Mapping the Premodern

Selected Proceedings
of the Newberry Library
Center for Renaissance Studies
26th Graduate Student Conference

Chicago, Illinois
January 25, 2008

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Introduction: Mapping the Premodern

by Karen Christianson

The Center for Renaissance Studies at the Newberry Library, organized as an international consortium of 47 universities, hosts an array of programs each year in medieval and early modern studies, from graduate courses, lectures, and early-music performances to seminar series, conferences, and symposia. One of our oldest continuing programs is our annual graduate student conference. This publication, Mapping the Premodern, reproduces the best papers presented at our twenty-sixth annual graduate student conference in January 2008, as determined by the student organizers and editors. Each year a select group of advanced graduate students reads abstracts, decides which submissions to include in the conference, and presides over conference sessions. For the last two years the organizers-turned-editors have then selected papers to include in our conference proceedings and worked with the authors to expand and revise their conference papers into publishable form. Mapping the Premodern, this year’s resulting publication, comprises six original contributions to our collective knowledge of the premodern era, researched and written by talented emerging scholars in a variety of disciplines. In their introductory remarks to each section, the organizers/editors have briefly discussed all the papers presented in their respective sessions at the conference, including those not offered here, to provide readers a comprehensive overview of the conference’s diverse permutations of mapping places, things, sexuality, and the sacred.

During the 2007-08 academic year, more than thirty cultural and scientific institutions throughout Chicago joined in a citywide celebration, the Festival of Maps, subtitled “Exploration, Discovery, and Mapping.” The Newberry Library’s collections include about half a million maps, including significant holdings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century works—Hernán Cortés’ 1524 map of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán, an Islamic mappa mundi dated about 1600, and more than seventy early modern editions of Ptolemy’s Geographica, among many others. Thus the Newberry became intensively involved in Festival of Maps activities. The Library co-organized and contributed numerous items on display to the centerpiece of the festival, the sweeping exhibit “Maps: Finding Our Place in the World,” held at the Field Museum and attracting about eighty-five thousand visitors during its twelve-week run in Chicago. In addition, the Newberry sponsored a lecture series and mounted two exhibitions at the Library itself. “Mapping Manifest Destiny: Chicago and the American West” examined the role of maps in envisioning the American West, documenting its terrain, fixing its boundaries, exploiting its natural resources, and developing its land. Of more immediate interest to Center for Renaissance Studies patrons, the Newberry’s second exhibit, “Ptolemy’s Geography and Renaissance Mapmakers,” displayed thirty-seven original historic maps and texts drawn from the Library’s internationally renowned collection of printed editions of Ptolemy’s work. The exhibit demonstrated how Renaissance scholars, artists, and craftsmen transformed the
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Geographica from an authoritative ancient treatise to a proto-modern atlas, and finally to a revered historical source. These exhibits and activities inspired Megan Moore, assistant director of the Center for Renaissance Studies, to select “Mapping the Premodern” as the theme for the 2008 Graduate Student Conference.

The conference’s call for papers invited submissions that addressed “broad interpretations of mapping the premodern through literature, geography, art, history, gender, disability, or cultural studies,” a call that drew papers from students in disciplines as varied as history, religious studies, art history, visual culture, music, philosophy, theology, medieval archaeology, and English, French, German, Spanish, and Latin American literatures. The submissions presented at the conference, and those published here, highlight the astonishing diversity of ideas that may profitably be viewed through the lens of mapping. Our contributors analyzed premodern chronicles, literature, and other texts that use geographically based concepts to inform discussions of everything from new discoveries—in science and law as well as new lands; to defining or expanding Old World boundaries; to controlling women’s bodies. The contributors and audience members who participated in the conference productively shared ideas across disciplines, theoretical frameworks, and viewpoints. This publication continues the conversation begun there by presenting the works of these young scholars to the larger scholarly community, in the hope that they will stimulate and influence further discussion and research—will, if I may, put these scholars “on the map” of academe.

Karen Christianson is interim assistant director of the Center for Renaissance Studies at the Newberry Library.
How can a writer describe a completely new, unknown land? The papers for the “Mapping Places” panel examined the premodern struggle to represent unfamiliar geographies and cultures and make the unknown intelligible. Although the papers addressed wildly divergent texts, they both showed that writers relied on conventional forms like the saint’s life or the *mappa mundi* to render exotic experiences comprehensible. The choice of form helps shape a reader’s perception that a land is hostile or friendly or that a people are human or monstrous.

Nicolas Hoel’s “Defining the North: Rimbert and the *Vita Anskarii*” examined the account of a ninth-century monk’s life and his missions to Scandinavia. Before the *Vita Anskarii*, the Danes and the Vikings appeared to the Franks to be inscrutable agents of destruction, and their homeland was rumored to be inhabited by monsters. Rimbert’s account of Anskar’s early missions to the North explains some aspects of Scandinavian social organization and gives names and descriptions to particular places in a previously unknown land. In addition, Rimbert locates the *cynocephali*, or dog-headed men, in the farthest north, effectively pushing back the limits of the monstrous world. Since this served both to humanize the Northmen and bring them within the borders of a Christian Europe, Rimbert’s *Vita Anskarii* served as a call for further missionary activity to the North.

In “The Circle and the Horseshoe: Premodern Space in the *Historias* of Bartolomé de las Casas and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo,” presented here, Katherine Thompson contrasts two descriptions of the New World written by sixteenth-century travelers. Las Casas, who protested the brutality of the Spanish conquest, fashioned his description of the island of Españoal after the form of the medieval *mappae mundi* in order to present the New World as a Garden of Eden, an “idealized space” that belongs to God’s creation. Oviedo, on the other hand, viewed the Amerindians as barbaric and so his description of the New World suggests not an earthly paradise but an “exploded or ruptured *mappa mundi*,” where the New World is figured as a horseshoe adjacent to Spain. Oviedo’s metaphors produce a threat to Spain that justifies its control of the New World. Thompson demonstrates that while these two writers held widely differing opinions about the New World, they use the same form to conceptualize it.

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The Circle and the Horseshoe:
Premodern Space in the Historias
of Bartolomé de Las Casas
and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo

by Katherine Thompson

To a much greater degree than scholars in most other disciplines, colonial Latinamericanists have long been inclined to recognize the cultural dimension of space, and to regard it as a social artifact rather than a purely objective physical entity, existing independently of human perception. Mexican historian Edmundo O’Gorman’s *La Invención de América* profoundly influenced an entire generation of scholars, to the extent that the idea that American space was “invented” rather than “discovered” has become accepted almost a given.¹ To all but the small minority of Europeans who actually traveled to the New World, America was a world which existed in texts and maps, rather than through direct experience. Those who did travel to the Americas faced the challenge of describing the new territory to an audience completely unfamiliar with it, a challenge they met by producing not only maps but a series of colorful and at times fanciful texts replete with images borrowed from classical and biblical sources, as well as comparisons with familiar scenes in Europe and Asia. Moreover, the new hemisphere, along with its flora, fauna, and human inhabitants, had somehow to be incorporated into existing notions of the cosmos. American space had thus to be conceived—or invented—in terms of the spatial schema of the early sixteenth century. The situation was further complicated because European notions of space were already in flux during that period, as the rediscovery of classical texts prompted a new interest in empirical study of the natural world, and Ptolemy’s gridded mapping system revolutionized navigation. Meanwhile, medieval notions persisted alongside the new concepts, offering authors a range of spatial concepts to draw upon in their efforts to portray the new hemisphere. Opinions as to the nature of the New World and its inhabitants also varied widely, and authors deployed divergent spatial tropes and discourses in order to construct competing visions of American space.

A number of approaches may be brought to bear on the study of Colonial-era representations of American space. Henri Lefebvre’s influential work, *The Production of Space*, has inspired studies examining space as a product of social practice, focusing in particular on the ascendance of abstract, mathematically measurable space and its relationship to the rise of capitalism and modernity in the

West. Building on this approach, scholars such as Walter Mignolo have emphasized the advent of gridded, Ptolemaic space not only in the voyages of exploration, but in the mindset through which Europeans justified their domination of the New World. But while Ptolemaic mapping undoubtedly played an important role in the Western imperialist project, it was far from a hegemonic concept during the period of discoveries and conquests. As Ricardo Padrón has pointed out, the new forms of mapping were limited to a rather narrow group of professional cosmographers, while medieval forms of spatial representation—including topographical itinerary maps, portolan navigational charts, celestial maps, and religiously focused mappae mundi—still dominated in the culture at large. In addition, since premodern spatial concepts did not separate abstract, empty space from the things which occupied it, spatial discourse in colonial texts is at times inseparable from landscape description.

All of the above-mentioned themes figure, to varying degrees, in Bartolomé de Las Casas’ Apologética Historia Sumaria and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo’s Historia General y Natural de las Indias. Encompassing both the early history of the Spanish presence in the Americas and the geography, ethnography, and natural history of the New World, these two massive texts uniquely suit comparative study. Both were written during roughly the same period—approximately 1514 to 1550 for Oviedo and 1526 to the 1550s for Las Casas—by men who had spent many years in the New World and based their authority on their status as eyewitnesses. They knew and intensely disliked each other personally, and held opposing views as to the proper role of Spain vis-à-vis her new

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5 For a discussion of the relation between landscape and Lefebvre’s production of space, see the preface to the second edition of W. J. T. Mitchell, Landscape and Power, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
6 The chronology of these works is rather complicated and open to debate, since all were written and revised over an extended period of time, and all but the first nineteen books of Oviedo’s Historia remained unpublished during the authors’ lifetimes. It is likely that Oviedo began to compile data for his work shortly after his arrival in America in 1514; Antonello Gerbi, Nature in the New World: From Christopher Columbus to Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, trans. Jeremy Moyle (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1985), 213. A brief natural history, the Sumario, was published in Toledo in 1526 and the first part of Historia General y Natural was published for the first time in 1535 and again, with significant revisions, in 1547. The second part (unpublished) of the Historia seems to have been written between 1541 and 1548 and the third part (also unpublished) was dated 1549 but probably finished several years later; Gerbi, 214-15. Las Casas’ Apologética was originally part of his Historia de las Indias; neither work was published during the author’s lifetime, although he used many of the arguments set forth in the Apologética in his historic debate with Juan Gines de Sepúlveda in 1551. Las Casas began to write his Historia in 1527 but could devote a significant amount of time to the project only after 1547, when he returned to live in Spain. It is not known when he finished writing, but Hanke cites internal evidence in the text in order to establish dates for various chapters, the most recent (165 and 167 of book III) in 1561, shortly before the author’s death in 1566; Lewis Hanke, Bartolomé de Las Casas, Historian: An Essay in Spanish Historiography (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1952), 30. It is also uncertain when Las Casas wrote the Apologética. He appears to have worked on it simultaneously with the Historia. At the moment when he decided to make the Apologética a separate work, Las Casas says, the majority of its content was already written (Historia lib. I cap. 67) and according to Hanke he probably had begun writing it as early as 1527; Lewis Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949), 67. But it was not until some time after the debate with Sepúlveda in 1551 that Las Casas completed the Apologética and revised the Historia, D. L. Brading, The First Americas: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 88. The bulk of the Apologética was apparently written between 1556 and 1559; José Rabasa, Inventing America: Spanish Historiography and the Formation of Eurocentrism (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 267.
colonies. Acutely aware of each others’ work, each wrote at least to some degree to counter the writing of the other. Each author drew upon a rich assortment of spatial traditions to produce a vivid and symbolically meaningful space which differed radically from that created by the other. Las Casas constructs an Edenic space centered on a paradisal mountain valley. It is perfect, closed, circular, and integrated harmoniously into sixteenth-century European cosmology, a space amenable to Christian conversion but not to violent conquest. Oviedo’s space, by contrast, has an open, unstable form, which suggests both the difficulty of incorporating the New World into established views and its accessibility to European domination. Padrón has argued convincingly for the importance of the spatial concept inherent in itinerary maps in both of these spatial constructs. Unlike Ptolemaic maps with their isotropic space, precise coordinates and mathematically determined distances, itinerary maps plotted a series of routes between known places; the space in between was simply empty and irrelevant, and not drawn to scale. This was “geography organized as a journey, a linear route through space”; rather than giving the reader “an abstract, idealized, and static point of view, the itinerary addresses a reader who is embodied, earthbound, and dynamic.” The importance of Padrón’s insight in arguing for the presence of this premodern spatiality in colonial texts cannot be overstated, but in what follows I will argue that other premodern forms—specifically mappae mundi as well as artistic and literary landscape tropes traceable to medieval and classical sources—play an equally significant role, both in Las Casas’ Apologética and in Oviedo’s Historia General y Natural.

Las Casas, a Dominican friar who dedicated his life to denouncing the brutality of the Spanish conquistadors, wrote to provide an intellectual foundation for his defense of the Amerindians. As a Dominican, his background lay in natural philosophy, a form of Christianized Aristotelian thought prevalent in the universities of the late Middle Ages and still influential during the Renaissance. The Dominican version of natural philosophy placed particular emphasis on the essential goodness of the natural world, on the premise that the study of nature could lead to a deeper understanding of God. Dominican scholars were well-versed in the art of dialectical argument based on a logical (and, by modern standards, somewhat mechanical) progression of cause and effect. By the middle of the sixteenth century, the debate in Spain as to the nature of indigenous Americans had become acute, with Juan Gines de Sepulveda and other humanist scholars citing Aristotle to back their contention that Amerindians were natural slaves. The Apologética is an extended polemic intended to make an airtight case against such claims, and Las Casas used many of the arguments made in it during his influential 1551 debate with Sepulveda. Originally part of Las Casas’ Historia de las Indias, a work which deals primarily with historic events, the Apologética grew in scope to the point that Las Casas separated it into an independent work. Its later chapters delve into ethnography and demonstrate the Indians’ status as civilized peoples through their ability to form governments, but the early chapters that concern us here. There, through a carefully constructed scheme of environmental determinism, Las Casas attempts to prove that the mild climate and Edenic landscape of the New World produce well-formed bodies which in turn favorably affect the development of mind and soul. Creation of an idealized space is thus essential to Las Casas’ overall argument.

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7 Padrón, 59.
8 Ibid., 60; 61.
The description of the island of Hispaniola forms the central image around which the rest of the work is structured. The landscape of the island is paradigmatic, standing for the landscape of the New World in general. As the only extended landscape description in either the *Apológetica* or the *Historia de las Indias*, shorter passages describing other regions frequently refer back to it. Organized in a series of three “vueltas,” or circuits around the island, the description culminated in the beautiful Vega Real (Royal Meadow) in the center. Padrón interprets the vueltas in terms of an itinerary map recording Las Casas’ personal experience of the island and thus establishing his credibility as “the long-suffering traveler whose sufferings beg for our trust.”

José Rabasa offers another interpretation, noting that Las Casas repeatedly points to the sites of former Spanish settlements abandoned after the decimation of the indigenous population; the vueltas thus “incorporate a narrative of destruction into the geographic description.” While both of these interpretations remain valid, they overlook what is perhaps the most striking feature of the vueltas. While Las Casas does at times mention negative aspects of the landscape, the overwhelming impression is one of almost unbelievable beauty. Throughout the series of circuits, Las Casas repeatedly emphasizes the island’s perfection in a rising crescendo of lavish praise. Many of the descriptions liken Hispaniola to Spain, only better: a small island off the coast is “like the Grand Canary island but much fresher and more fertile than that and more cheerful,” the leaves of a food crop “seem something like the little palms that there are in Andalucía, except that they are narrower and smoother and more delicate.”

Other passages emphasize the incredible fertility of the island; one province, for example, is so fertile that the yucca roots which in other parts of the island reach the thickness of an arm or a leg become so huge that even when they are cut in half, they are so heavy that the Indians must carry them on their backs, and “if we were to put there a seed of one of our carrots, they would be as thick as the waist of a man.” Meanwhile, the fireflies of another province “are so big that with one live one in one’s hand, and better if there are two, one can pray matins reading from a breviary with small print, and I have prayed them, as I believe, as with two little candles.”

Las Casas makes repeated use of hyperbole and strings together chains of superlatives; one valley is so “full of joy, beauty, fertility, and amenity that words do not occur to me with to praise and enlarge the dignity of it all,” while the entire province is “the most temperate and the most amenable.” One of Las Casas’ favorite techniques is to extol the virtues of one province and then begin the description of the next by saying it is even more beautiful than the last. In the province of Cubao, for example, “the rivers and streams are infinite, without even mentioning those that are from the hills or mountains, which fall and make very fertile banks for the fields of the Indians,” but the province of Ciguayos is “more capacious and fertile and graceful than the preceding one of

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9 Ibid., 177.
10 Rabasa, 277.
11 “como la isla de Gran Canaria, pero harta más fresca y fértil que aquella y más feliz”; “parecen algo como los palmitos de los que hay en el Andalucía, puesto que son más angostas y más lisas y delicadas,” Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Apológetica Historia Sumaria.* [1551-], ed. Edmund O’Gorman (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México e Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1967), I:15 and I:25. Here and throughout, all translations are my own.
12 “si pusiesemos allí una simiente de nuestras zanahorias serían tan gruesas como por la cinta es un hombre,” Ibid., I:23
13 “son tan grandes que con uno vivo en la mano, y mejor si son dos, se pueden rezar matines en un breviario de letra menuda, y yo los he rezado, según creo, como con dos candelitas,” Ibid., I:16
14 “lleno de alegría, hermosura, fertilidad y amenidad, que no me ocurren palabras con que encarecer y engrandecer la dignidad de todo ello”; “temperatísima y amenísima,” Ibid., I:13.
Cubao.” The vueltas thus serve both to de-exoticize the island through favorable comparisons with Spain, and to build toward the climactic image of the Vega Real. Since the beauty of the provinces toured through the vueltas is already superlative, the beauty of the Vega becomes super-superlative. The description of the Vega is one of the most frequently quoted passages of the Apologética, but it bears repeating:

It is all painted with herbs, the most beautiful one can describe, and fragrant, very different from those of Spain. Every league or two, it is painted with the most pleasant streams which cross it, each one of them bearing in rows along both of its banks its band or eyebrow or strip of trees, always green, as well-placed and ordered as if they had been placed by hand. . . . and as this Vega and all the island are always like the fields and trees of Spain in the months of April and May, and the freshness of the continuous breezes, the sound of the rivers and streams so rapid and flowing, the clarity of the sweetest waters, with the greenness of the herbs and trees, who would not consider it a joy, a pleasure, and a consolation and cause for rejoicing for whoever sees it, inestimable and incomparable?

