century atlases, such like *remora*, the little fish believed to be capable of stopping a huge ship.

In this manner, the poet uses the text of a map to mediate the parallel between the macrocosm of the Universe and the microcosm of the man.

Adopting Piercian terminology of semiotic triad we may also say that the text of a map serves here as an interpretant of Donne's poems. It is possible then to interpret these poems as verbal equivalents of the sixteenth and seventeenth century maps, in other words as the translation of the maps into the language of poetry.

Probably the best known example of such translation is Donne's poem "The Good Morrow" which as some critics have pointed out refers directly to the shape of the so called cordiform maps which were very popular in Donne's times. The Third stanza of this poem opens with the lines which remind that the map is believed to represent a mirror reflection of the world; only in this case the world to be reflected is the microcosm of the lovers:

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest,
Where can we find two better hemispheares
Without sharpe North, without declining West.
(Patrides ed. 1985:49)

Commenting on the above quoted lines, R. L. Sharp reminds that the so called cordiform maps represented the two hemispheres in the form of the two heart shaped figures (1954:493-95). Only in this context, the critic observes, Donne's metaphor which describes the heart of each lover as one hemisphere becomes meaningful. The two lovers make together a world of their own:

Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone
Let Maps to other, worlds on worlds have showne,
Let us possesse one world, each hath one, and is one.
(Patrides ed. 1985:49)

The word "possesse" which connotes absolute mastery (in Donne's times it still retained its metaphoric connection with demonic possession) did not appear in this poem for no reason. It apparently points to the pride of a cosmographer who claims his dominion over the newly mapped land which is thus taken into possession. He who draws a map of the unknown land, tames it:

For of Meredians and Parallels,
Man hath weaved out a net, and this net throwne
Upon the heavens, and now they are his owne.

writes Donne in "An Anatomy of the World" (Patrides ed. 1985:338). Not too far an echo of such an assumption resides also in his elegy "To His Mistresse, Going to Bed" which is at one time a gentle inviation to make love and a prophecy which foreshadows subduing the beloved woman. The following lines, for example, seem almost overflooded with the possessive pronoun "my":

Licence my roaving hands, and let them go,
Before, behind, between, above, below.
O my America! My new-found-land,
My kingdome, safliest when with one man mann'd,
My Myne of precious stones: My Empire
How blest am I in this discovering thee!
To enther in these bonds is to be free;
Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be.
(Patrides ed. 1985: 184)

This persistent repetition of the possesive pronoun rhymes with the image of "bond of love" which appeared in the pre-ultimate line at the same time evoking the memory of the previously quoted poems. The submission of a woman is articulated also in "The Sunne Rising" where Donne writes "she'is all States, and all Princes, I". Such a metaphor leaves no doubt as to the "appropriative" character of love. The reference to America, the newly discovered and conquered land in the elegy quoted above seems to suggest a similar interpretation though at the same time it constitues an invitation to read this poem in the context of the seventeenth century icongraphy and cartography while in the light of such an intertextual analysis the meaning of Donne's poem becomes surprisingly ambiguous. Both in the previously mentioned Flemish atlas of Abraham Worels, and in the *Iconologia* by Caesare Ripa which the critics call a "source book for Jacobean personification" (Freeman 1948: 79) the naked beauty which stands for America can be taken for anything but a symbol of the submissive virgin. In Ripa's anthology she holds man's head pierced with an arrow (the accompanying text contains references to Indian warfare customs but the reader cannot miss the parallel with the biblical story of Sisara and Jael) (Ripa 1610: 361); in Ortelius's atlas she takes the figure of Judith who "from the symbol of triumph over Satan (...) has become the symbol of death" as her triumph over Holophernes made her an image of Kopfjagerin, the woman who destroys men with her fatal influence (Białostocki 1982: 126). The association with Jael and Judith, however surprising it may seem, proves significant for our considerations. One needs not remind here that both Sisara and Holofrenes fell the victims of their lust for these fatal women.

The author of the prologue to Ortelius's atlas writes:

Inferiore solo quam cernis America dicta est
Quam nuper vectus pelago Vespucius audax
Vi rapuit, tenero nympham complexus amore.
Illa oblita sui, castique oblita pudoris
Nuda sedet totum corpsum, nisi vitta capillos
Plumea vinciret frontem nisi gemma notaret
Ambirent teretes nisi tintinnabula suras
Lignea clova olli im dextra, qua mactat obesos
Atque saginatos homines, captivaque bello

Corpora, quae discissa in frusta trementia lentis
Vel torret flaminis calido vel lixat aheno
Vel, si quando famis robies stimulat mage, cruda
Et iam coesa recens, nigroque fluentia tabo
Membra vorat, tepidi pavitant sub dentibus artus
Carnibus et miserorum et sanguine vesciur atro
Horrendum fascinus visu, horrendumque relatu
Quid non impletas designat barbara? Quid non
Contemptus superum?
Adspicis in loeva soedatum coede recenti
Humanum caput. En arcum celeresque saggitas
Queis solet, adducto dum flectit cornua nervo
Vulnera certa viris certamque infligere mortem
Hox detessa hominum venatu tradere summo
Membra volens lectum contextum varius instar
Reticuli, germino a palo quem fixit utrimque
Nonscedit, textoque caput reclinat a artus.

