



John Donne and the “Anthropomorphic Map” Tradition

Noam Flinker¹

University of Haifa

Almost twenty years ago, Claude Gandelman asked me for some assistance in determining just what had been written about John Donne and the anthropomorphic map tradition. Not surprisingly, we found that little had been done and he proceeded to write (1984) “The Poem as Map: John Donne and the ‘Anthropomorphic Landscape’ Tradition.” Today, when I reread that piece (and the related chapter “Bodies, Maps Texts” in *Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts*) I am reminded of Robert Burton’s Democritus Junior whose introduction to the *Anatomy of Melancholy* cites the humanist commonplace that “A dwarf standing on the shoulders of a Giant may see farther than a Giant himself” (20). In this case, Gandelman serves as the giant and those of us who stand on his intellectual shoulders are thereby enabled to see a bit beyond the limits he lit up for us.

In “The Poem as Map” Gandelman shows the relevance of a peculiar kind of map of Europe to Donne’s “metaphysical” love poetry. He cites poems such as “The good-morrow” and “Elegie: Going to Bed” in order to document places in which seventeenth-century English verse set up connections between the work of the late medieval map maker Opicinus de Canistris or Sebastian Münster’s sixteenth-century “phantasmagoric cartography” (1991: 86). The point of all this is to provide “one more argument in favour of the classifying of this poet within Mannerism” (“Poem as Map,” 249). Finally, Gandelman points to the ludic function of the anthropomor-

1. Dr. Noam Flinker is Chair of the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Haifa. He also worked with the late Claude Gandelman at the University Ben Gurion, Beersheba. E-mail:flinker@research.haifa.ac.il .

phic landscape in Donne. It is “the seeing in succession of contrary and sometimes antithetical aspects contained in one and the same figure. Donne’s anthropomorphized maps or landscapes are very much like the famous “duck-rabbit” used by Wittgenstein in which a “duck” or a “rabbit” can be seen alternately following the spontaneous reversals of the figure. Similarly, Donne’s mistress “spontaneously reverses” — in the imagination of the reader — from map or landscape to feminine human body and vice versa. The poem alternately “anthropomorphizes” the landscape and “disanthropomorphizes it” as our imagination focuses in succession on the landscape or on the human body” (1991: 250).

It is unfortunate that Donne scholarship has been somehow deprived of ready access to Gandelman’s work on the anthropomorphic map tradition. The *MLA Bibliography* provides no reference to his essay “Poem as Map.” Jeanne Shami’s discussion of Donne’s use of geography as metaphor cites various important contributions to the study of Donne and maps. She argues “that Donne’s geography was part of his consuming passion for assimilating the new science into the old (and for finding the modern significance of the old knowledge)” (1984, 162). Nonetheless, her very competent summary of the field shows no awareness of the anthropomorphic map tradition and Donne’s evident knowledge of it. Earlier works on Donne’s cosmography provide the intellectual contexts for integrating Gandelman’s insights into what has become the standard view of Donne scholarship. Toshihiko Kawasaki has discussed ways in which Donne made use of the concepts “microcosm” and “macrocosm” in his verse and sermons. He claims that Donne’s “microcosm and macrocosm not only correspond to each other as two entities and symbolically reflect each other, but also that they represent a definite system of relative values: the smaller world is more valuable than the larger” (26-27). Leonard Barkan devotes an entire chapter to “Natural Philosophy: The Human Body and the Cosmos.” He traces the idea of the parallel between the microcosm and the macrocosm from the ancient Greeks through the Renaissance and actually cites Opicinus de Canistris as “an especially good example” of the proliferation of “the hierarchies and systems which correspond to man’s body” (39). Barkan provides the historical and literary facts and materials necessary to understand Gandelman. Don Parry Norford deals with these same terms in the context of the entire seventeenth century (and their earlier philosophical roots) but has nothing to say about anthropomorphic maps. This aspect of Renaissance mapping is significant for Donne studies and Gandelman’s essay deserves to be known.