Clearly, the Vega Real is more perfect than any place actually in existence; it is portrayed as real, but at the same time somehow beyond reality. It is worth recalling here that Las Casas was the editor of Columbus’s letters, in which the latter suggests that the earthly paradise may be located on the South American mainland. Las Casas never makes such a claim for the Vega, but his description consists of nothing less than a series of tropes normally associated with the earthly paradise as it was construed in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: the sweet smells, the sound of the babbling brooks of sweet water, the trees planted as if in a garden, the cool breezes, and the eternal springtime are all characteristics of the earthly paradise. In their respective histories of the trope of the earthly paradise, Jean Delmeau and A. Bartlett Giamatti both explain that the garden image arose from a combination of the biblical image of paradise, the Garden of Eden, and the classical locus amoenus. Giamatti adds the etymology of the word paradise, which in Old Persian originally referred to a royal park or enclosure and in Hebrew referred to “verdant enclosures.” The notion of enclosure finds an echo in Las Casas’ description of the Vega circled by the three successive vueltas, as well as in the mountains surrounding the meadow. Moreover, the earthly paradise was frequently represented as being atop a high mountain; while the Vega lies not at the very summit, it is a high valley surrounded by peaks, and the vueltas produce a sense of ascent.

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15 “son infinitos los ríos y arroyos, sin los que están dichos de las dos sierras o cordilleras, que caen y hacen riberas muy fértiles . . . para las labranzas de los indios”; “más capaz y fertile y graciosa que la precedente de Cubao,” Ibid., I:23.

16 “Está toda pintada de yerba, la más hermosa que puede decirse, y odorífera, muy diferente de la de España. Pintanla de legua a legua, o de dos a dos leguas, arroyos graciosísimos que la atraviesan, cada uno de los cuales lleva por las rengleras de sus ambas a dos riberas su lista o ceja o raya de árboles siempre verdes, tan bien puestos y ordenados como si fueran puestos a mano. . . . Y como siempre está esta Vega y toda la isla como están los campos y árboles de España por el mes de abril y mayo, y la frescura de los continuos aires, el sonido de los ríos y arroyos tan rápidos y corrientes, la claridad de las dulcísimas aguas, con la verdeur de las yerbas y árboles. ¿quién no considerará ser el alegria, gozo y consuelo y regocijo del que lo viere, inestimable y no comparable?” Ibid., I:49.


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Vega from the vantage point of the summit of the island's highest mountain, gazing down upon the lush meadow. The idea of the earthly paradise as a perfect and lofty garden surrounded by circles of somewhat lesser perfection was well-established before Las Casas' time, finding perhaps its most famous expression in Dante's Purgatorio. Thus, while Las Casas stops short of literally identifying the Vega as the earthly paradise, sixteenth-century readers would easily have made the connection.

The earthly paradise also served as the focal point in many medieval mappae mundi. Rather than serving as guides for navigation or realistic representations of places, mappae mundi were essentially theological maps of both space and time, which inscribed the redemptive history narrated in the Bible in spatial terms and mapped biblical sites alongside medieval ones. The maps were generally circular in form, with east at the top and Asia comprising the upper half of the map, while Europe and Africa occupied the lower half. Paradise was depicted as a circle or rectangle at the top (easternmost) edge of the map, the beginning of both time and space. As Alessandro Scafi puts it, "as an event/place, paradise was a place simultaneously in the past and in the present, believed to exist still, somewhere on earth in a virtual present." Paradise was the central trope which gave form and meaning to the space depicted by the map, and initiated the sacred history inscribed in it. In the same way, Las Casas' Vega Real acts as the symbolic foundation of Apologética as a whole, imbuing with meaning the entire chain of causality through which Las Casas constructs his defense of the Indians.

Two other sections of the Apologética also point to the paradisal nature of the Vega. First, Las Casas argues that the New World is, in fact, part of Asia—the part of the world in which the earthly paradise was most frequently located on mappae mundi. Second, Las Casas incorporates all of the Americas into one large climate zone. As Padrón points out, this move serves to generalize the idealized description of Hispaniola throughout the New World. But it also has relevance to the island's association with the earthly paradise. Medieval climate zone maps, which divided the world into frigid, temperate, and torrid zones, rarely showed the eternally temperate earthly paradise, because it fit neither within the temperate zones characterized by changing seasons, nor within the overly hot torrid zone. By effectively erasing climatic zones in the western hemisphere, Las Casas incorporates all of the Americas into a single paradise-like zone of eternal springtime.

Overall, then, Las Casas' Apologética contains strong traces of the medieval spatiality of the mappae mundi and, most importantly, the earthly paradise. While allusions to the earthly paradise are not literal, their presence lends to the text a sense of unity and order and serves to incorporate the New World harmoniously into Old World spatial concepts. The spatiality of the mappae mundi may be glimpsed in Oviedo’s Historia as well, but in a radically different form. Here, the old order is fragmented and the unified whole replaced by a sometimes chaotic multiplicity. Oviedo, the official court historian of the New World, had also served as inspector of mines and spent time in Italy,

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19 Ibid., Ch. 5.
20 Ibid., 125.
21 Las Casas, I:109; I:105.
22 Padrón, 179-80.
23 Scafi, 165.
where he had been influenced by Italian humanism. He was fascinated by the natural world, and the extensive catalogues of flora and fauna included in the Historia served as inspiration to early natural historians in various European countries. At the same time, however, his thinking retained a medieval cast, and prior to beginning the Historia he had published a chivalric romance. He differed strongly with Las Casas in his assessment of the Amerindians, whom he often portrayed as barbaric, although he condemned the Spaniards’ brutality against them. Las Casas’ nemesis Sepúlveda cited the ethnographic sections of the Historia in the 1551 debate on the nature of the Indians, further cementing the antipathy that already existed between the Las Casas and Oviedo.

Unlike the Apologética, Oviedo’s Historia does not possess a unifying spatial theme. It does, however, include a repeated image which sheds light on the spatial framework underlying the text. In the first chapter of the first of fifty books that constitute the Historia, Oviedo speculates that the New World is as large as Europe, Africa, and Asia combined, explaining that this is possible because of its arched shape, “similar to a hunter’s lure or a horseshoe.” Later, in the proemio to book XVI, he again mentions the hunter’s lure and also compares the figure to an open mouth in profile. This open, curved shape reflects the coastline of the Americas as represented on maps of the time, where the coastline of North America was generally represented as bending toward the east. The shape itself is thus not Oviedo’s invention, but the metaphors he uses to describe it, and the significance he gives to it by repeating it in different sections of the Historia, indicate that he attributes to the shape a symbolic importance which goes beyond mere description. Padrón notes that the curving form, with its open end facing Europe, converts the American coastline into “the western littoral of a nearly enclosed Spanish mare nostrum.” Thus Oviedo links the New World to the Old in a way that naturalizes Spain’s claim to the Americas, a claim that is further legitimated by Oviedo’s identification of the Caribbean islands with the Hesperides, mythical islands supposed to have been owned by the ancient kings of Iberia.

But Oviedo’s similes beg further interpretation. The Spanish noun señuelo can be used metaphorically to mean anything that lures by way of deceit, and the image of the open, hungry mouth carries a slightly sinister connotation as well. If Oviedo on the one hand tries to incorporate the Americas into the Iberian sphere, he also suggests that there is something in the New World which threatens to subvert that very attempt at unity. A final example of the horseshoe form reinforces its destabilizing aspect. Oviedo alludes to the shape yet again in the context of his narrative of Columbus’ voyages, where he gives a detailed description of Columbus’ coat of arms. In the lower right quarter, he says, is a figure showing the ocean, with almost the entire circumference occupied by the South American mainland, “leaving the superior, upper part open in such a way that the points of this large land are shown to occupy the southern and northern parts,” while the western part at the bottom is filled by land and the space between the points with islands, “in such a way that

25 Padrón, 147.
26 Fernández de Oviedo, I: proemio
they can signify these Indies.”

Although the majority of Renaissance maps were oriented like modern ones, with north at the top, this one is oriented like a *mappa mundi*, with east in the uppermost position. But instead of the closed circular form of a *mappa mundi*, the figure has a horseshoe shape, and at the top, where paradise might be found on a *mappa mundi*, lies only open space. The figure thus suggests a sort of exploded or ruptured *mappa mundi*, with a hole where meaning-generating earthly paradise should be.

This sense of openness and decenteredness pervades all of Oviedo’s *Historia*. Unlike Las Casas, Oviedo did not separate historical narrative from geographical description, and the two often appear to fight for primacy as the organizing axis of the work. While different chapters deal with flora, fauna, foods, medicinal plants, and other biological and geographical themes, descriptions of various elements of the natural world often irrupt unexpectedly in the context of a historical discourse. Moreover, Oviedo rarely resists showing off his erudition by inserting references to classical or other sources wherever possible. Narrative branches from narrative, and the offshoots sometimes give rise to new narratives of their own. In his analysis of the geographical descriptions in the second and third parts of the *Historia*, Padrón notes that this meandering form reflects the linear, premodern geography of a plane chart. Oviedo’s narrative moves along the coastline, with historical narratives branching from the various points along the way. The movement from place to place along the coast thus serves as the underlying principle which strings the various narratives together. To this, I would add that the conflation of temporal and spatial organization harks back to the merger of time and space in the *mappae mundi*. But instead of following an orderly sequence of events informed by a biblical notion of redemptive history, Oviedo’s space/time seems to branch and bifurcate freely, with no sense of progression toward some final goal.

To a postmodern reader, such a structure calls to mind the notion of the rhizomaceous text, as formulated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. A rhizome, an essentially open form, branches and sprouts from the nodes, much like Oviedo’s narrative. It contrasts with a tap root, which grows straight and implies a logical progression. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, “Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from a tree root, which plots a point, fixes an order.” Moreover, “the tree imposes the verb ‘to be,’ but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, ‘and . . . and . . . and . . . ’. This conjunction carries enough force to uproot the verb ‘to be.’” For Deleuze and Guattari the rhizome’s subversiveness liberates, but for Oviedo it threatens. Interestingly, he narrates an anecdote which includes his own rhizomaceous metaphor, in the context of a conversation between Columbus and Queen Isabella on the failure of trees in the Caribbean to produce tap roots. Columbus complains that in the Caribbean islands, the trees do not sink their roots deep into the soil, but instead their roots “extend themselves and multiply, and spread so many roots, or more, than they have branches.” After hearing Columbus’ description,
Queen Isabella remarks that “In that land, where the trees don’t root themselves, men must have little truth and less constancy.” For Oviedo, the rhizome is associated with a duplicitousness inherent in the very soil of the New World. He finds himself writing in the style of a rhizome not because he chooses to but because the diversity and chaos of his subject matter impose a lack of order upon him. The incompleteness and openness implied by the rhizome is analogous to that suggested by the horseshoe. Both images imply that Spanish domination is justified and needed to complete the fragmented circle and bring the anarchic rhizome/horseshoe under control. But at the same time these images reflect an underlying fear that the reality of New World nature may be incompatible with Old World geographical and cosmographical notions, potentially undermining them by exposing them for the constructs they are.

The space of Oviedo’s Historia thus provides a stark contrast to the ordered space of Las Casas’ Apologética. Yet the two spatial constructs share a common grounding in premodern mapping traditions. Although both authors at times provide Ptolemaic coordinates for the places they describe, in neither case does a gridded, abstract notion of space—implicated by Mignolo and others in Europe’s imperial mentality—serve as a basis for spatial representation. And in both cases the symbolic aspects of premodern space, expressed most explicitly in medieval mappae mundi, figure more prominently than Padrón acknowledges. Nonetheless, despite their commonalities, the two texts deploy premodern spatial concepts in very different ways to project radically different ideological notions of the New World and Spain’s role in it. Rooted at least in part in medieval mappae mundi, Las Casas’ paradise-centered space serves as the basis for his defense of the Amerindians. Given our postmodern fascination with flux and flow, this closed, circular space seems rather static. Moreover, there is something hierarchical in the series of vueltas and the culminating Vega. Yet Las Casas uses precisely the closed, totalizing quality of the image to demonstrate the perfection and wholeness of America, and the fundamental injustice of the conquest and enslavement of the Indians. Oviedo, on the other hand, constructs images which in a postmodern context might suggest a liberating open-endedness. The horseshoe shape, with its empty space where paradise might be found on a mappa mundi, challenges the rigid stability of Las Casas’ encircled paradise. And with his rhizomaceous narrative that traces the coastline while branching and digressing freely, Oviedo creates an open, fluid space that constantly breaks and reconfigures linear progression through space and time, a characteristic that appeals to postmodern sensibilities. From a sixteenth-century perspective, however, this subversive quality of the rhizome, portrayed by Deleuze and Guattari in a positive light, would have been perceived as dangerously destabilizing. For Oviedo, the openness of the horseshoe and the anarchic quality of the rhizome signaled a need for control, serving as an invitation to and justification for conquest.

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32 “En esa tierra, donde los árboles no se arraigan, poca verdad y menos constancia habrá en los hombres,” Ibid.


Mapping Things

Introduction

By Robert Kilpatrick

The panel titled “Mapping Things” brought together papers that investigated early modern attempts from very different domains—medicine and anatomy, literature and law—to situate familiar “things” (the dead body in the Libro de la anatomía del hombre, natural bodies such as the brook in Hamlet) within a network of competing and overlapping disciplines. The essays are thus profoundly interdisciplinary, not just in their twenty-first century methodologies, but also in what they reveal about the intermingling of fields of inquiry in the early modern era. They also suggest that the status of “things” was not stable in early modern Europe, but rather constantly shifting in the context of efforts to position them on the disciplinary map.

Justin Kolb of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, in “The Devil is an Ass,” drew on the “thing theory” of Latour, Appadurai, and others to argue that Ben Jonson's play of the same name attempts with limited success to use mimesis to map and control the twisted lines of agency and authority in a city and play audience in which people and things circulate, recombine, and mediate for each other in productive ways. In her essay “The Dissector behind the Anatomist: Medical Practices in Renaissance Spain under the Light of Italian Humanism,” Silvia Arroyo, whose paper is presented here, examines the attempt by Bernardino Montaña de Monserrate in his Libro de la anatomía del hombre to reassert the primacy of written anatomy in the context of the emergence of dissection as a pedagogical tool and medical practice in early modern Europe. Through a careful analysis of the work’s structure, language, and apparatus of illustrations, Arroyo demonstrates Montaña’s profound ambivalence toward a practice whose usefulness he cannot fully deny, yet whose predominance in the field of anatomy he does not wish to sanction. Ultimately, argues Arroyo, Montaña’s endeavor to assert the preeminence of book-based anatomy over dissection and to draw a sharp distinction between the two disciplines is only partially successful, for the anatomist must appropriate the very language of dissection in order to displace it as a practice. Dissection thus reasserts itself by infiltrating the language of its detractor. Caryn O'Connell, in “A Legal Standing for What? Or Mapping a Brook in Hamlet,” also included in this collection, posits that the literary imagining of natural bodies, read in the context of law, might cause us to confer a valid legal status on them. O'Connell's provocative suggestion is grounded, not just in the analysis of Hamlet, but also in a survey of theorists of natural and tort law from antiquity through early modern Europe. This dual approach allows her to highlight areas of overlap between the disciplines of literature and law, and to explore the implications of their treatment of natural bodies. Using an analysis of the literary
device of personification in a key scene of *Hamlet* as a case study, she carries the implications of that device to its logical limits, suggesting that the “absurdity” of natural bodies acting on their own may have very real effects on how they are perceived by the law, and even by makers of ecological policy. O’Connell argues that the murderous brook in Shakespeare’s tragedy, by forcing us to see the natural body as an actor, is indicative of literature’s power to change the way we view similar natural bodies in the non-literary realm.

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Bernardino Montaña de Monserrate’s *Libro de la anatomía del hombre*, first published in 1551, is an anatomical manual written in the vernacular and addressed to surgeons and folk physicians with no academic training. Montaña’s project aims to adapt and present authoritative anatomical knowledge to a group of practitioners engaged in medical praxis, with scarce opportunities to witness an anatomical demonstration during their career. The *Libro de la anatomía*, then, becomes a locus for the discussion and confrontation of theory and practice in a controversial moment of the history of anatomy, when an abject routine, necropsy, was becoming indispensable in the anatomy lessons of European universities. As a mediator between academic textual knowledge and folk practitioners with no knowledge of Latin, the *Libro de la anatomía* displays a very characteristic undecidability regarding humanist anatomy when facing the new position of dissection as an epistemological and didactic tool rivaling the written word. In Montaña’s manual, a negotiation constantly occurs that rarefies discourse and manifests the anxiety derived from the attempt to literally map the body by penetrating its cavities through literal or symbolic dismemberment. Dissection and anatomical description—body experience and text—tensely coexist, negotiating their functions and responsibilities in the endeavour of making the body’s interior transparent to sight.