Seen through the prism of the Judith's history, the man's head becomes once again "the symbol of erotic triumph, the interplay of death and love where wins not the cool light of man's armour but the warm hew of woman's body" (Białostocki 1982: 128). Whether this ambiguity arising from the juxtaposition of Donne's poem with the frontispiece of Ortelius's atlas was intended or not is hard to decide. One can assume, though, that Ortelius's collection of maps was well known to the poet. It gained a widespread popularity in the Elizabethan England where Abraham Wortels, Ortelius, spend a large part of his life working together with English cartographers.

Taking all this into consideration, we may interpret Donne's complaint on women's shrewedness which comes in the following lines:

Jems which you women use
Are like Atlanta's balls, cast in mens views,
That when a fools eye lighteth on a Jem,
His earthly soul may covet theirs, not them
(Patrides ed. 1985: 185)

as a prompt to re-read and re-interpret the previously quoted fragment, a signal of its ambiguity.

No less intriguing proves Donne's "Valediction: Forbidding Mourning". The poem, frequently quoted as an example of metaphysical conceit, compares the two lovers to a pair of stiff twin-compasses: when one of them sets out on a journey, that which "in the center sits (...) leans, and hearkens after it, / And growes erect as that comes home", their souls "endure not yet / A breach, but an expansion, / Like gold to ayery thinnesse beate" (Parides ed. 1985: 98). Apart from the traditional reading of this text one may also attempt to scan the "map" on which the poet draws the route of this journey, bearing in mind

the conventions of the seventeenth century cartography. The scientific set-up of Donne's poem makes such intertextual interpretation still the more plausible.

Many maps dating from Donne's times had an image of stiff twin-compasses as an ornament of a scale: the divided line used to represent a larger unit for measure. Already this one parallel opens almost infinite possibilities for Derridean dissemination of the meaning embedded in Donne's metaphor. The reference to the scale on a map fits aptly the situation presented by the poet. Going away from his beloved lady he may be said to "measure" the distance which will soon separate them. At the same time, however, the reader of this text may go one step further and try to recall in this context the other meaning of the word "scale" which denotes in English an instrument used for weighing goods, usually a beam that is supported freely in the centre and has two pans of equal weigh suspended from its ends. This meaning of "scale" corresponds with poet's plea to "balance" the emotions:

So let us melt, and make no noise
No teare floods, nor sigh-tempests move,
T'were profanation of our joyes
To tell the layetie our love
(Patrides ed. 1985:97)

At the same time, however, it reminds one of the swinging movement of the scales. This in turn brings in the atmosphere of uncertainty which renders the message of the poem ambiguous. On the one hand, the narrator makes the reader belief that physical separation does not matter for those whom love has transformed:

But we by a love, so much refin'd
That our selves know notwhat it is,
Inter-assured of the mind,
Care lesse, eyes, lips, hands to misse.
(Patrides ed. 1985:96)

This declaration is reinforced through the reference to the art of alchemy ("by a love, so much refined") which sought the formula for transforming matter into a higher, spiritual form symbolized by gold (hence the previously quoted line: "like gold to ayery thinnesse beat). On the other hand, however, the very metrical pattern of the last stanza quoted above shows that, at least subconsciously, the poets wants to foreground the physical aspect of love. The departure from the iambic pattern in the last line: "Care lesse, eyes, lips, hands to misse" makes the reader slow down and thus focuses his attention on the "physicality" of love (Patrides ed. 1985:18). Also the following stanza contains obvious references to sexual intercourse:

And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other after doth rome,
It leanes, and hearkens after it,
And grows erect as comes home.
(Patrides ed. 1985:98)

Finally, the reference to the "oblique" route of the other foot in the ultimate stanza may as well denote unfaithfulness. Only the firmness of the fixed foot makes circle "just" which in this context means both "correct" and "honest":

Such wilt thou be to mee, who must
Like th'other foot, obliquely runne.
Thy firmnes makes my circle just
And makes me end, where I begunne.

Thus the poem oscillates between doubt and certainty, between the poles of physicality and spirituality. It is then a sample of what Stanley Fish calls a self-consuming artifact (Fish 1972). The structure of the poem is circular: the end refers back to the beginning and so, interestingly enough, the last stanza qouted above may also refer to the reader of Donne's poem who in decoding the self-reflexive text must *like th'other foot, obliquely runne.*

Instead of pointing to a conclusion of some kind the last paragraph shows yet another loophole in the labyrinth which Eco describes in the fragment quoted in the introductory part of the present paper. Thus the reader finally finds himself trapped in the library where, throughout centuries, various texts lead an imperceptible dialogue. To stay outside, however, means to lose the unique opportunity of seeing into this amazing dialogue which takes place there.

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