The Donne texts that Gandelman cites shift back and forth from the macrocosm to the microcosm. Most famous (thanks to Hemingway’s novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*) is “Meditation 17” from *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*:

No man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the *Continent*, a part of the *maine*; if a *Clod* bee washed away by the *Sea*, *Europe* is the lesse, as well as if a *Promontorie* were, as well as if a *Mannor* of thy *friends*, or of *thine owne* were; Any mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*. (Donne, 1967: 243).

Gandelman first claims that this “is, of course, a cartographic image which shows us man as an ‘island’ (an anthropomorphic island) in his loneliness, as a part of an anthropomorphic continent, insofar as he participates in the fate of humanity” (1984, 246). Here a dwarf could complain that Donne’s point is precisely that man is not an island: “no man is an Iland.” This passage is concerned with community and not loneliness. And the dwarf would be right, except for the conclusion about the duck-rabbit. That is, “no man is an Iland,” yet as we try to see this claim, we must simultaneously recognize that we have here one of those “spontaneous reversals” in which man both is and is not an island. Gandelman cites Arcimboldi’s “anthropomorphic man/island” which appears both as a man’s head and as an island, but never at the same instant in our perceptual imagination. He seems to have implied that Donne’s claims about involvement “in mankind” must be juxtaposed against his loneliness as an artist. Man is part of a community which is to be associated with a continent rather than an island. Nevertheless, that continent is constantly being reduced, even if only a clod at a time. Donne urges us to stand together in the recognition that each of us will soon enough depart so that the funeral bell for one tolls for us all.

Renaissance commonplaces about the connections between the microcosm and the macrocosm take on greater relevance when read in the context of what Gandelman called “The Mediterranean as a Sea of Sin” in light of an anthropomorphic map by Opicinus de Canistris (1984, Fig. 1; 1991: 85). He explains: “One sees ‘the woman’, mulier, whose head and nose constitute the coastline of North Africa (present Morocco and the Cape of Tanger), thrusting her nose toward the ear of ‘the man’, vir, whose head is constituted

by Spain and whose armed hands correspond to the Italian peninsula and Greece. According to the inscriptions deciphered by [Georg] Salomon, what she says is: *venite commiscemini nobiscum*, ‘come, copulate with me!’ Opicinus represents the world as a gigantic and geographical copulation” (Gandelman, 1984: 245).

This kind of cosmic sexuality is an important context for Donne’s associations between sexual love and geography. It adds a significantly erotic element to the more traditional scholarship on Donne and maps. Aside from Shami’s summary discussion, there has been work done on Donne’s use of cordiform maps (Robert Sharp) and of T-in-O maps (Donald Anderson). To this we can now add the eroticism of the anthropomorphic map tradition.

Eroticism is a crucial element in Donne’s ludic perception of the correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm. A sexually charged cosmos in which the world is “a gigantic... copulation” is a poetic analogue to the context of spiritually focused erotic desire which electrifies the poems. The cosmos which is itself driven by sexual tension is a suitable place for Donne’s presentation of love. This is at the heart of Hemingway’s use of Donne’s meditation in his novel which celebrates the love of a couple for whom the earth move during love-making.² That is, the poetic intensity of the erotic connection between Hemingway’s microcosmic lovers is intensified by the perception that their union is somehow acknowledged by the macrocosm.

In addition to the prose of Meditation 17, Gandelman’s article cites a number of different Donne poems in terms of the connection between maps, geography and love. These texts communicate slightly different nuances of experience by means of the metaphor. The earliest of these is the famous “Elegie: Going to Bed” in which Donne’s speaker urges his mistress to undress. This elegy moves back and forth between playful sexual innuendo and an interest in the emotional and spiritual aspects of the speaker’s

1. Cf., for example, the following dialogue:

“Maria, I love thee and thou art so lovely and so wonderful and so beautiful and it does such things to me to be with thee that I feel as though I wanted to die when I am loving thee’.

‘Oh’, she said. ‘I die each time. Do you not die?’

‘No. Almost. But did thee feel the earth move?’

‘Yes. As I died. Put thy arm around me, please’.” (1968: 160)

love. While the geographical metaphors help to articulate intensity of feeling, the anthropomorphic map tradition serves to remind us of their sexual roots. The operative technique is another aspect of the “spontaneous reversals” to which Gandelman refers.