Montaña’s book opens with a dedication to the Marqués de Mondéjar, in which anatomy is defined as “the alphabet that those who aspire to become doctors should start learning” (fol. i verso). In the introduction, Montaña gives a more detailed definition of the term as “perfect division . . . by which those parts that without this doctrine were confused and obscured and not able to be understood, now come to be clearly understood.”¹ After this definition, Montaña makes a clear distinction between two forms by which this knowledge of the body as a conjunction of parts emerges, pointing to two interrelated practices: anatomy by experience (dissection) and anatomy by writing and word (anatomy). At the same time, Montaña recognizes their limitations: on the one hand, he praises dissection as the best way to understand the structure of the limbs, humoral complexion, and relationship between the organs, but he admits the difficulty of this practice and its need for an expert surgeon. On the other hand, he recognizes the supplemental nature of the textual

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¹ “Llamase esta doctrina Anothomia, que quiere dezir division perfecta . . . [por la cual] las partes del cuerpo humano que sin la doctrina estan confusas y escuras y no se entienden, se dan a entender claramente.” Bernardino Montaña de Monserrate, *Libro de la anatomía del hombre* (Valencia: Librerías París-Valencia, 1998), fol. ii verso. All quotations are my translations.
anatomy but shows that its didactic advantages embody the most convenient form of solidifying knowledge gained by dissection and preserving it for memory. Montaña’s last statements in the Prohemio register a tension between dissection and anatomization, two practices that seem to be in competition to establish their authority as didactic tools:

There is another way to teach this science [anatomy], that is to say, by writing or word, that is, as a historia that, although providing some knowledge of it [the body’s anatomy], not as perfect as it is required, constitutes a precondition to easily understand what it is seen by experience, and without this historia, experience would be understood with difficulty: and although experience would be understood, it would not be possible to keep it in memory.²

Dissection provides a more perfect understanding of the body, but anatomy preserves knowledge and prepares students for the direct experience. Anatomy, then, precedes any attempt to confront the open body. The title page of Mondino de’ Luzzi’s Anatomia, 1493 (Figure 1), an anatomical manual devised to accompany a public dissection, dramatizes this same friction. As Luke Wilson points out, this illustration depicts the “epistemological tension” between direct experience and textual knowledge: with a book in his hands, the anatomist presides over the dissection, and the surgeon-dissector gazes at the book while he penetrates the corpse. This circuit of attention confirms the authority of the anatomist and written knowledge over the surgeon-dissector and the cadaver.³

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² The Spanish term historia means both “history” and “narrative, short story”; “Ay otra manera de enseñar esta sciencia, es a saber, por escritura o palabra, que es como manera de Historia la qual aunque da algun conocimiento della, pero no tan perfecto como se requiere es una previa disposición para entenderla fácilmente quando se vee por experiencia, y sin ella aunque se viese la experiencia con dificultad se podría entender; y aunque se entendiese no se podría bien tener en la memoria,” Ibid., fol. iii recto.

The epistemological tension described by Wilson becomes more problematic for Montaña, writing after the publication of Andreas Vesalius’s *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543), a revolutionary work, according to Andrea Carlino, whose greatest merit lay in the foregrounding of dissection as a research method for both teaching anatomy and verifying the anatomical knowledge passed down from older writings. Before Vesalius’s *Fabrica* and apart from the pioneering empirical methods of Alessandro Benedetti, Jacopo Berengario da Carpi, and Niccolò Massa in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, dissection had not been systematically carried out as a research method since the times of Aristotle, then Galen, and later since the Ptolemaic Alexandrian school cultivated human dissection in the third century. During the Middle Ages dissection had rarely been carried out, and when it had been practiced it was intended to serve as mere illustration of anatomical explanations bequeathed by authorities of the written knowledge in an educational atmosphere. Carlino specifies some of the reasons why dissection was abandoned or inhibited as a research and didactic method for almost a millennium: on the one hand, the anatomists who practiced dissection, Rationalists, had been traditionally described as butchers, killers, or brigands, by Empiric and Methodist physicians, as cited in Celsus’s *De medicina* and Tertullian’s *De anima*. Dissectors were believed to cruelly exercise superfluous violence on a body that structurally changed after death and manipulation, and the resulting knowledge was not necessary for healing. On the other hand, Augustinian theories, as expressed in *De civitate Dei* and *De anima et eius origine*, laterally promoted the inhibition of dissection by discussing the limits of knowledge and human haughtiness in trying to access the secrets of God’s creation that, hidden to human eye, were designed to remain inscrutable. During the Middle Ages a cultural and moral prohibition to opening a deceased body, considered inviolable, endured, as did the belief that blood and the dead contaminated. Carlino pays special attention to the adjective *lanius* (butcher), which persisted long after Tertullian’s invectives, commenting:

The profession was considered by the Romans to be among the lowest and most sordid, as is clear in Cicero and Livy. Its essential tasks, the slicing up of the animal’s body, evisceration, the contact with flesh and blood, made the person practicing the trade loathsome, so that his activity aroused feelings of defilement and foulness. . . . To define an anatomist as *lanius* (butcher) and the practice of dissection as *laniola* [butchery] emphasized the analogy. But it also meant implicitly accusing the anatomist of treating the human body like that of a beast, adding to the indignity of the practice of human dissection. On the other hand, the act of *laniare* was not the butcher’s alone (and by analogy the anatomist’s), but also pertained to wild animals. It followed from this that the designation *lanius* carried with it a connotation of bestiality, adding to the sordidness of the profession and consequently of anatomical practice.

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Not until the fourteenth century, with Mondino de’ Luzzi’s *Anatomia Mundini*, was dissection, and anatomy with it, reborn in the university medical community of Bologna and from there introduced to universities all over Europe.⁸

By the time Montaña was writing his anatomy in Spain, human dissection was an institutionalized and regulated practice in European universities—more than ever at that moment, under the trend of the Vesalian school—but its alleged abjection endured as it came to be associated with judicial punishment. The bodies of the executed were frequently donated to universities for public anatomical demonstrations, a fact that, according to Jonathan Sawday, stimulated the identification of the anatomist with the executioner.⁹ Furthermore, Sawday poses the idea that the ritualism and theatricality of public anatomizations at university anatomy theaters were strategies to distance institutionalized dissection from the infamy culturally attached to the executioner by inscribing the shameful corpse of the condemned into a spectacle on the complexities of God’s creation:

In asserting, as forcefully as possible, the dignity of a body which, perhaps moments before, had been an object of penal display, the anatomist also asserted his own dignity and the dignity of his science. . . . It was as if the dissector and the dissected entered a form of transaction in which dignity could be mutually negotiated between them.¹⁰

Contingent to dissection as it was, anatomy had to construct its legitimacy on the basis of an abject practice that strained and trespassed many anthropological and moral taboos of premodernity. In my opinion, it is in this context of tense negotiations of authority and dignity that Montaña’s *Libro de la anatomía* should be read. In the direction of the *Fabrica*, Montaña praises dissection as the most effective method to understand the body’s structure, and he recommends that students attend academic demonstrations. However, Montaña asserts that anatomy by word is a convenient start for students, and he ends by suggesting that his book—and particularly the illustrations taken from the *Fabrica* that he includes as appendixes—would suffice to learn the basics. He writes:

And it could happen that if the doctor or surgeon that read this work would have the ability to understand the solid issues [meaning: the basics] through the plain drawings, he would be able to grasp what he needs to know without any further real incision.¹¹

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⁸ Carlino points out the three conditions that may have contributed to the establishment of dissection as a feasible and, later, a legitimate practice in anatomical research and education: first, the circulation of authoritative Greek and Arab texts that claimed the utility of the practice; second, the development of university teaching with a subsequent need to professionalize its didactic methods; and third, the spreading use of autopsy in judicial processes that provided enough justification for opening the body and legitimizing its practice under public sanction. *Ibid.*, 176-7.


¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 82 and 84; quotation, 84.

¹¹ “Y podría ser que si el médico o cirujano que leyere en esta obra, tuviere habilidad para entender lo sólido por las figuras llanas, que sin otra incisión real entiendan lo que les cumple,” Montaña, fol. iii recto.
The competition for authority and precedence between dissection and anatomy, far from being resolved, is displaced by analogy. Indeed, when Montaña says that through anatomy the doctor would be able to grasp the basics without the need of any further real incision he affirms that anatomy itself embodies a form of simulated, imaginary, or virtual incision. His words confirm a semantic transfer that had already started to occur in his definition of anatomy as perfect division. Anatomy, either by experience (dissection) or by word (anatomy), consists in cutting apart, fragmenting, separating that which constitutes an obscure unity. In other words, anatomy always encompasses dissection, literally or symbolically. The distance Montaña strives to establish and maintain between these two practices ultimately vanishes because of this impending analogy. The illustration from the Anatomia Mundini (Figure 1) also makes this phenomenon visible, since it inevitably posits an analogy between the two practices by working with simultaneity and specularity. An anatomist touches a book while a dissector manipulates a corpse. Both text and body are ultimately reduced to objects of manipulation by medical authorities. At the same time, anatomy and dissection appear, not only as intimately related, but also as analogous and simultaneous. So when Montaña declares that his book manifests the second form of anatomy—that is, anatomy by word—he is not able to escape the implication that he is indeed also performing a symbolic dissection by the very act of narrating or presenting the body as a set of separate pieces.

This blurring of distinctions between dissection and anatomization would not need to be a problem since Montaña also mentions in his introduction that dissection is now being carried out at the University of Valladolid with the permission of “his Majesty,” Charles V. In addition, in his Fabrica Vesalius condemns the traditional division of labor of what is known as the quodlibetarian model of dissection, by which dissection was carried out by three figures, as shown in Figure 2: the anatomist leads the dissection by reading an anatomy book; the ostensor points with his wand to the part of the body described in the text; and the surgeon-dissector cuts the body. Indeed, Vesalius blames this division of labor on the errors of anatomists, and instead proposes a direct contact between the cadaver and the anatomist, who himself becomes the dissector, as is depicted in Figure 3. The portrait in the Fabrica, showing a Vesalius dissector who faces a hanged corpse, like a dead animal ready to be chopped, blurs basic professional distinctions (butcher/dissector/anatomist and dissection/anatomy); a blurring that Montaña, on the contrary, does not seem willing to admit in his work. Indeed, Montaña’s Libro de la anatomía clearly illustrates anxieties about dissection and the semantic transfer between anatomy by word—his own project—and anatomy by experience—dissection. First, as José María López Piñero notes: “Vesalius is never cited [in Montaña’s text], something that does not impede the inclusion of twelve illustrations copied from the Fabrica, although so imperfectly done that they look like caricatures of the originals.”

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12 Roger French, Dissection and Vivisection in the European Renaissance (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999), 43.
13 José María López Piñero, Ciencia y técnica en la sociedad española de los siglos XVI y XVII (Barcelona: Labor, 1979), 325.
Are these imperfections a deliberate mechanism to undermine the authority of Vesalius and his dissection-based didactic method by laterally stressing the precariousness of such knowledge? Is Montaña’s silence regarding Vesalius a veiled critique of his preeminence? The truth is that Libro de la anatomía remains highly ambiguous about dissection and about the Vesalian trend: on the one hand, Montaña insists on evoking it, not only by including the illustrations but also through employing the architectural metaphor of the body as a building, which articulates the whole Vesalian Fabrica, a metaphor that Montaña elaborates into an allegory in the third part of the Libro de la anatomía. On the other hand, Montaña distances himself from dissection by adhering to the classical rhetorical convention of the a capite ad calcem: the morphological account of the body (in the first part, chapters iii-xi) develops according to the body’s vertical axis, starting with the head and ending with the feet. Ascribing to this classical convention has profound implications here because this paradigm erases any clue of the dissecting process. As Sawday explains:

The anatomist dissected the body according to its rate of decay, commencing with the abdominal viscera, and then moving on to the thoracic cavity, the head, and, finally, the external members—the limbs. . . . The method was one which understood time and decay . . . as the determining factor in the process of dissection.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{14} Sawday, 132.
Although Vesalius presented the body according to this architectural metaphor, that is, starting with the structural—the skeleton—and continuing progressively toward the most superficial parts of the body, the dissection order was adopted for an English version of the Fabrica in 1553 (two years after Montaña’s Libro de la anatomía), demonstrating the implied attachment of Vesalius’s work to dissection. Also, the Anatomia Mundini had abandoned the rhetorical convention of the a capite ad calcem in order to better adjust to the dissection process.

By maintaining the a capite ad calcem convention in the Libro de la anatomía, Montaña deliberately distances anatomy from dissection: his work reaffirms an anatomical tradition for which the act of cutting and mapping the body through language—that is, anatomy—stays at a safe distance from the real cadaver and its real incision by the dissector. This approach stems not only from his work addressing a group of medical practitioners—barber-surgeons—who had not been trained at the university and thus could not read Latin and would not have had the opportunity to witness dissection, but also from a disproportionate preoccupation with professional boundaries and practices. The organizational topic of the a capite ad calcem, normalized by its frequent use, contributes to erasing traces of a scientific practice still considered abject, by veiling the violence the dissector exerts on the dead body. This rhetorical device sanitizes the discourse by reintroducing the distinction, the division of labor, in which the anatomist is the medical practitioner who, far from destabilizing the natural order of the body, maintains its structure—its verticality—intact, as understood since classical antiquity through rhetorical exercises such as the Progymnasmata. By contrast, the dissection’s work is dictated by the corporeal process of decay, the dissecting procedure inevitably foregrounding the putrefying quality of the deceased, thus inviting the intrusions of a semantic field that emphasizes the abjection of a decomposing cadaver.

In relation to this preoccupation, Montaña includes an allegorical account of the body that again attempts to clearly differentiate the functions of medical practitioners. This allegory constitutes the third part of the Libro de la anatomía. The situation for the allegory is as follows: the Marquis of Mondéjar, intrigued by a dream he is not able to understand, relates it to Doctor Montaña, describing his visions of the different rooms in a marvelous house through which he walks, while a Montaña glossator decodes the continued metaphors through concise marginal labels as shown in Figure 4 (for example: “this kitchen is the stomach where the food for the whole body is cooked”). Eventually, a Montaña-interlocutor reveals the metaphors at length for the Marquis, including more detailed medical and philosophical information, and answers questions the Marquis poses. This dream can be understood as a reflection on the function of the anatomist and the pedagogical model at the universities. The Marquis acts as a neophyte who witnesses a dissection for the first time, lacking a previous systematized knowledge of the anatomy of the body that may enable him to recognize and store in his memory what he sees. More importantly, he also lacks the language to transpose the images of the physical cavities into scientific sociolect. At the beginning of the allegory, the Marquis states:

15 “Esta cocina es el estomago donde se guisa de comer a todo el cuerpo”. Montaña, fol. lxxvi recto.
Human understanding is not enough to understand its formation [referring to a second house that is being built inside the house, that is, the fetus], nor is language enough to properly relate it: and it is for this reason that I think that I won’t be able to describe many things I saw because I didn’t understand them, and I may have forgotten others: well, I’ll tell you what I remember from what I was able to understand.

The Marquis’s account of the morphology of the body is not reliable because it is incomplete: “I’ll tell you what I remember from what I was able to understand,” he confesses. In contrast, Doctor Montaña is able to concisely decipher the images provided by the neophyte through his glosses and then, supported by authoritative knowledge, to expand that account. The knowledge derived from anatomy, then, must precede any penetration into the body and the mapping of the body’s interior can only be achieved by leaning on the previous authoritative anatomical descriptions; without that previous wisdom the images of the interior cavities derived from its dismemberment and

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16 “No basta humano entendimiento para entender la compostura della [fortaleza que está siendo contruida en el interior del cuerpo], ni lengua para bien contarla; y por esta causa creo bien que muchas cosas vi que no podre contar por no haberlas podido entender, y otras se me havran ahidado: pero en fin diré de lo que pude entender lo que me acordare.” Ibid., fol. lxxv recto.
disarticulation remain a puzzling enigma. The whole allegory, then, becomes a pedagogical performance in which the anatomist leads the knowledge exchange while the dissector has been erased and remains absent: the first incision never registers, and the Marquis finds himself inside a body already transparent to sight. The pedagogical performance makes clear that images of the body’s interior are not sufficient and that medical training must lean on specialized language: anatomy, anatomical language.

Anatomy, then, becomes a Derridian supplement. Ultimately constructed by knowledge of the body’s interior derived from classical authorities who made their observations from either human or animal dissection, anatomy in the *Libro de la anatomía* finally takes the place of dissection as a didactic tool: but only at the cost of reformulating itself into dissection. Not only does Montaña’s work enact a symbolic dissection by presenting the body as a set of separate and identifiable organs and limbs, but its introduction is also constructed by dissection when the author insists on distinguishing the branches of the discipline. Wilson identifies this phenomenon in William Harvey’s *Prelectiones*, describing it as an “implicit analogy between the body that is anatomized and the anatomical theory that anatomizes itself—conceives of itself as a body of knowledge that examines its own parts.”

This examination is accomplished through a perfect division that is simultaneously a dissection and an anatomy of a corpus that is likewise a body and a collection of texts, a bulk of written knowledge. Anatomy or dissection, text or body: binary distinctions such as these agonizingly disarticulate in Montaña’s *Libro de la anatomía*, in spite of its continuous reiteration of a desired safe differentiation of professional attributions. The body is revisited four times: first, through a conventional *a capite ad calcem* anatomical description; second, in the part on man’s generation and death, in physiological terms; third, in the dialogue between the Marquis of Mondéjar and Montaña, as an allegorical dream vision; and finally, through the illustrations, included as appendices. All four parts of the *Libro de la anatomía* expose the anxieties of Montaña toward dissection and its manipulation of a body that corrodes, by exploiting and rephrasing processes and images of building up: the reconstitution and recording of the cadaver’s verticality through the *a capite ad calcem*; consignation of the generative process in the second part, in a much more detailed form than death’s explanation; the body/house metaphor in the allegorical dream; and, even more, that this allegorical body is the body of a pregnant woman. Montaña’s discourse remains ambiguous enough to defend dissection as the most convenient way of achieving a proper understanding of the body, while at the same time making anatomy rise to the surface as a dangerous supplement that eventually takes precedence over dissection by emulating it—by appropriating its methods.

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17 Jacques Derrida defines the supplement as that which “adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself ‘in-the-place-of’. . . Compensatory and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which ‘takes-(the)-place’.” Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1997), 145.
18 Wilson, 77.
Finally, a comparison between Vesalius’s illustrations and their correspondent figures in the Libro de la anatomía suggests Montaña’s discomfort with dissection. Figure 5 is one of the illustrations of the first edition of the Fabrica: an opened-up body; that is, a dissected cadaver, with movement, standing alive in a natural environment. This image can be understood as an allegory of the body derived from anatomization: a dead body as if still functioning.

Figure 5. Andreas Vesalius, Humani Corporis Fabrica (Basel, 1543), 178. Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine, MD.
On the other hand, we have Figure 6, the corresponding illustration in the *Libro de la anatomía*, emulating and evoking Vesalius’s anatomized man yet deconstructing its naturalness, its beauty, its perfection; ultimately, a revised illustration that can cast doubt on Vesalian research and didactic procedures, and its confidence in dissection, by contesting its results through the image of a rough dissected body.

Figure 6. Bernardino Montaña de Monserrate, *Libro de la anatomía del hombre* (1551). Courtesy of the Universidad de Murcia.
Not only does Montaña feel uncomfortable with the ineludible semantic transfers that concur in defining both anatomy and dissection, he also seems troubled by the liminality and undecidability of anatomy. The discipline of anatomy unavoidably participates and engages in manipulation of and intervention upon a deceased body through dissection, literal or symbolic; it refers to a dead body in corrosion and at the same time generates a functional, universal, and didactic body that, although virtually opened up, peeled off, and cut, pretends to be alive; and it always has to cope with a dissector hidden behind an anatomist, or an anatomist that eventually discovers himself a dissector.

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A Legal Standing for What?
Mapping a Brook in Hamlet

By Caryn O’Connell

The fifth act of Hamlet opens with two gravediggers considering suicide—its circumstances, its criminality, its relation to the preconditions of a Christian burial. How is it possible, one gravedigger asks the other, that this woman is receiving interment in consecrated grounds, since she drowned herself “wittingly” (5.1.10)? The other, being the less acute, strikes the grosser note—it is possible because she is a “gentlewoman.” But the first gravedigger, Goodman Delver, bypasses the open fact of her exceptional station and the breach it has afforded, choosing instead to focus on the problem of culpability, a problem he pursues with an extreme literalism that will soon prompt Hamlet to remark, “How absolute the knave is” (5.1.133). The gravedigger’s reasoning is comic in part because he botches his legal terminology, but also because he drives the hypothetical death scenario to its reasonable limits: “Here lies the water—good. Here stands the man—good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he nill he, he goes, mark you that. But if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself. Argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life” (5.1.15-20).

What is missing from Goodman Delver’s straight rendering of the suicide scene is precisely what is missing from Gertrude’s lyrical imagining of the same. She reports,

There is a willow grows askant the brook
That shows his hoary leaves in the glassy stream.
. . . There on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook (4.7.165-174).

Before long, as Gertrude has it,

her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pull’d the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death (4.7.180-182).

Though the Queen means to color the suicide as an accident, she fails to name it as such. Instead, she reworks the scene as one in which Ophelia is victim to nonhuman homicidal agents: the willow’s branch is “envious,” envious here meaning malicious, while the garments aggressively “pull” her to her mud-assisted death. Likewise, in the gravedigger’s account, just as we are expecting him to propose the accident option, he instead suggests a case of a murderous brook: “the water come to him and drown him.”

Both accounts contain an absurdity, the idea that nonhuman entities willfully seek a human being’s end. In this essay, I would like to take advantage of these absurdities to introduce a further one: the idea that a nonhuman entity might have its own intentions. Leaping ahead to the question in its largest sense, I would like to ask if a natural body might claim a legal standing. Can a brook have interests, and therefore rights? Possessing interests, can it furthermore pursue them—can it be understood to act? In posing these questions, I will take *Hamlet* as precedent, considering the brook in both its legal contexts, after the gravedigger’s style, and its poetic contexts, after Gertrude’s, tracking it as it engages law, primarily property, tort, and natural law, and as it engages literature, both directly through the poetic device of personification and indirectly, through drama’s construction of action. By pressuring areas of overlap in this way, I hope to reappraise natural bodies as valid subjects, legal and poetic.

Recent critical thought about the relationship between literary texts and legal practices has focused on the social implications of that relationship—and for good reason. Law and literature concern themselves with human activities, with their ordering, presentation, and enactment. In responding to the question “what does literature have to do with, or for, the law?” many critics develop arguments along the lines of Peter Goodrich, who stresses law “as a social discourse, as a series of institutional functions and rhetorical effects.” Subha Mukherji suggests that “there is something about the legal situation itself—functioning centrally through figuration—that calls up a commensurate representational impulse.” That something, a common need for justice, credibility, and representation, is precisely what literature speaks to, lending nuance to justice and circumstantial vividness to credibility and representation. Joel Altman’s formulation answers the “why literature” question succinctly: “Tragedy is equity.” Along similar lines, Lorna Hutson stresses drama’s singular capacity to advance a more subtle, detailed justice, and through its close evocations of lived human experience, to advance the capacities of spectators to hypothesize, interpret, and judge. Plays, in short, make for more sophisticated and critical analysts. In early modern England, she argues, plays even contributed to the emergence of “a distinct political consciousness.” Drama is viewed as very directly contributing to the personal agency of individuals. This vision works well within the human, social realm. It works less well, however, when applied to the nonhuman one, for Hutson’s thesis

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3 Ibid., 2.
6 This view itself is understood to contribute, in the form of a corrective, to the antithetical theory of drama’s role (to contain and control) that much new historicist criticism had proposed.
hangs on drama’s mimetic powers. Is the scene being staged plausible? Does it have verisimilitude? Such factors, for her, play a crucial part in creating what Mukherji calls “the audience as an equitable jury.”

But if drama forms the nexus where individual agency is most powerfully created, where does that leave the agency of nonhuman entities? If plausibility is a key criterion, what happens to those dramatic components that are implausible or to our minds impossible? Aristotle’s literary theory offers one answer to this question. In the Poetics, one of the five elements of drama disallowed in his poetic program is “the impossible.” An example he offers readers, drawn from the Iliad, features a stump that incredibly does not rot in the rain. Unrealities of this kind are disallowed in his poetic program. However, he qualifies his ban at the section’s close: “Generally speaking, then, the ‘impossible’ has to be justified on grounds either of poetic effect, or of an attempt to improve on reality, or of accepted tradition.” Something preposterous can be justified, if it “improves upon reality.” In this proviso, the implausible gains some of the potency Hutson and Mukherji grant to the highly likely; it too makes possible, within the space of the literary, the betterment of the real. In this case, then, the very act of picturing, for instance, an intending willow, brook, or sparrow can change and enrich the forms those same nonhuman bodies assume in the real structures that drama enacts. Altered in our imagination after something like intense creative distortion, the ways in which such bodies are perceived, defined, approached, and handled also may be altered in consequence. In this way, the nonrepresentational literary moment affords a unique purchase on justice. Exploiting the seriously unlikely seriously, it can imagine into existence very real changes in the legal status of its human and nonhuman subjects.

To return to the gravedigger’s animated brook: where does it technically end up in the body of the law? It is difficult to map. In the second book of his Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765-1769), “The Rights of Things,” William Blackstone concludes that all of the physical kingdom must belong to someone, and all of these belongings can be divided into two classes of property: nonmoveable “real” property, namely land, or moveable “personal” chattels. In determining the legal signification of “land” he draws on the jurist Edward Coke, listing “any ground, soil, or earth whatsoever; as arable, meadows, pastures, woods, moors, waters, marshes, furzes, and heath.” However, he is quick to qualify his inclusion of water as real property: “water is here mentioned as a species of land, which may seem a kind of solecism; but such is the language of the law.” His solution is to rename it “land covered with water. For water is a moveable, wandering thing, and must of necessity continue common by the law of nature.” When Blackstone settles on classifying water as a “wandering thing” operating under the “law of nature,” he is closely following its treatment in Henry de Bracton’s Laws and Customs of England. Bracton’s thirteenth-century text explicates the problem of water and property law in fine-grained detail. To take just one example, “[Soil] which a

7 Mukherji, 4.
10 Ibid., 17.
11 Ibid.
river adds to your land by alluvion becomes yours by the *jus gentium,*” but this does not hold, say, “where the violence of a stream has swept away a parcel of your land and attached it to that of your neighbour . . . then it remains yours.”¹² Water, we begin to gather in his many dilations, not only complicates property law for itself, but also for all of the bodies it touches. Puzzling over a dried-up river bed, he concludes, “the old channel belongs to the riparian owners. . . . The new channel, however, begins to have the same legal character as the river itself, that is, a public character.”¹³ Something is “public” if it is “outside our patrimony”; something is “outside our patrimony” if it is either “sacred” or “owned in common”; and the “common” things include air, water, and the shores of the sea.¹⁴ Connecting all these overlapping entities, ultimately, is the natural law, and in Bracton’s divisions, natural law further connects bodies of water to wild animals. Thus the family enlarges: things “outside our dominion” are related in kind to things “belonging to no one . . . as wild beasts, birds and fish.”¹⁵

Blackstone also links moving water and moving animals, but through a different classificatory channel: things escaping capture. In his discussion of real property, Blackstone argues that “if a body of water runs out of my pond into another man’s, I have no right to reclaim it.” It is named “transient,” like partly tamed wild animals, which turn back only “at their pleasure” and otherwise begin again to “use their natural liberty” . . . like water.¹⁶ What we are witnessing in these progressive definitions is a mode of thinking that reveals a deep and shared association: each legal thinker, when venturing out to either of these two classes of things, pivots back to the other. Moreover, the definitions do not just reveal a recurring relation; they also alter a body of water’s status: a natural, nonanimal entity occupies the same categorical space as multicellular, locomotive bodies “wandering” and seeking their own “natural liberty.” To return to Bracton’s channels, water is here pictured as describing its own course. In short, in these definitions, which resonate with and so redouble each other, our brook is getting nearer to effecting an action. Emerging from these legal documents is the outline of something that looks like an actor, proper.

This profile only deepens when it finds a cognate in tort law. Common early modern negligence cases involved animals and “dangerous forces” such as fire and bodies of water; one of the most common pleadings, *ipso invito,* arguing that the injury or damage done was against the accused party’s will, in its wording implies that the will lies elsewhere: the fire, the horse, the water was understood to be out of one’s hands.¹⁷ At stake here, in addition to a natural body with a measure of agency, is the further important recognition that effects are not always traceable to a single source and that causation often has a complex distribution. Much as in cases of “transferred malice,” where poison, for instance, moves among persons and objects, causes and forces in cases of negligence are reconceived as inhabiting a variety of bodies and objects. Luke Wilson theorizes how the doctrine of

transferred malice recasts intention as “something that can be ‘transferred’ from one object to another, through the quasi-mechanical instrumentality of ‘haste,’ as though it were a kind of bodily or material substance communicated, like sweat, in proximity and exertion.” The shifting grounds of negligence and misplaced malice not only allow us to imagine a more substantive dimension of intents, but also a more substantially inclusive account of intending objects. Like a virus, an intention may inhabit a number of bodies; at the same time, a number of bodies may be thought of as hosting or possessing an intention.

*Ipsa invito,* against one’s will, out of one’s hands—the nonhuman things taking on wills of their own in the language of negligence law are one and the same, it turns out, as those pursuing their own “natural liberty” under the “natural law”: animals and natural bodies. But what exactly is this “liberty” they seek and obey? Blackstone has an image of it in mind, as does his touchstone Bracton, and in more theoretical terms, more proximate to *Hamlet,* the important sixteenth-century legal writer Christopher St. German has an idea of it. For each of these legal compilers, synthesizers, and theorists, Aquinas is the chief source from which they draw their definitions, and behind Aquinas is Aristotle. St. German formulates the “lawe of nature” in this way:

> when it is consydereyd generally then it is referryd to all creatures as well resonable as vnresonable for all vnresonable creatures when unimpeded and not disordered lyue vnder a certeyne rewle to them gyuen by nature necessarye for them to the conservacyon of theyr beynge.

Bracton writes:

> It may first be said to denote a certain instinctive impulse arising out of animate nature by which individual living things are led to act in certain ways. Hence it is thus defined: Natural law is that which nature, that is, God himself, taught all living things.

Finally, Aquinas reasons that “human beings have an inclination for good by the nature they share with all substances, namely, as every substance by nature seeks to preserve itself.” In each of these accounts, natural law loosely translates to a kind of will to live for all creatures and substances, and more specifically, a preservation of a “certain way” of living, fitted to certain life forms. However, there is a further dimension to natural law that “natural liberty” points us to: the liberty to carry out that life’s term. At issue is not just an existence, but a full and thriving one. In *King Lear,* Edmund glosses exactly this aspect of his “goddess” nature’s law in the terse declaratives, “I grow; I prosper”

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19 Negligence law is even more inclusive than natural law in its domain, admitting made objects.


21 *Bracton Online,* 26.

Natural law, it seems, concerns increases. Aquinas’ generous, ecumenical definition of it (it involves “all substances”), plus his use of the word “share” (humans share in this universal inclination to life), strongly echoes Aristotle’s description of the first principle of the soul, a principle that underscores this further valence of natural law I am pursuing. In De Anima, Aristotle writes: “We speak of as nutritive that part of the soul in which even plants share.” The nutritive is put in alimentary terms, wherein all functions in which a life form takes nutrients into its body, with consequent change or increase, qualify as an exercise of the nutritive faculty. Unlike Galen, who in his taxonomy of faculties five centuries later demotes the nutritive to the mere habitual operations of nature—though it is still classed as a type of motion—Aristotle includes it among the active operations of the soul. All natural bodies “share in life,” and more importantly, all bodies, simply in exercising the nutritive faculty, are seeking to unfold the life term that is given to them: “For the ensouled thing maintains its substance and exists as long as it is fed; and it can bring about the generation not of that which is fed, but of something like it.” Here, in Aristotle’s classic formula of potentiality and actuality, living things are viewed as endeavoring after something beyond their immediate maintenance, that is, the actuation of the generation of a form, a “something like it” that is yet to be materialized.

In this lasting account, then, a nonhuman body participates in the style of purposive action usually given to be the privilege of rational creatures. Furthermore, the bipartite structure of the nutritive faculty grants life-processes as simple as growth a share in agency and in non-material activity. There may not be intellection, but there is an abstract aim constantly in play during a life form’s existence. In this sense, Aristotle’s potentiality-actuality structure has an affinity with the more familiar thought-action structure attributed to human beings. Wilson speaks of intention’s “quasi-spatial language,” especially as articulated in Hamlet, suggesting that “intention describes the relation between thought and action by spatializing its temporal aspect, traversing . . . between thought and thing and . . . between mental image and external event or realization.” The intending mind reaches toward its intended object; the image of action draws itself out, “describing” its path toward the realization of itself. This way of thinking about intention brings the subject much closer to the terms this essay imagines for it. Carried in this direction, intention can start to look like a kind of action that is non-discursive, bound up in a material articulation of an immaterial image, just as a plant is, for Aristotle. The realization of a single body can be imagined as one instance of this extending class of action; the directed motion is like a slow-motion geste involving an external unfolding of an internal thought or impulse. A natural body, self-propelled or not, can begin to be perceived as having ends, and of acting toward them, in its own interests. Finally, that acting need not be automatically visible, audible, or traceable to qualify as such. It may escape immediate

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25 Galen, On the Natural Faculties, trans. Arthur John Brock (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), 3. Galen remarks that “if there be anyone who allows a share in soul to plants as well, and separates the two kinds of soul, naming the kind in question vegetative, and the other sensory, this person is not saying anything else, although his language is somewhat unusual. We, however . . . say that animals are governed by their soul and by their nature, and plants by their nature alone, and that growth and nutrition are the effects of nature, not of soul.”
26 Aristotle, 21.
27 Wilson, 17.
empirical determination, but that does not mean that it, the active process, does not exist. Motion and action are not reducible to what can be humanly grasped.

For Protagoras, famously, man is the measure of all things, but nature’s bodies and especially the protean body water, when seriously scrutinized, frustrate this anthropocentrically distorting index. The last legal principle impacting nonhuman things that this essay teases out also stems from natural law: the right to possession. In early modern definitions, from Hobbes to Hugo Grotius, possession is a primary law and “right” of nature, second only to preservation of the self.28 One of man’s primary rights and first acts is to claim something outside of himself as his. Indeed, in a recent study of Hamlet, Margreta De Grazia points to this deeply human principle as the crux of the play. The driving force of Hamlet, De Grazia contends, is that Hamlet has no land. He has been dispossessed, stripped of a title and that which is core to his humanness; that is, earth matter to claim as his.29 For Aristotle in the Politics, possession also is named primary, but it is further distinguished as being predicated on alteration: once someone actively changes something, then that something may be claimed as his or her belonging. Alteration and possession are seen as mutually constitutive, while possession is named “an instrument for maintaining life.”30 This more detailed definition of the concept effectually makes it more capacious. On a microscopic scale, possession in this sense, placed alongside the faculty psychology of De Anima, can again apply even to plants: drawing into their bodies and altering alien nutrients essential to the preservation of their life, plants metamorphose into owners.