Near the opening, the elegy playfully presents the speaker’s sexual tension, first in terms of suggestively phallic warfare and immediately afterwards in language of cosmic sexuality:

The foe oft-times having the foe in sight,
Is tir’d with standing though he never fight.
Off with that girdle, like heavens Zone glittering,
But a far fairer world encompassing. (Donne 1968: 3-6)

The first couplet deals with male sexual desire as experienced through observing the woman (“in sight”) in terms of standing that is simultaneously military and phallic. The multiple meanings for “sight” and “standing” establish the ludic tone at once, but in the couplet that follows, the comparison of the woman’s girdle with the belt in the constellation Orion (“Heavens Zone”) leads to the conclusion that she is far more beautiful than the world of heaven and earth (“a far fairer world”). But the poetic technique here is more complicated than Wittgenstein’s “duck-rabbit” since the sexuality of the first couplet is never really absent from the second, despite the fact that the language emphasizes the aesthetic aspect of sight (“far fairer”) rather than the phallic response of the male viewer to his “foe.”

This implicit juxtaposition between earthly sexuality and heavenly beauty continues throughout the poem. The woman’s undressing stimulates responses that are first phallic but then aesthetic:

Off with that happy busk, which I envie,
That still can be, and still can stand so nigh.
Your gown going off, such beautious state reveals,
As when from flowry meads th’hills shadowe steales. (1968: 11-14)

The uncovering of the woman is like the illumination of a landscape in the early morning. The speaker’s response to his sexual excitement as he anticipates her undressing is conflated with the sun’s sudden revelation of the beauties of a colourful meadow. The shift in focus from microcosm to

macrocosm connects sexual desire to the emotional intensity generated by the universal appeal of the landscape.

On another level, her nakedness is a kind of truth that must be revealed or uncovered. The moment of undressing is associated with the way in which the light of the sun removes the shadows from the landscape. Although this aspect of truth is established playfully, the intensity of the feeling goes well beyond the phallicism of the first of these couplets. Once again, sexual desire takes on larger significance by comparisons between the lady and the implicitly anthropomorphic landscape.

The crowning geographical image of the elegy likewise occurs immediately after a playful version of sexual exploration. The tradition of the sexual Mediterranean is extended to the new world:

Licence my roaving hands, and let them go,
Behind, before, above, between, below.
O my America! my new-found-land,
My kingdome, safeliest when with one man man'd. (1968: 25-28)

Here the ludic sexuality is expressed by a list of prepositions, each of which becomes a sexual reference in the context of the “roaving hands.” The subsequent identification of the woman with “America” and “new-found-land” carries with it a quality of wonder not unlike that of “heavens Zone” and the “flowry meads.” Like those other geographic references, part of the point here is that the sexuality of the anthropomorphic map tradition makes it possible to have America and Newfoundland connote discovery that is spiritual and emotional on the one hand, but implicitly sexual on the other. Donne’s “Elegie” thus finds an analogue to the speaker’s erotic desire in what he perceives as a parallel or model for that desire in the geographic macrocosm.

Donne’s lyric “The Good-Morrow” likewise makes use of geographic imagery which aptly reflects the tradition of the anthropomorphic map, but here erotic tension gives way to the emotional intensity that grows out of sexual experience. The poem opens with a frank avowal of previous sexual encounters and their relevance to the speaker’s love:

I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I
Did, till we lov'd? were we not wean'd till then?
But suck'd on countrey pleasures, childishly?

The speaker regards all previous sexual experience as infantile. Whatever the actual physical activities in which he and his partner(s) engaged, they were akin to the world of the infant who is limited to what he or she can suck. The speaker suggests that there was something sleepily unconscious or dream-like about all this:

Or snorted we in the seven sleepers' den?
T'was so; But this, all pleasures fancies bee.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desir'd, and got, t'was but a dreame of thee.

Yes, he seems to be saying to his beloved, I've had my share of previous “relationships” but they were, at best, but a dream-like anticipation of you. Unlike the “Elegie,” the speaker here seems to be unconcerned with convincing his mistress to make love with him. Instead he is reflecting on what they have already done and the significance of similar acts (with other partners) for his present love.