This ownership even more explicitly extends to the nonhuman for Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who explore the process of claiming space and creating territory through the examination of bird behavior. They seek to stress the nonaggressive, inventive creativity inherent in territorializing; marking out one’s space also involves feeling out one’s space. Two subtler life-systems they consider in addition to birds are the “leaf-water relation” and the “fly-spider relation”; what these choices show is that even merely adaptive development, for them, can be conceived as making claims on a body’s surroundings. So the leaf, in the act of drawing toward, is expressing a form of selection; the spider, in the act of drawing out, is expressing Aristotle’s essential alteration. Each is making a claim on, has feelings about and interests in, its conditional environment. Possession, then, improvisational, responsive, selective, or interpretive, is intensely relational; another term Deleuze and Guattari use for the process is “geomorphism.”31 In this formulation, existing in space, so long as it involves change, becomes something much more significant. Whereas above we sought to bring the being of natural bodies closer to doing (carrying out a term of life, following a natural liberty, running on like fire, water, and feral animals), here, natural bodies are elevated to the doing of having.

29 Margreta De Grazia, Hamlet Without Hamlet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), introduction, see especially 2, 3.
On a larger scale, through this lens, Bracton’s and Blackstone’s waterway seeking out its own course may be understood first as a composite body fulfilling its own aim, thus gaining an ontological dimension, and second, as a body seeking new land to inhabit, creatively marking out new land over which to run, thus gaining possession. A river, as it were, is making out its own bed. This more modest conceptualization is that much more possible, I contend, after extravagant conceptualizations. A brook pursuing and seizing a human, perhaps for its own appetitive purposes, or the brook’s own bed tenaciously retaining that human with similar intentions, until her “muddy death”—these dramatic conceits make less dramatic ones thinkable in the first place; thereafter a nonhuman body may be understood to have an Aristotelian “share” in the simpler acts of being, doing, and having. To reiterate, this is one of the special achievements of imaginative writing.

Reformulating our earlier inquiry, where does the animated brook end up, not in law or philosophy, but in drama and poetry? Like runaway water in a negligence case, Goodman Delver’s speculative brook takes on a life of its own: it comes to the man and drowns him. This remains the heart of the effort of personification, imagining nonhuman things with human capacities. Note that the gravediggers’ dialogue by itself is banter, not formal personification. However, that banter becomes something more due to its strategic placement proximate to Gertrude’s high poetic rendering of the same virtual drowning: she closes the fourth act, they open the fifth. The effect of this theatrical hinge is that the gravedigger’s literalist proposition becomes charged with Gertrude’s extreme lyrical valences. Yet these transferences are not unidirectional, but relay back and forth across the Act break: the gravedigger’s brook which rather blankly but actively “comes” to drown a human, recursively informs Gertrude’s brook, which rather passively but sensational “weeps” before the soon-to-be-drowned human. The weeping seems to suggest that the brook plays no part in the drowning. However, as within the Acts, so too is there a parallel exchange within the boundaries of Gertrude’s tableau, one that infects even the sympathetic brook. First the brook curiously assumes the epithet typically given to willows; it is said to be the scene’s “weeping” body. At the same time the willow curiously assumes qualities typically given to literary waterways, from Homer’s Skamander to Ovid’s Nereids to Spenser’s Humber, which are scrambling after, with malice or lust, targeted humans: the willow here is not weeping but full of directed menace. Back and forth, cold, brittle, and malevolent inflections jump between the “hoary leaves” and “glassy brook,” while thicker charges pass between Ophelia’s heavy garments (pulling) and the brook’s muddy bed (holding). The full effect is much like that of the “dangerous forces” of negligence law: being described for us is a system of events, a physically distributed intent. No one body is isolable from the total phenomenon.

As the proximate scenes encourage us to pause and ask, “where is the locus of motive?” likewise, they also stir us to ask when. While the Queen wants to trouble the circumstances of Ophelia’s death, Goodman Delver wants to tarry the temporal aspect of the man’s hypothetical self-slaughter. As with the “there lies the water” theory, his rendering of the baffling question, “when is an act?” also is burlesqued: splicing action into three branches, he confounds the attempt of the

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32 Such a move, I argue, need not be anthropomorphizing but can in fact effectively reverse the fallacy, retracting instead of imposing human facilities. The sentiment can read, not, “it acts like us,” but “perhaps that act is not our unique privilege.”
plaintiff’s lawyers in *Hales v Petit*, the scene’s referent case. For the legal professionals, to act is to engage in “imagination,” “resolution,” and “perfection”; for Goodman Delver, it is “to act, to do, to perform” (5.1.11-12). But the screwy tautology, because distorted, brings the problem into closer focus: how to parse or fix aims and acts in a definite moment? Like natural phenomena, they are sunk in a stream of inscrutable instants, rarely in alignment with external measures of time. The definition of an act is here pushed to its reasonable terminus, and in consequence we can begin to see what elements might remain essential and newly reasonable—or, to return it to the courtroom, plausible—within it.

What other gains can this kind of extremity test give us? Limits highlight adjacencies. For instance, by investigating contiguous legal categories, we see relatives or cognates more clearly. Waterways touch on feral animals; self-preservation touches on possession. Stepping outside the law, inter- in addition to intra-disciplinary adjacencies also prove revealing; for instance, in showing the nearness of certain legal and literary functions. Blackstone’s “solecism” of conjuring water “as a species of the land” or the fictional culpability of nonhuman bodies in negligence theory, set alongside poetic animations of the same, can tell us more about the offices they may be sharing. Similarly, the adjacencies of interdisciplinary moments within a single discipline or genre further illuminate, so that lyrical personifying set in friction with quasi-legal literalizing can productively warp, then clarify, the shared subjects and events in question. Categorical relations, disciplinary functions, definitions of concepts as fundamental as agent, intention, and action—all these can be reappraised through the exploitation of limits. A body, action, or scenario exaggerated and driven to its extremity may in the end benefit greatly from such treatment. A murderous, covetous brook can produce, more simply, a natural body with an interest in not having its life impeded; a malicious, conspiring tree can produce, more simply, a natural body understood in close, constitutive relations with other bodies; finally, these two implausible and unsympathetic entities, dragged through a combinatorial study of this kind, may produce for natural bodies more generally something that looks like viable legal standing, perhaps granting of limited rights, and in turn even a rewriting of ecological policy.

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33 *The Commentaries, or Reports of Edmund Plowden . . . containing divers cases upon matters of law, argued and adjudged in the several reigns of King Edward VI., Queen Mary, King and Queen Philip and Mary, and Queen Elizabeth [1548-1579] To which are added, The queries of Mr. Plowden. In two parts* (London: Printed by S. Brooke, 1816), 259.
Mapping Sexuality

Introduction

By Philip Grace

The papers in this session focused on the concept of mapping with relation, not to physical space, nor to inanimate objects, but to the human body and its sexual aspects. One of the issues taken up by all of the papers is the question of who controls the mapping project. William Smith’s “Raising Sodom: Preliminary Notes on a Remapping of Medieval Sexuality” discussed the possibility of using the city of Sodom as a metaphorical site for modern queer identity, though he ultimately argued that the medieval concept of the sins of Sodom included more activities than homosexuality. The “map” of Sodom evident in Chaucer’s Parson’s Tale includes multiple types of adultery and lechery. Despite modern attempts to reclaim Sodom, it is clear that the map in the Parson’s Tale was drawn by “foreigners”—that is, by medieval theologians and moralists—in an attempt to define sins more clearly.

If Smith’s essay focused on inscribing sexuality on a metaphorical place, Maura Giles-Watson’s “Geosomatic Women in Premodern Comedy,” presented here, does the opposite in exploring ways that geographical language was inscribed on the female body as a means of control, using Chaucer’s To Rosamounde, Shakespeare’s Comedy of Errors, and Middleton’s Chaste Maid in Cheapside. In exploring the trope of comic revulsion in relation to geosomatic imagery, Giles-Watson demonstrates male attempts to control the women they describe, even as they reject them. Both Chaucer’s description of Rosamounde and Shakespeare’s description of Luce picture their subjects’ bodies as the globe itself as a way of objectifying and distancing them. Especially in the case of Middleton’s unnamed Welsh Gentlewman, geography and sexuality become intertwined, in that the young man Tim is attracted to a young woman whom he supposes to be both exotic and an heiress: it is when he discovers she has neither travel experience nor lands that he experiences revulsion. While the first two essays focused on how maps of sexuality were imposed on different identities, Sara Luttfring’s “Mapping the Female Reproductive Body: The Politics of Premodern Virginity in The Changeling and Early Stuart Historiography,” also presented here, discusses ways women asserted their own authority during attempts to map virginity onto their bodies. Male uncertainty about physical and psychological indicators of virginity forced them to rely on women’s narratives about their own virginity. This happened in “Art”—in the form of Middleton and Rowley’s play The Changeling—in “Life”—in the form of the notorious divorce trial of Frances Howard with its royal political entanglements—and, to add a third category, in “Historiography”—in the form of three near-contemporary histories, The Five Yeares of King James, Anthony Weldon’s The Court and Character of King James, and Arthur Wilson’s The History of Great Britain, which use Frances Howard as a visible symbol of the corruption of the court.

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Female Body as Geosomatic Apotrope in Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Middleton

By Maura Giles-Watson

Body of woman, white hills, white thighs,
you look like the world in your position of surrender.

The field of feminist geography emerged and developed in the 1970s and 80s in response to the near exclusion of women from the geographic profession and from geographic inquiry. Like all branches of feminist research, feminist geography problematizes gendered power relations traditionally regarded as value-neutral and asserts the authority of women’s lived experiences as essential to the production of knowledge and to confronting and eliminating gender inequality. At both the macro and micro levels, feminist geography explores and critiques the ways that traditional geography and its gendered political and cartographic discourses both produce and are products of masculinist misprision of women’s desire for autonomy and geographic motility as potential transgressions of male prerogative; this misprision manifests as the impulse to control and oppress women. Moreover, this new geographic field understands traditional academic geography as an instrument of expansion and exploitation that erases women by neglecting the ways women shape and are shaped by their familial, social, economic, political, and cultural conditions. Feminist geography thus oppugns all masculinist-imperialist geographic ideologies, practices, and discourses, including that which the geographer Gillian Rose identifies as the “trope of discovery,” through which old but newly discovered places, cultures, lands, and landscapes are discursively feminized as desirable spaces available for invasion, occupation, and exploitation.

To Derek Pearsall, for his many kindnesses and for awakening my feminist literary consciousness, I dedicate this essay. I would like to express my gratitude to Megan Moore and Karen Christianson of the Newberry Library and to the conference participants, especially S. Vida Muse and Caryn O’Connell, for their questions, critiques, and suggestions. My thanks, too, to Nicholas Spencer, Julia Schleck, Ruth Nisse, and Carole Levin, Director of the Medieval and Renaissance Studies Program of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

3 Gillian Rose, Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographic Knowledge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 63.
From Trope to Apotrope

As a geographic trope transposed to literary discourse, discovery remains closely linked to the desire for possession. Postcolonial criticism has sought to deconstruct the feminized and sexualized discourses of geographic places and spaces as objects of desire, invasion, and annexation. In her study of the ways that “certain forms of spatiality are institutionalized and normalized,” Sara Mills “interrogate[s] the process whereby spatial relations are constituted as gendered, raced, or classed.” And, as Rose notes, “concepts of place and space are explicitly gendered in geographic discourse,” which traditionally limits women to private place—family, home—while assuming, and allowing, men to enjoy the freedom of the full range of public space. In literary contexts, masculinist geographic discourses of cartography, geography, and topography also redefine the female body, a woman’s first and most private place, as desirable, discoverable, and mappable space. For lack of a better or existing term, I will call the geographized female body “geosomatic.”

In “Elegie Nineteen,” John Donne sets in motion a colonialist-cartographic agenda by simultaneously textualizing and geographizing a nameless woman, whose private body-place the poet publicizes as discovered space to be coaxed into complicity in her own colonization. Donne achieves discovery exuberantly, although the imminent “intrusion, invasion, and spoilation are all implied,” rather than explicit, in this poem. Employing the language of power and possession—replete with a narcissistic cascade of “my”s—Donne performs the geosomatic trope’s immanent desire for enjoyment of the woman’s private body as newly discovered public space:

O my America! my new-found-land,
My kingdome, safest when with one man man’d,
My Myne of precious stones: My Emperie,
How blest am I in this discovering thee!” (27-30)

By sharp contrast, Chaucer’s Troilus enacts his desire for and discovery of Criseyde’s private body as an intimate sight-seeing excursion in which Chaucer’s third-person narration preserves Criseyde’s autonomy and allows her body to remain “hire” possession:

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5 Rose, 62; on “public and private space,” see Mills, 31-34.
6 On the Cartesian view of the “mere body” as the person’s “home,” see Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 73.
Hire armes smale, hire streghte bak and softe,  
Hire sydes long, fleshly, smothe, and white  
He gan to stroke, and good thrift bad ful ofte  
Hire snowissh throte, hire brestes rounde and lite. (TC 3.1247-50)

Nevertheless, Troilus’s topographical survey of Criseyde’s body in this passage invites a proto-geosomatic reading: Troilus, Derek Pearsall observes, is here “offering a kind of greeting to Criseyde’s body as he goes his rounds, like a gardener.” And a garden, even an enclosed one, constitutes an “intermediary space” between the most private locus amoenus and the most public space.

As the geographer Linda McDowell observes, Michel Foucault’s “notion of the body as a map, as a surface for social inscription, has been particularly productive, and provocative” for feminist geography; this is equally true of Foucault’s influence on feminist literary study of the body. Foucault theorized the body as constructed—inscribed, defined, mapped—by contingent social and discursive practices. Mapping of the body is not merely descriptive; as an instrument of political geography, mapping it is a form of prescriptive control—an attempt to regulate the motile body’s unruly lands and landscapes by asserting new discursive boundaries that impose and enforce limits. Bodies may be mapped through a variety of modes of discourse, including parody and ridicule. In the comic texts and contexts to which I will shortly turn, ridicule, as one of the social “coercions that act upon the body” is a primary discursive practice that seeks to render spatially and sexually transgressive female bodies “docile.”

I intend now to upset the discovery-desire construct by exploring three premodern comic texts in which the geosomatic woman is discursively constructed as object of male sexual resistance. I will refer to this phenomenon as the geosomatic “apotrope,” the masculinist “turning away” from the spatially or sexually transgressive female body. In enacting this apotrope, male characters react not with desire but rather with revulsion or resistance or both to the geosomatic woman’s overstepping spatial or sexual boundaries, mapped by masculinist discursive regulation of her body in cartographic, geographic, or topographic language. The three geosomatic apotropes considered here include Rosemounde, whose spatially transgressive body is cartographized in Chaucer’s balade, “To Rosemounde”; Luce, the sexually transgressive kitchen-chench geosomatically dissected in Shakespeare’s Comedy of Errors; and the Welsh Gentlewoman who is both ethnically and sexually topographized in Thomas Middleton’s Chaste Maid in Cheapside.

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11 Mills, 124.  
“To Rosemounde”: Geosomatic Cartography

In “To Rosemounde,” Chaucer renders ridiculous the suffering lover of French courtly lyric by means of a male poem speaker who describes his putative unrequited-love predicament in comic terms. Vasta calls this poem “Chaucer’s ‘gentil’ dramatic monologue.”\(^{14}\) Davies, Stemmler, and Wimsatt read Chaucer’s courtly-lover persona in this poem as a conventional apoplectic self-representation in the tradition of Machaut; still others have read the persona as a lover’s self-parody.\(^{15}\) Most persuasively, though, Fichte understands “To Rosemounde” as a parody of both the lover and his love object—a parody achieved by Chaucer’s disturbance of the “traditional descriptio” and creation of a “mockery of the concept of fine amor,” which is by the late fourteenth century a literary relic of extinct social relations.\(^{16}\) Fichte’s reading of this poem informs my own reading, but I would further suggest that by constructing Rosemounde as a geosomatic apotrope, Chaucer playfully ridicules Rosemounde in order to discursively reconstruct her as a parodic object of male sexual resistance.

Chaucer, the male lover-subject, begins the poem with a direct address to Rosemounde, “Ma dame, ye ben of al beaute shrine,” (1) that immediately establishes her physicality as public space: a shrine, a destination of holy pilgrimage.\(^{17}\) Chaucer then ambiguously extends this metaphor in the next line, where he surveys Rosemounde with a frankly cartographic gaze: she is now “as far as cireled is the mapamounde” (2). This double entendre has confounded critics: is Rosemounde the most beautiful woman in the known world—that is, “as far as the map of the world extends”—or is she instead “rotund,” as vast and round as a \textit{mappa mundi}\(^{18}\)? Chaucer initially makes room for both readings, but the comic images, activities, and exaggerations that soon surface support the latter understanding. Indeed, Chaucer quickly amplifies his assertion of Rosemounde’s roundness with her ruby-red “chekys rounde” (4) which, as Fichte points out, do “not belong to the catalogue of female beauty” and stand “where one would expect instead red lips” in the usual run of \textit{descriptio}.\(^{19}\) Indeed, Rosemounde’s body is not merely the object of description here; her body is being mapped as public space. Chaucer’s departure from Rosemounde’s lips is also calculated to indicate the absence of sexual desire on the parodically resistant lover’s part.

In Chaucer’s pretended connoisseurship of amorous discomfort, he is perversely content to worship his love-object Rosemounde from a distance: “at a Reuell whan that I se you dance / It is


\(^{19}\) \textit{Ibid.}
an oynement vnto my wounde.” (6-7) Conventionally, a lover’s watching his inaccessible beloved dance happily would inflict, rather than sooth, a wound. Realizing his mistake, the lover playfully hyperbolizes that he weeps a barrelsful of tears, but admits that his heart is unconfounded. And when he hears Rosemounde sing and “out twyne”—that is, “force out” or “wind out”—her “semy” (11, thin), “small” (11, treble) voice, his thoughts range to “joi and blys” (12), to the comedy of incongruity embodied by round Rosemounde’s thin high-pitched voice. Like the physical body, sound is experienced as spatial; sound has shape and “very complex spatial attributes.” In acoustic aesthetics pleasant sounds and rich voices are termed round, as opposed to unpleasantly high-pitched sounds and voices, which are termed thin when weak or, to use more gendered language, shrill when loud. Women’s bodies, however, are discursively constructed the other way around: in the aesthetic regulation of the physical female body, thin is pleasant—spatially normative and idealized—but round is spatially transgressive and hence threatening. Chaucer’s amused observance of Rosemounde at the revel as a physical performer—singer and dancer—bears this out. As Susan Glenn points out, female comic performance depends upon female transgressivity: “too-muchness—too much fat, too much noise, too much physicality . . . too much of whatever exceeds the normative standards of femininity.” A round woman is indeed just too much; she constitutes a negation of the phenomenological and geometrical images of the sphere as perfection.

In the balade’s second and third stanzas Chaucer’s focus shifts from the comedy of Rosemounde’s body to that of his own, as he launches half-hearted clichés that render his self-representation as a lover completely suspect. The poet’s hyperboles and redundancies now emphasize the lover-persona’s comically detached stance: Rosemounde is merry and jocund (5), the lover’s thoughts are of joy and bliss (12), and his love will neither grow cold nor be chilled (21). In the third stanza, Chaucer describes himself as so deeply in love that he is like a fish drowning in heavy sauce, his body completely paralyzed by love: “Nas neuer Pyk walwed in galauntyne / As I in loue am walwed and iwounde.” The balade’s refrain, “Thogh ye to me ne do no dalliance,” expresses three times the lover’s contentment that Rosemounde expects nothing from him sexually. He is not pleading for her mercy, nor indeed for anything else; rather, he is content not to upset the status quo. Not only does he claim to be happy just to watch her dance and listen to her sing (“Sufficeth me to loue you, Rosemounde,” 15), but he is explicitly satisfied to love her although she grants him no “dalianse,” a word that carries a range of signification from flirtation to sexual intercourse. The lover’s final exaggeration, namely, that he will become round Rosemounde’s “thral” (23), anchors the parody through which Chaucer’s discovery and mapping enacts revulsion and renders Rosemounde a “docile body.”

20 Don Ihde, Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1979), 58, 60.
23 To use Foucault’s phrase, 138; Cressida Heyes applies Foucault’s concept to the internalized self-policing involved in women’s food regimens, in Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. 28-29.
Shakespeare’s Luce: Geosomatic Dissection

As Gillian Rose points out, in masculinist geographic discourse “the desire for full knowledge is indicated by [allusion to] transparency, visibility, and perception. Seeing and knowing are often conflated.” When taken together in this way these epistemes paradoxically construct, “a sophisticated ideological device that enacts systemic erasures” of the geosomatic object’s somatic existence and experience.24 This epistemological discourse, which transforms the first place—the female body—into the male space of the world at large, occurs in response to perceived transgressions that include female sexual initiative or independence, or indeed any “bodily gesture of autonomy.”25 Such gestures meet resistance, often in the form of ridicule, because they both embody and realize the loss of male power and privilege, a loss that masculinist discourse represents as victimization.

In *The Comedy of Errors* Shakespeare’s male exiles, the Syracusans Antipholus and Dromio, dissect Luce, the kitchen-wench, as a geosomatic apotrope; they do this with a frank brutality absent from the anatomization of Criseyde in Chaucer’s Troilus or indeed from Chaucer’s playful description of round Rosemounde. Antipholus and Dromio geographically dissect Luce in order to achieve their discursive “desire for full knowledge” and discovery of her body.26 In Act 3 Scene 2, the men engage in a ninety-line comic dialogue in which Dromio reveals that he is in flight from Luce, the woman who has mistaken him for his twin and is pursuing him sexually. Her very pursuit of Dromio is constitutive of comedy as it violates the rules of the advancing-male and retreating-female courtship motif. Rather than desiring to colonize the new woman, Dromio desperately seeks to escape from her. He describes Luce in explicitly apotropaic terms as greasy and dirty from her kitchen work; she is also fat. The *descriptio* then turns into a geographic blazon as the two men inscribe political agendas and geographic and colonialist stereotypes onto Luce’s private body. In the men’s exchange, Antipholus’ questions bind together constructions of gender, race, and class to invite Dromio’s representation of Luce; Dromio responds to these questions by describing Luce as an embodiment of both foreignness and ranging geographic space. “What is she?” Antipholus asks (3.2.89); Dromio replies that she is “a wonderous fat marriage” (3.2.93).27 “What complexion is she of?” (101); Dromio responds “swart, like my shoe, but her face nothing like so clean kept” (102-103). What is more, he claims Luce’s clothes are so greasy that they would burn for an entire “Poland winter” (99).

Luce has already been both seen and known, but her erasure is about to be enacted: Antipholus now asks Dromio Luce’s name; in Dromio’s reply, he erases Luce’s identity and renames her for her roundness:

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24 Rose, 86-87.
25 Bordo, 7.
26 Rose, 86.
Nell, sir; but her name and three-quarters, that’s an el and three quarters, will not measure her from hip to hip. (109-111)

An ell was an official unit of measurement, approximately 1.15 meters, used by both cloth merchants and land surveyors; an “ell and three quarters” would have been about two meters in length. Dromio asserts that “Nell’s” height and width are equal, and that “Nell” is “spherical, like a globe.” Indeed, she is so round and enormous that Dromio puns that he “could find out countries in her” (3.2.114-115). These two well-traveled and spatially experienced men then catalogue distant places while dissecting and geographizing Luce’s body; in the process, the men draw absurd correspondences between Luce’s unruly body and the geography, landscape, weather, and resources of both new and known continents and countries. Antipholus probes Dromio for the details of where these various countries are mapped on Nell’s body; what follows is both a geosomatic and a “geohumoral” analysis of Nell’s bodily topography and its effluents and effluvia. Antipholus first asks after Ireland and Scotland, two quagmires in England’s pan-Britannic program. Dromio locates Ireland “in her buttocks; I found it out by the bogs,” he says (117). Scotland Dromio claims to have found “by the barrenness; [in] the hard palm of the hand” (120-121). Then Antipholus asks the location of France, which Dromio inscribes in Nell’s scowling forehead (123-124), and England, which is in her chin; a “salty sweaty channel” flows between them in her face. Dromio had surveyed “Nell” for England’s “chalky cliffs” but “could find no whiteness in them” (126-127). He felt Spain’s climate in Nell’s hot breath, and located the jewels of the Indies and America in the rubies, sapphires, and carbuncles on Nell’s nose, after which riches “Spain” had sent “whole armadoes” (136-137). By this point one feels that the geosomatic burlesque has been a bit overworked, but the ridicule continues nevertheless: “Where stood Belgia—the Netherlands?” asks Antipholus. “Oh sir, I did not look so low,” Dromio replies (139). Nell is now reduced to the absolute status of geosomatic apotrope. Dromio’s final revulsion at the mere thought of seeing Nell’s “Netherlands” resembles the effect of the Irish _shelagh-na-gig_, or the ancient Greek gesture of _anasyrma_ in which the sight of an apotropaic female’s genitals was enough to repel potential invaders.

**Middleton’s Welsh Gentlewoman: Geosomatic Topography**

The Welsh Gentlewoman in Middleton’s comedy _A Chaste Maid in Cheapside_ remains nameless, defined instead by masculinist reading of her ethnicity and gender. “Gentle” is a misnomer; Middleton ironically inscribes her sexual deception and transgressivity. The Welsh Gentlewoman embodies English colonial fantasies and stereotypes of Welsh difference: she is revealed to be sexually promiscuous and morally deficient—symbolized by her red hair—and assumed to be

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28 See Mary Floyd-Wilson’s discussion of “geohumoralism,” “regionally inflected humorism,” as “the dominant mode of ethnic distinctions in the 16th and early 17th centuries,” in *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1 and throughout. I am very grateful to Caryn O’Connell for alerting me to Floyd-Wilson’s work.

intellectually, socially, ethnically, and linguistically inferior. In short, the Welsh Gentlewoman constitutes the complete colonial object.

As Tamar Mayer maintains, feminist geographers:

have shown that employing gender and sexuality as specific categories of analysis enables us to understand more clearly not only how the “nation” is constructed, but also the importance of power to this construction. . . . [Feminist geographers] have demonstrated that manhood and womanhood are entangled in national, and nationalist, ideologies.  

In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, the entangled ideologies of masculinity, femininity, and nationality are enacted through the body of the Welsh Gentlewoman, who arrives in London on the arm of Sir Walter Whorehound, whose mistress she has been. Sir Walter now intends to unburden himself of the Welsh Gentlewoman by misrepresenting her as his wealthy landed niece, the “heir to some nineteen mountains” (1.1.127-128), a claim that will allow Sir Walter to marry his mistress off to Tim Yellowhammer, a recent Cambridge graduate and son of a socially ambitious goldsmith. To make these arrangements even more complex, Sir Walter Whorehound is to marry Tim’s younger sister, Moll, who loves someone else and resists her parents’ plan for her own marriage.

Like his sister, Tim too has decided to free himself from what he sees as an undesirable entanglement. When he first meets the Welsh Gentlewoman he attempts to offend her by launching into a corrupt but archly rhetorical Latin speech, to which she responds in Welsh. Tim mistakenly believes her Welsh reply is a Hebrew obscenity (4.1.116-118), and is concerned that her knowledge of Hebrew makes her more learned than he is. For now, language and knowledge are the Welsh Gentlewoman’s modes of transgression. Tim is relieved when his mother arrives, although he misconstrues her intentions: “I’m glad my mother’s come to part us,” he says aside to the audience. At this point, Tim’s resistance derives from his disgust with the Welsh Gentlewoman’s foreignness—more specifically, Welshness—combined with his fear of being humiliated by a foreign woman’s apparently superior learning: “By my faith, she’s a good scholar; I see that already: she has the tongues plain” (120-121).

The Welsh Gentlewoman’s foreignness and strange language introduce the risk that she might be undiscoverable and unknowable; language, nationality, and topography all are bound together in Middleton’s representation of her. These features also emerge in the obscene puns and double entendres on “travel-travail,” “clap,” “chamber,” and “mutton,” that hint at the Welsh Gentlewoman’s previous sexual experience. When Tim finally realizes that she speaks English, he relents and tells his mother that he had misunderstood the marriage arrangement: “I thought you’d marry

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me to a stranger”; that is, a “foreigner.” His mother then pushes him into a kiss: “O delicious!” he exclaims (143):

One may discover her country by her kissing;  
’Tis a true saying: “there’s nothing tastes so sweet  
As your Welsh mutton.”—It was reported you could sing (144-146).32

Tim’s gaze here is less cartographic than touristic. He now explicitly enacts tactile discovery as he revives the Shakespearean pun on “country.” The Welsh Gentlewoman’s song and singing are attributive of ethnic difference; her song production is her corporeal expression of uninterpretable Welsh nationality. As the poet Anne Carson avers, “it is in large part according to the sounds people make that we judge them sane or insane, male or female, good, evil, [or] marriageable. . . . These judgments happen fast and can be brutal.”33 Tim has now deemed the Welsh Gentlewoman marriageable chiefly because of her voice and singing. But her song is not enough. Her putative wealth, in the form of land, drives the marriage plan. Tim now performs a cartographical survey of the sexual topography of his new possession, namely, his future wife, who stands geosomatically for her imagined lands and landscapes:

And ’tis my mind I swear, before I marry  
I would see all my wife’s good parts at once,  
To view how rich I were (4.1.148-150).

The “parts” he intend to inspect suggest dissection, as well. Tim, a pretentious fraud himself, is much deceived. Sir Walter Whorehound has engineered a triple deception: he has lied about the landedness, social class, and sexual purity of the Welsh Gentlewoman, but the lies have not yet been found out. Only after their marriage ceremony does Tim learn that his new wife is heir to no mountains. His reaction to the news is frank revulsion that he is now married to a penniless whore. He now ridicules the Welsh Gentlewoman as a “jade” whom he considers pimping out for money (5.4.85-88). He believes he has been cheated of his promised lands: “Where be these mountains? I was promis’d mountains, / But there’s such a mist, I can see none of ’em” (5.4.89-90). And Tim’s angry last line in the play was apparently censored for its indecency: “And for my mountains, I’ll mount upon—” (5.4.112). Tim’s topographical mountain-mounting pun achieves the Welsh Gentlewoman’s complete discursive construction as a geosomatic apotrope. Tim now “sees” and “knows” that there are no mountains in the new landscape he possesses. The Welsh Gentlewoman is now silenced and utterly docile, but she still embodies the concrete materiality of the discovered colonial space, and Tim uses her deception to justify his anger and aggression toward her and to fully erase her topography.

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32 mutton = whore  
Epilogue

Geosomatic literary tropes and apotropes abound; I have provided just a few examples here to illustrate the concept and the complexity with which geosomatic visions of the female body are realized. Particularly in comic texts, the masculinist practice that most effectively disciplines spatially or sexually transgressive female bodies is ridicule, the discursive enactment of revulsion. In life, laughter is frequently a response to inflexibility; in masculinist comic literary contexts, however, the geosomatic apotrope is deployed in the service of inflexibility to render docile the transgressive female body and the feminized landscape.

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Mapping the Female Reproductive Body: The Politics of Premodern Virginity in The Changeling and Early Stuart Historiography

by Sara Luttfring

In Thomas Middleton and William Rowley’s play *The Changeling* (1622), and in the numerous histories, letters, court records, and poems documenting the life of Frances Howard, physical and rhetorical control over the virginal female body are at stake.¹ A crucial element of this struggle for control is the difficulty of locating virginity during the early modern period; although authors of medical treatises and conduct literature attempted to map virginity onto the female body, the unreliable nature of physical signs of virginity consistently thwarted their efforts. In *The Changeling* and in historical accounts of Howard, who claimed to be a virgin in order to obtain a divorce, virginity is shown to be located as much in the stories women tell about their bodies as it is in these bodies themselves. This paper argues that, in these texts, the narrative control women have over locating their own virginity gives them influence over the sociopolitical institutions of patriarchy, as well as increased sexual freedom. Despite male anxiety that women may falsify narratives of virginity to further their own sexual agendas, men rely on women to narrate and perform virginity in ways that allow for the coherent mapping of familial lineage and the continuation of patrilineal property transmission. In addition, historical accounts of James I’s reign published during the Civil Wars and Interregnum suggest that women’s narratives about their bodies may have influenced the charting of history, since historians’ descriptions of the Jacobean court seem to take inspiration from Howard’s claims of virginity and the various refutations of those claims. Thus I argue that early modern women’s narratives about virginity participated in a larger project of genealogical, political, and historical mapping.

Despite its crucial role in determining a woman’s value on the marriage market and ensuring the legitimacy of her husband’s familial line, virginity remained an extremely uncertain state during the early modern period, one that frequently depended on female narrative and performance to provide “proof” of physical integrity, or lack thereof.² Physical examinations of women’s reproductive organs were relatively rare, but even when they did occur, the evidence they provided about

Mapping the Premodern

women’s virginity was uncertain and contested. Early modern authors of medical treatises were extremely divided over whether the hymen could be used to determine the status of a woman’s virginity, or indeed whether such a membrane existed at all.\textsuperscript{3} Anatomists who dissected the corpses of unmarried women in search of the hymen came up with decidedly mixed results, particularly because there was no way of knowing whether the absence of the hymen signaled its nonexistence, or its loss through premarital sex, masturbation, or accident.\textsuperscript{4}

Physical examinations of living women were no less problematic, particularly since they were typically conducted by female midwives. In such cases, interpretive authority over the female body fell to women rather than men, despite male medical writers’ fears that midwives would misinterpret or mishandle the female body, or even that a careless examiner would rupture a woman’s hymen in the act of searching for it.\textsuperscript{5} Even the age old “proof” of bloody sheets was acknowledged to be unreliable by early modern writers such as Helkiah Crooke, who notes in \textit{Mikrokosmographia} (1615) that, although pain and bleeding during intercourse are usually a sure sign that a woman is a virgin, a woman who is menstruating or has recently menstruated may not exhibit such symptoms, “for then they admit the yard with lesse trouble, because of the relaxation and lubricity of these moyst partes whereupon the Membranes are dilated with little or no paine.” Crooke goes on to note that in such instances, “some men have unworthily suspected the uncorrupted chastity of their wives,” and he stresses the need for a bride’s female friends and relatives to fill her new husband in on the complexities of the female anatomy in order to avoid scandal: “it were fit the mothers or women friends of such Virgins should have care of their Honor, by giving warning to their Bride-grooms of their Brides purgations, if at that time they be upon them.”\textsuperscript{6}

In order to compensate for the unreliability of the hymen as evidence of virginity, other methods of mapping virginity had to be proposed. One such method rested on the assumption that a woman’s inward physical state would be mirrored in her outward appearance and conduct. This assumption placed on women the added burden of having to \textit{appear} virginal in addition to physically abstaining from sex, but it also suggested that a sexually active woman could enjoy the social prestige of a virgin if she could convincingly feign purity by assuming its physical and behavioral signs. In Thomas Tuke’s \textit{A Discourse Against Painting and Tincturing of Women} (1616), he warns “it is not enough to be good, but she that is good, must seeme good: she that is chast, must seeme chast: shee that is humble, must seeme humble: shee that is modest, must seeme to bee so, and not plaister her face,

\textsuperscript{4} Loughlin, 41-47.
\textsuperscript{5} For more on the role of midwives as medical examiners and interpreters of virginity, see Caroline Bicks, \textit{Midwiving Subjects in Shakespeare’s England} (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 60-93.
\textsuperscript{6} Helkiah Crooke, \textit{Mikrokosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man} (London, 1615), 236.
that she cannot blush upon any occasion.” Tuke critiques cosmetics because they make a woman unable to “blush upon any occasion,” thus providing a mask behind which she can hide her true nature, but blushing itself was an ambivalent physical sign which could indicate the modesty of a virgin or the shame of a sexually guilty woman. Even as he insists on the necessity of a correspondence between a woman’s inner virtue and her outward appearance, Tuke suggests that what a woman “is” can be concealed or fabricated by the way she “seems,” and he appeals to physical signs that, even when not concealed, are not easy to interpret.