The next stanza connects two separate metaphors in order to characterize the significance of their love. The sleepy, infantile love-making of the first stanza gives way first to a form of awakening, and then to the geographical model of the macrocosm:

And now good morrow to our waking soules,
Which watch not one another out of feare;
For love, all love of other sights controules,
And makes one little roome, an every where.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let Maps to others, worlds on worlds have showne,
Let us possesse one world, each hath one, and is one.

The bedroom is the site of the awakening but it is parallel to the cosmos of the anthropomorphic tradition. It is a universal “every where” and as such is superior to the world of maps and exploration. The point of the reference to the macrocosm is to deny it the seriousness of the “world” of love.

The final line of the second stanza points in the direction of the third in which the lovers become the two hemispheres of a world like that of the Mediterranean of Opicinus:

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appeares,
And true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest,
Where can we finde two better hemispheares
Without sharpe North, without declining West?
What ever dyes, was not mixt equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die.

The world as geographic copulation gives way to a more perfect set of hemispheres that complete each other the way the eyes of the lovers see so that each one's image is in the eye of the other. This perfect cosmos of love avoids the problems of macrocosm ("sharpe North" and "declining West"). Love has thus moved from infantile sexuality to spiritual awakening to a potential equality that points in the direction of immortality ("none can die"). The final line is, perhaps, also a reference to the tradition of courtly love in which sexual passion is to go on endlessly. That is, since "die" often connoted orgasm in seventeenth-century English, the final line of the poem may be suggesting that lovemaking without sexual closure makes the relationship immortal.

Gandelman's contribution to Donne studies is thus important yet generally unnoticed. This study has been concerned with the nature and significance of his work on the anthropomorphic map tradition and with an adjustment of his perspective on it. I have tried to subject the flashes of insight that characterize the best of Gandelman's work to a series of evaluations designed to transform the instants of bright illumination into a few principles of critical analysis. Most important, I would argue, is the irrelevance of Wittgenstein's "duck - rabbit" for understanding the poetic functioning of Donne's eroticism. As the imagination of the persona in the poems and the prose moves back and forth between sexuality and the spirit and between the microcosm and the macrocosm, the reader can never lose sight of either. The reversals implicit in the duck - rabbit conundrum make it impossible to perceive the two at the same time. If we see the rabbit, we cannot see the duck and vice versa. In Donne's poetic imagination, however, all the various facets of the materials of the verse and the prose somehow come together.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Donald K. Jr, (1972). “Donne’s ‘Hymne to God my God, in my sicknesse’ and the T-in-O Maps.” *Essays in the Renaissance in Honor of Allan H. Gilbert*. Ed. Philip J. Traci, Marilyn L. Williamson & Don C. Allen. In *South Atlantic Quarterly* 71, 465-72.
- Barkan, Leonard (1975). *Nature’s Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World*. New Haven: Yale UP.
- Burton, Robert (1927). *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith. New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1927.
- Donne, John (1968). *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*. Ed. John T. Shawcross. New York: New York UP.
- _____ (1967). *John Donne’s Sermons on the Psalms & Gospels with a Selection of Prayers and Meditations*. Ed. Evelyn M. Simpson. Berkeley: UC Press.
- Gandelman, Claude (1984). “The Poem as Map: John Donne and the ‘Anthropomorphic Landscape’ Tradition.” *Arcadia: Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* 19, 244-51.
- _____ (1991). *Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hemingway, Ernest (1943). *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. 1940; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner.
- Kawasaki, Toshihiko (1971). “Donne’s Microcosm.” *Seventeenth-Century Imagery: Essays on Uses of Figurative Language from Donne to Farquhar*. Ed. Earl Miner. Berkeley: UofC Press, 25-43.
- Norford, Don Parry (1977). “Microcosm and Macrocosm in Seventeenth-Century Literature.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 38, 409-28.
- Shami, Jeanne (1987). “John Donne: Geography as Metaphor.” *Geography and Literature: A Meeting of the Disciplines*. Ed. William E. Mallory & Paul Simpson Housley. Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 161-67.
- Sharp, Robert L (1954). “Donne’s ‘Good-Morrow’ and Cordiform Maps.” *Modern Language Notes* 69, 493-95.