As Mara Amster points out, in their attempts to regulate women’s behavior conduct books such as Tuke’s and medical treatises such as Crooke’s risk becoming manuals on ways to fake virginity. Amster is primarily concerned with the ability of the female body to physically perform virginity, but I would argue that women’s speech plays an equally important role. When, in the above passage, Crooke assumes that certain elements of women’s physiology, such as their menstrual cycles, will have to be explained and interpreted for men by women, his intention is to shield true virgins from reproach, but in doing so he creates a narrative that a sexually active woman could use to falsify virginity. Similarly, for Tuke what a woman “is” or “seems” is further complicated by what she says; he implies that a woman who would use cosmetics to conceal her true appearance would also use lies to conceal her true character, when he declares: “How unworthy the name of Christian it is . . . to lie with the countenance, who may lie with their tongue.” Examples such as these suggest that women could map virginity through their words, appearance, and behavior and that this narration and performance of virginity was both desired and feared by men; on one hand virgins were expected to look, speak, and act virtuously, but on the other there was nothing to say that non-virgins could not do the same.

During the summer of 1613 the divorce trial of Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, and Frances Howard, Countess of Essex, dragged the sticky issue of identifying and narrating the virginal female body into the English national spotlight. In May 1613, Howard submitted a libel to a specially convened panel of commissioners in which she claimed that her arranged marriage to Essex had never been consummated and requested that the union be nullified. A panel of midwives and married women was called in as expert witnesses regarding the female reproductive body; the women were asked by the panel of male religious and legal authorities presiding over the case to

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7 Thomas Tuke, *A Discourse Against Painting and Tincturing of Women* (London, 1616), 10. As Curtis Perry points out, Tuke’s treatise is particularly noteworthy in the link it makes between the use of cosmetics and other social ills, listed on the title page as murder, poisoning, pride, ambition, adultery, and witchcraft. See Perry, *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 103. Tuke actually discusses the Overbury murder, although he does not specifically mention Howard’s role in it, nor does he mention the Essex divorce; Tuke, 49, 52. However, the publishing history of Tuke’s text suggests that Tuke, or at least his publisher, Edward Merchant, imagined its critique as being directed particularly at aristocratic women like Howard. Whereas the text was originally published in 1616 as *A Treatise Against Painting and Tincturing of Men and Women*, it was reissued during the same year with a new title that targeted women specifically: *A Discourse Against Painting and Tincturing of Women*. Also new to the title page of the reissue is a woodcut illustration of a lavishly dressed woman, whose wide skirts, stiff ruff, and feathered hat mimic fashions popular with ladies of the court.


9 Tuke, 18.
physically examine Howard in order to determine whether she was a virgin. Despite widespread belief that Howard had been conducting an extramarital affair with court favorite Robert Carr and that a substitute had been examined in her place, her virginity was confirmed, allowing her to divorce Essex and almost immediately take a second husband of her own choosing, the aforementioned Carr.\textsuperscript{10}

In addition to the challenges Howard’s bodily narrative posed to Essex’s control over her, the divorce also encompassed a political dimension. By divorcing Essex and marrying Carr, Howard allied herself and her family with the current royal favorite, thus gaining a wealth of access and influence at court. In addition, critics have argued that the Essex divorce may have shaped the public’s perception of the king, since James I showed an active interest in the divorce throughout the trial and made no secret of his support for the nullity that would allow his favorite to marry into a powerful family. As Alastair Bellany points out, the king’s collusion in Howard’s divorce created an image of the court “as a house of patriarchal disorder” where “women, irrational and dangerous, ran free.” Bellany further argues that this image worked to “undercut the language of monarchical authority” that James I depended so heavily upon.\textsuperscript{11} Thus those who proposed counter-narratives to Howard’s assertions of virginity were mapping corruption not only onto Howard’s body, but also onto a court culture marked by favoritism, secrecy, gossip, double-dealing, and betrayal, all overseen by James I.

Concerns raised by the Essex divorce trial about the potential social autonomy and political impact women might gain through their ability to narrate and perform virginity are further explored in Middleton and Rowley’s \textit{The Changeling}. The play was first performed in 1622, approximately a year after Frances Howard and Robert Carr were released from the Tower after being imprisoned for their complicity in the murder of Thomas Overbury, and it resonates with the themes of murder, illicit sex, and feigned virginity that thrilled the public during the Essex divorce and Overbury murder trials. The female protagonist, Beatrice-Joanna, rejects the marriage arranged for her by her father, has sex with her servant De Flores in exchange for the murder of her unwanted fiancé, and fakes virginity in order to marry Alsemero, a nobleman-sailor newly arrived in her father’s land. Despite her misdeeds, the play emphasizes Beatrice-Joanna’s ability to convincingly narrate and perform submissive virginity, even when put to a virginity test. Although the men in the play attempt to map virginity onto her body, Beatrice-Joanna takes advantage of the ambivalent nature of virginity to create false narratives about her physical and moral states. After Beatrice-Joanna finally confesses to her sins and dies in Act 5, the surviving male characters attempt to salvage a happy ending from the tragedy, with Alsemero declaring that he will continue to perform the duties of a son to Beatrice-Joanna’s father.\textsuperscript{12} However, despite this rather forced return to patriarchal order

\textsuperscript{10} Since the examination took place in a closed room, into which no male witnesses were permitted, and since Howard was allowed to wear a veil during her examination in order to preserve her modesty, skeptics accused her of sending another veiled woman to be examined in her place. For a balanced account of the Essex divorce trial and the ensuing—and continuing—historical discussion of it, see David Lindley, \textit{The Trials of Frances Howard: Fact and Fiction at the Court of King James} (London: Routledge, 1993), 77-122.


\textsuperscript{12} Middleton and Rowley, 5.3.227.
following Beatrice-Joanna’s death, the play leaves the question of how to accurately locate virginity in a woman’s body largely unresolved, creating the distinct impression that male control over the female reproductive body is complete only when that body, like Beatrice-Joanna’s, is dead. Moreover, the ending points to how patriarchal society relies on women to narrate and perform their own virginity, while gesturing toward the fear that women will, like Beatrice-Joanna, attempt to turn this reliance to their own advantage.

Although Beatrice-Joanna’s performance during the virginity test is probably the most memorable example in the play of women’s ability to feign chastity, here I will focus on the play’s final scene, which shows men relying on women’s words and behavior in their attempts to locate virginity. Despite increasing evidence that Beatrice-Joanna’s virginity cannot be accurately determined by referencing either her words or her body, in the last scene Alsemero frantically invokes both Beatrice-Joanna’s testimony and the physical signs of her body in order to know the truth of her guilt. Alsemero begins by trying to exact a narrative of confession from Beatrice-Joanna:

\begin{verbatim}
ALSEMER: Pray resolve me one question, lady.
BEAT: If I can.
ALSEMER: None can so sure. Are you honest? (5.3.19-21).
\end{verbatim}

Despite his rising suspicions, Alsemero assumes that Beatrice-Joanna is the ultimate source of truth about her own body, even going so far as to claim that no one else would be able to resolve matters as surely as she. When Beatrice-Joanna sidesteps his question by laughing and turning it into a joke, Alsemero switches tactics and tries to find answers in her behavior rather than her words: “Do you laugh? My doubts are strong upon me (5.3.24).”

Beatrice-Joanna counters by mocking his reliance on ambiguous physical signs that can easily be counterfeited:

\begin{verbatim}
'Tis innocence that smiles, and no rough brow
Can take away the dimple in her cheek.
Say I should strain a tear to fill the vault,
Which would you give the better faith to? (5.3.25-28).
\end{verbatim}

At this, Alsemero abruptly changes course again and claims that no external sign can change what he knows to be true:

\begin{verbatim}
Neither your smiles nor tears
Shall move or flatter me from my belief:
You are a whore (5.3.30-32).
\end{verbatim}

Yet, a few lines later he returns to the female body as a source of truth, this time seeking proof in its interior:
I’ll all demolish and seek out truth within you,
If there be any left. Let your sweet tongue
Prevent your heart’s rifling; there I’ll ransack
And tear out my suspicion (5.3.37-40).

Although Alsemero threatens to “seek out truth within” Beatrice-Joanna’s body, his language of demolition and tearing suggests an awareness that even the ambiguous physical “truth” of the hymen is lost to him, since at this point in the play Alsemero believes that he has slept with Beatrice-Joanna (who actually sent a substitute to her wedding bed), and thus that her maidenhead is gone. Although he threatens to physically “rifle” her heart for evidence, he also turns yet again to Beatrice-Joanna’s words when he suggests that she could prevent his violent search/abuse of her body by providing more certain narrative proof with her “sweet tongue.” Despite Alsemero’s conviction that Beatrice-Joanna’s words and body are duplicitous, he must rely on them both as he cobbles together proof to confirm his suspicions.

Moreover, the end of the play shows the stakes of Beatrice-Joanna’s narration of virginity to be greater than the success or failure of her relationship with Alsemero. Beatrice-Joanna’s control over her body seems to have a damaging effect, at least symbolically, on the play’s male bodies, and it has a very direct and transformative effect on the mapping of male-dominated systems of dynastic marriage and social hierarchy. De Flores calls her “that broken rib of mankind,” and as she is dying Beatrice-Joanna refers to herself as a corrupted part of the patriarchal body when she tells her father, Vermandero, “I am that of your blood was taken from you / For your better health” (5.3.155, 159-60). However, even after Beatrice-Joanna’s death, the soundness of both patriarchal family and patriarchal society remains debatable. As mentioned above, Alsemero assures Vermandero that he will continue to honor him as a father, but this father/son relationship, predicated on Beatrice-Joanna’s manipulations, seems tenuous—after all, just a short time earlier Alsemero was ready to kill the man Vermandero had handpicked to be his son-in-law. Moreover, the symbolic phlebotomy that Beatrice-Joanna suggests will heal her father can be read as in fact having a weakening effect if one understands the “blood” that is “taken” from Vermandero to be a reference to his bloodline, a line which ends with Beatrice-Joanna’s death. Although her corpse is finally legible, it cannot act as a vessel for the transmission of male aristocratic lineage, and the all-male family celebrated at the end of the play remains ultimately barren.

Additionally, the female threat to patriarchal society exemplified by Beatrice-Joanna could also be writ larger than the individual family. Given the intertwined nature of gender, class, and political
hierarchies during the period, the challenges posed to the domestic authority of husbands and fathers by women’s narratives of virginity can also be read as questioning the social and political authority of the upper classes and even the king. Cristina Malcolmson argues that *The Changeling’s* challenge to social authority encompasses that of “master, father, husband, or king,” drawing parallels between domestic, class, and political hierarchies. Although the play warns against the damage to social hierarchies wrought by women’s falsification of bodily narratives, it cannot escape the truth that women’s narration of virginity also gives patriarchal society structure and coherence by providing at least the appearance of an orderly system of patrilineal descent and stable social hierarchies. Despite the play’s paranoia about women’s control over their own virginity, it suggests that the mapping of gender, class, and even political hierarchies depends on women’s bodily narratives, whether true or false.

In historical accounts of Frances Howard from the Civil War period, which also saw *The Changeling*’s first printing in 1652, the high social stakes of narrating virginity appear even more vividly, since the histories demonstrate the potential for women’s narratives to shape both the Jacobean court and the reading and writing of history itself. In their retellings of Howard’s narrative of virginity, histories such as *The Five Yeares of King James* (1643), Anthony Weldon’s *The Court and Character of King James* (1650), and Arthur Wilson’s *The History of Great Britain* (1653) attempt to reassert male control over the female body by refuting Howard’s claims of virginity and depicting her as the pawn of powerful men, a passive token of political exchange. These depictions of Howard are part of the texts’ larger project of tracing the root causes of the failure of the British monarchy, which they locate in James I’s inability to properly execute his authority as king. However, despite the histories’ attempts to discredit Howard and downplay her control over her body, they also show her narrative of virginity, debunked though it may be, as influencing both the hierarchy of, and their own historical narratives about, the Jacobean court.

Howard’s bodily narrative of virginity causes far-reaching consequences in these histories, as it works not merely to achieve a divorce, but also to shift factional power within the court in her favor. In addition to affecting the factional politics of the Jacobean court, Howard’s narratives of virginity, even when contested, shape the reading and writing of history. One of the most striking examples of this shaping occurs in Wilson’s *Proeme* to his *History of Great Britain*, in which he suggests that bodily narratives shape how history is written when he compares historiography to dissection:

> Histories are like Anatomies, especially when they reflect on Persons: He must be a skilful Artist, that can dissect a Body well. . . . [A]s the dissimilar parts of the body, head, hands, feet, &c. are apparently known; and the Similar parts, as veins sinews, nerves, &c. are easily discovered; so the motions and operations of the more secret

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15 Cristina Malcolmson, “‘As Tame as the Ladies’: Politics and Gender in *The Changeling*” in *Revenge Tragedy*, ed. Stevie Simkin (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 143.

16 *The Five Yeares of King James, or, The Condition of the State of England, and the Relation it had to other Provinces* (London, 1643); Anthony Weldon, *The Court and Character of King James* (London, 1650); Arthur Wilson, *The History of Great Britain, Being the Life and Reign of King James the First, Relating to what Passed from his First Access to the Crown, till his Death* (London, 1653).
and hidden parts are controverted, and hard to find out, as the Circulation of the Blood, &c.\textsuperscript{17}

Wilson claims historians must necessarily deal with what they can easily know and discover, just as anatomists must make do with studying those parts of the body that are most accessible, and in his own history he uses observations of what is “apparently known” and “easily discovered” to try to map what is “secret and hidden.” Earlier in the Proeme Wilson warns rulers that their actions are not immune from the censure of history, but he later concedes that he is unable to “discover all the Contrivances hatcht, and brooded in the secret corners of Princes Councils.”\textsuperscript{18} Therefore, he must use incidents that are more “easily discovered” to shape his narrative of James I’s reign and court. Although Wilson’s account of Howard constitutes a small part of his nearly 300-page book, his anatomically explicit description of her death resembles the Proeme in its focus on uncovering hidden secrets within the body, suggesting that the events arising from Howard’s bodily narrative might be particularly revelatory in mapping James I’s reign:

Her death was infamous. . . . And though she died (as it were) in a corner (in so private a condition) the loathsomeness of her death made it as conspicuous as on the house top: For that part of her Body which had been the receptacle of most of her sin, grown rotten (though she never had but one Child) the ligaments failing, it fell down, and was cut away in flakes, with a most nauseous and putrid savour.\textsuperscript{19}

On one level, this grotesque description of Howard’s death from uterine cancer graphically reveals the sexual misconduct that her narrative of virginity was believed by many to have concealed. Her reproductive body literally turns against her, and in doing so, corrects the error made by the divorce court when it proclaimed her a virgin. However, the anatomical description of Howard also reflects the Proeme’s bodily metaphors in a way that suggests that Howard’s body, however grotesque and abject, helps to shape and narrate history. She is one of the “easily discovered” parts of the political body that reveals the “secret and hidden” corruption of James I’s reign, and her bodily narrative, even when discounted, helps shape historical accounts of the Jacobean court. Like The Changeling, Wilson’s history suggests that male anxiety about the socially deformative effects of female narrative authority is fueled by the nevertheless crucial role women’s narratives of virginity play in mapping and perpetuating patriarchal society.

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\begin{itemize}
\item[17] Wilson, A3v-A4.
\item[18] \textit{Ibid.}, A4v.
\item[19] \textit{Ibid.}, 83.
\end{itemize}
In the first three panels of the “Mapping the Premodern” conference we mapped places, things, and sexuality. For the fourth and final panel we concluded with three papers that focused on sacred images or objects. Although the topics varied, each paper began with examples employed to draw a larger metaphorical map of beliefs and attitudes toward the divine in their distinct locations and time periods.

Chris Tiessen of the University of Guelph examined the copper engravings of martyrs made for the 1685 Dutch publication, the *Martyr's Mirror*. These often violent images of Mennonite martyrs in the moment of their tribulation served as powerful reminders to an increasingly affluent and complacent community of their violent beginnings and passionate ideals. Coincidentally, the publication date of the *Martyr's Mirror* was also the year focused on in Tiessen’s paper. Stephanie Blue of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign meticulously studied an ephemeral architectural monument titled *Marriage at Cana*, created for the high altar of the Jesuit church in Rome in 1685 and reproduced in engravings by Andrea Pozzo. The “event” of the large-scale decoration coincided with a forty-hour-long devotional display of the Holy Eucharist, when the faithful would sit for long periods in front of this expressly created theatrical monument and contemplate its meaning. The final paper of the day took us back to the earliest period considered in this conference, the eighth and early ninth centuries, and explored the phenomenon of the transference of saints’ relics from Muslim-dominated areas to the Christian world. Daniel DeSelms, whose paper is presented here, demonstrates how three important translations underscore the hardening of political frontiers and the widening of social divisions between the Muslim Caliphate and Christian West.

All of these papers examine images and objects that function like theatrical windows, magically transporting the viewer back to an earlier time for an immediate, forceful experience of the spiritual message. The images presented also all use the technique of interweaving familiar images from the audience’s own time with stories of the past to draw spectators in and allow them to relate more intimately to the event.

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Caliphate to Christendom:  
Trans-Mediterranean Relic Translation around 800

By Daniel DeSelm

Relic translations provide us with some of the best—and only—early medieval travel literature. The mixing of travel and literature are indeed suggested by the word “translation” itself, which is the technical ecclesiastical term for the movement of relics, usually the bodily remains of a dead saint, from one place to another. This act had tremendous ritual significance, enough to rate mentions in the most important contemporary chronicles, as well as a steady stream of texts in its own distinct literary genre, the translatio. From the Latin transferre, the word “translation” has a linguistic or literary connotation to the modern American ear, and when we hear it we think of the translation of a text or idiom from one language to another, or from one cultural context to another. But the word’s medieval meaning has as much to do with movement of people and objects through space as it does with the dissemination of ideas.¹ In either sense of the word, translations represented exercises in boundary crossings. Relics and the people who transported them crossed geographical and social boundaries from old communities to new ones. This was true whether relics simply moved across town from an old shrine to a new-built basilica or traveled thousands of miles from the farthest corners of the Christianized world. Relics crossed political, ecclesiastical, social, linguistic, and a myriad of other boundaries. Texts about translations implicitly describe these boundaries, and by extension, circumscribe a geography—or map—of both the old and new locations.

In this case, translation accounts represent a quite literal mapping of the premodern. Because relics moved, and because monks and clerics sought to explain and justify the relevance of their relics within their new settings, relic translation accounts tend to highlight the differences between old contexts and new, as well as the meaning and significance of the boundaries between them. Of the many boundary lines that encircled and crisscrossed the premodern West, one boundary in particular stands out as perhaps the most conspicuous difference between the map of the West in antiquity and the map of the West in the early Middle Ages. This is the long, blurry, at times controversial boundary between the Islamic Caliphate and Christian West.

As boundaries go, this one is rather sexy, and it has lured the attention of a large number of scholars over the years. The most conspicuous has to be Henri Pirenne, who as early as the 1920s

¹ For background on the wider phenomenon of relic translation and translation accounts see Martin Heinzelmann, “Translationsberichte und andere quellen des Reliquienkultes,” Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental 33 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979).
argued that the arrival of Islam into the Mediterranean threw a major cultural and military barrier across the heart of the old Roman world, forcing a redirection of commerce and power away from southern Europe and leading indirectly to the rise of northern Europe and the Carolingians centuries later.\(^2\) This boundary has also intrigued historians of relic translations. Starting in the nineteenth century, the Bollandists focused attention on the translations at issue in this paper, in addition to many others.\(^3\) In the 1970s, Patrick Geary examined the translation of St. Mark and a few other later trans-Mediterranean relic translations in some detail in his book on the theft and trade of relics in the Middle Ages.\(^4\) More recently, Michael McCormick has used relic translation to challenge Pirenne’s idea of an Islamic barrier in the Mediterranean. McCormick has explored the collections of relics in Carolingian churches to show that relics, and many other items, continued to circulate among Christian communities on both sides of the Mediterranean, or at the very least, that it remained feasible for relics to circulate in this way.\(^5\) I agree with these scholars that relic translation provides a new perspective on the nature and function of the Mediterranean boundary, but it is worth looking again at a particular subgroup of early translations that, together, shed new light on the dividing line between Christendom and Islam during an important formative period.

This period is a very early one for the movement of Christian relics. The three translations considered here all occurred within about a century of the completion of the Islamic conquest of the Maghreb; a short time, but long enough for the effects of Muslim overlordship to be felt by Christian communities on both sides of the Mediterranean. This period also falls largely after the end of large-scale Islamic conquests. Constantinople had by this time successfully withstood two Arab sieges, and the Carolingian Mayors of the Palace were on their way to driving the Muslims back into Iberia. This period also precedes the great era of continental invasions in the ninth century, of the Vikings, Magyars, and resurgent Muslims in Italy and southern Gaul. This period around the turn of the ninth century also attracted the attention of Henri Pirenne, coming as it did at the beginning of a great flourishing of documentation after the long drought that obscures the formative boundary-making period of 650–750. If we adhere to these chronological limits, three important, well-documented translations remain for us to consider. First, St. Augustine’s translation from Sardinia to Lombard Pavia around 724; second, the translations of Sts. Cyprian and Speratus from Carthage to Carolingian Lyon around 807; and third, St. Mark’s translation from Alexandria to Venice around 827.


\(^5\) McCormick, 283-318.
First, a brief synopsis of these three translations, beginning in chronological order with the translation of St. Augustine. St. Augustine of Hippo, the famous doctor of the early church, was actually the subject of a double-translation—two different overseas reburials by different groups during the eighth century. In the first translation, St. Augustine’s relics were taken from their initial burial place in his home city of Hippo to the island of Sardinia. Recent research has demonstrated that this first translation likely occurred not as a result of Arian Vandal persecution in the fifth century, but rather because of the Islamic conquest of the province of Africa in 703. Sadly, little is known of this translation beyond later eighth- and ninth-century writers attributing it to “barbarian” invasions there. Augustine’s second translation from Sardinia to Pavia on the Italian mainland is much more thoroughly documented. Bede made nearly contemporary references to it in both his *Chronica Minora* and his *Martyrologium*. Paul the Deacon and Ado of Vienne built upon his description a bit later, adding details about the relics’s reburial in Pavia. All three accounts tell a similar story: in about 723-24, King Liutprand of the Lombards heard that the Saracens were “laying waste” to Sardinia and “defiling” the region where the bones of St. Augustine had been carried sometime earlier because of “barbarian devastation” in Africa. Liutprand sent agents to Sardinia to purchase the relics from an unknown party for a great price, bear them across the sea to Ticinum, the new Lombard capital beginning to be known as Pavia, and rebury them there with great honor in a monastery newly founded by the king especially to house them.

Now we turn to the second translation, this one at the turn of the ninth century. In the year 807, the relics of Cyprian and Speratus were translated from Carthage, not far from Hippo, and ultimately ended up in Lyon on the Rhône River. Cyprian had been an important third-century bishop of Carthage and a paragon of orthodoxy against Donatist schismatics there, and Speratus had been leader of the Scillitan Martyrs of the late second century. A number of early ninth-century sources commemorate their translation, most notably a poem of sixty-seven hendecasyllables

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possibly attributable to Bishop Agobard of Lyon (816-840), though Agobard’s disciple Florus also commented on it as, independently, did the great martyrologist, Ado of Vienne.  

This story contains slight differences from the previous one. It opens with a group of Charlemagne’s ambassadors making their way back to Francia after meeting with the Muslim Caliph Haroun al-Raschid in Persia. The ambassadors used the occasion of their return trip to make a pilgrimage to Christian sites along the way home, first in the Holy Land, and finally, briefly, in Carthage. The Carolingian envoys were shocked to find the Christian sites of Carthage in complete disrepair, “enchained by barbarians and robbed of their honor.” With the permission of the Muslim “prince,” they gathered the two most famous relics, those of Cyprian and Speratus, into coffins, along with the skull of Pantaleon, a lesser saint. Accounts differ as to whether the Muslim “prince” in question was Haroun himself, or a local emir. The Translatio SS. Cypriani et Sperati indicates that the relics were given to them freely; Ado’s martyrology suggests that the relics were sold to the ambassadors for a small fee, since the “prince” feared he might earn Charlemagne’s wrath by asking for more. The envoys made the final leg of their journey by sea to Arles without incident. There the relics were welcomed with the usual adventus. Charlemagne himself ordered the relics to be carefully guarded at Arles until he could build them a suitable sepulcher somewhere in his kingdom. Building was delayed, however, and bishop Leydradus of Lyon, Agobard’s predecessor, seized the opportunity, with Charlemagne’s permission, to move the relics to his cathedral in Lyon where they remained permanently.

Translation number three concerns the translation of St. Mark from Alexandria, Egypt, to Venice in 827. The evangelist Mark had long been associated with Alexandria but was also connected by longstanding tradition with Aquilea and Grado and those cities’ political and cultural heir, Venice. Marc was remembered as a sort of “apostle to northern Italy,” and the supposed “Throne of St. Mark” had earlier been translated from Alexandria to Venice by the emperor
Heraclius in the seventh century. The sources on Mark’s translation are more problematic than the others, in large measure because the best one is anonymous and difficult to date precisely: the *Translatio Sancti Marci*. Its earliest manuscript dates to the tenth century and was incorporated wholesale into John the Deacon of Venice’s early eleventh-century chronicle of Venetian history. A brief contemporary account of Mark’s arrival in Venice also appears in the will of Doge Particiaco, the Venetian ruler who received the relics just before he died in 828. The *Translatio Sancti Marci*, despite its problems, remains an excellent source, extremely well-informed about both the Christian and Islamic worlds it describes. It presents a far more detailed and nuanced picture than we can hope for of the other two translations. Its story proceeds as follows: two Venetian merchants miraculously find themselves blown ashore in Alexandria despite a Byzantine-sponsored embargo on Islamic ports. While repairing their vessels they fall in with the local Christian community and suggest taking the relics of Mark back to Venice. Not surprisingly, the local Alexandrian clerics demur, not wanting to give up the relics of their city’s patron saint. Their attitude changes, however, when a decree by the Muslim “prince”—again, which prince remains unclear—demands that the cathedral be stripped of its ornamental marble for use in the prince’s faraway Babylonian palace. One Alexandrian cleric responds by systematically smashing the cathedral’s marble panels to deny them to the Muslims; this results in a brutal beating by Muslim authorities. This act of physical violence against a member of the cathedral clergy convinces two of the guards of Mark’s tomb, both monks, to hatch a plan to abscond with the relics and defect to Venice in secret, where they hope the Christian Doge will protect them, and Mark, from further affronts. Late one night the monks and merchants open Mark’s tomb and exchange the relics of a lesser saint for his. Returning to their ships, they smuggle the relics out of Alexandria hidden in a cargo of pork to dissuade prying Muslim customs officials. The ships flee back up the Adriatic, but stop short of Venice itself until the Doge pardons their offense against the embargo. The Doge, hearing about their cargo, personally welcomes them as heroes and enshrines the relics of Mark in his personal chapel.

These three translations exhibit important differences but also share a number of similarities. It is worth exploring these similarities in the context of premodern “boundary crossing” to consider the way they illustrate salient features of the great dividing line they traverse between the *Dâr al-Islâm*

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13 An alabaster throne bearing carvings of the four evangelists and said to be the symbolic seat of St. Mark in Alexandria was presented to the Patriarch of the city of Aquileia in 630, perhaps as a result of the popular story of Mark’s mission to the area. The throne was supposedly moved to Grado, then to Venice following the Lombard invasions. Heraclius’ bequest is mentioned in a number of later Venetian chronicles, starting with John the Deacon in the early eleventh century. The throne rests today in the *Tesoro* of St. Mark’s Cathedral. Art historians have described it as a fourth- or fifth-century Coptic work. See Otto Demus, *The Church of San Marco in Venice* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1960), 10, especially note 27. Mark’s throne is also briefly mentioned in the ninth-century *acta* of the Synod of Mantua; *MGH Concilia aevi Karolini*, A. Werminghof, ed. (Hannover, 1906-8), II/2, 583.

and western Christendom. The rest of this paper will focus on just two such features: first, the
meaning of royal participation in these translations as it relates to the hardening of the
Mediterranean frontier and, second, an emerging sense within these texts of the ethnographic
differences that were beginning to appear between people on either side of the new boundary.

Royal involvement, the first of these features, seems critical to all three translation accounts. All
require or revolve around the highest level of political authority to tell their story. Bede credits King
Liutprand with instigating, financing, facilitating, and receiving the translation of Augustine.
Likewise, the relics of Cyprian and Speratus are given either by the local Muslim king or the Caliph
himself to royal envoys of Charlemagne. The “official” nature of this gesture is hard to ignore; the
translation of these relics was directly tied to the exercise of the power of the Frankish kingdom.
The translation account also leaves open the possibility that the relics of Cyprian and Speratus were
given to Charlemagne’s representatives, and thus to Charlemagne himself, as part of an ongoing
diplomatic gift exchange between the Caliphate and the Carolingians. In the third translation,
although the Venetian Doge doesn’t instigate the translation, both the Venetian merchants and the
Alexandrian monks who accompany Mark look to the Doge as a way out of Islamic persecution.
The Doge, furthermore, legalizes and legitimizes the translation under his aegis, and then takes a
personal interest in the relics once they arrive. Moreover, royal participation in these translations
underscores their fundamental “foreignness.” After all, the right to conduct foreign
relations is a hallmark of royal power. The rights to conduct diplomacy, send embassies, and enter
into lawful treaties with foreign powers are typically reserved to kings or would-be kings alone. The
regulation of international trade in any kind of goods is usually a privilege exercised by the highest
authority. The Carolingians’ royal trading emporia regulated overseas trade, and we can see in our
translations that the Byzantines and Venetians imposed embargoes to restrict trade with Muslim
ports. Indeed, long-distance trade of any kind in the medieval world—without delving too deeply
into a great controversy—remained restricted to elite goods and the trappings of elite power.15
Structurally similar to long-distance trade, all three translations were complex, expensive, lengthy
undertakings that could only be bankrolled by a king or the famous merchant fleets of Venice.

In these translations royal participation appears as a necessary condition for success. This
requirement contrasts with another famous early medieval translation, that of the relics of St. Bene-
dict from the ruins of Monte Cassino in central Italy to the Frankish monastery of Fleury on the
Loire River in Merovingian Gaul.16 That much-studied translation, dating to about 672, before our
period, involved an opportunistic theft of relics from a ruined monastery by a group of traveling
monks. No meaningful royal involvement took place there. By contrast, though our three transla-
tions do involve the occasional traveling monk, they all require royal authority to reach fruition.
The singular importance of rulers in these accounts suggests that the formerly Roman-Christian lands
across the Mediterranean now lay on the other side of a kind of static, formalized, and formidable
international border. This suggests that Henri Pirenne was right, that easy links across the

15 Verhulst, 97-115; Hodges and Whitehouse, 77-122.
16 Adrevald of Fleury, Miracula s. Benedicti (BHL 1123), E. de Certain (ed.), Les miracles de Saint Benoît, écrits par Adrevald
Anmoine, André, Raoul Tortaire et Hughes de Saint Marie, Moines de Fleury, réunis et pub. pour la Société de l’histoire de France (Paris:
Chez Mme. veuve J. Renouard, 1858), 15-83.
Mediterranean had truly been broken, presumably by the Islamic invasions and the new geopolitics they created. Another aspect of royal participation in these accounts underscores this impression. If we look beyond these translations to the wider universe of relic translation, the presence of kings was often required to legitimize problematic translations. Bishops, for example, regularly sought permission or even direct participation from kings to overcome native opposition to removing relics at the beginning of a translation. Similarly, the Venetian Doge decriminalized the translation of Mark’s relics despite its patent illegality. In other words, monarchs could make translations happen through the force of their influence even if other factors were working against them. This is especially true with our trans-Mediterranean translations. Only kings and doges enjoyed the kind of power and influence that stretch across international borders to facilitate the removal of relics from overseas. Of course, western Christendom, too, remained divided by internal boundaries during this period—some of them rather formidable military frontiers—but as the translation of St. Benedict and others like it prove, royal involvement was not always necessary to translate relics across internal boundaries dividing postclassical Christian kingdoms within western Europe. The boundary between western Christendom and the Islamic world, on the other hand, does seem to have presented such a barrier, one that required a special impetus from the highest level of political authority to surmount.

Moving beyond the role of royalty in these translation accounts, another similarity has implications for this “border” between Islam and western Christendom: the motivating factors behind the translations themselves. In all of our three translations the ultimate reason for each had to do with Islamic persecution, destruction, or neglect of Christian communities and Christian sites in North Africa. Bede could not be clearer that the threat of destruction by Muslims in Sardinia inspired Liutprand to rescue Augustine’s relics. Bede further implies that Augustine’s relics had been pulled from Africa initially due to Islamic invasions there a few decades earlier. Similarly, although Charlemagne’s envoys arrived with no intention of recovering the relics of Cyprian and Speratus, when they saw the dilapidated condition of the saints’ tombs they were moved to ask for permission. Mark’s relics, too, according to the texts, were acquired by accident because of Muslim pillaging. A Christian community survived in Alexandria and still participated in Mark’s cult, which was perhaps no longer the case for Cyprian in Carthage, but Alexandrian Christians did come under pressure. When a Muslim prince sought to despoil the cathedral of its ornamental marble and a monk was beaten for defying the order, this finally motivated the defection of Alexandrian clergy, along with Mark’s relics.

We see these relics essentially forced out of Islamic lands because of both active and passive attacks on Christian sites in the southern Mediterranean—or so our narrators would have it. The way these texts depict events, Muslims threatened actual physical harm to these cults, as is clear in the cases of Augustine and Mark. As for the relics of Cyprian and Speratus, the dilapidated condition

of their tombs in Carthage may have resulted from similar Muslim destruction or from creeping disrepair and abandonment of the cult site in the absence of official government patronage. Either way, it was enough to shock Charlemagne’s envoys into liberating the saints’ relics from the ignominy of their decaying tombs. This, at least, is how the eighth- and ninth-century authors who witnessed these events described the rationale behind them. Modern scholars have tended to look past the threat of Muslim devastation for other factors that may underlie these translations, such as political motivation. Some have argued that Mark’s relics were taken from Alexandria not for the reason put forth in the texts but rather so that the Venetians could gain an alternative holy patron provided by a neutral source; that is, neither Frankish nor Byzantine. Conversely, some have seen the translation of Augustine as an attempt on Liutprand’s part to demonstrate his credentials as a rex Catholicus by endowing his new capital with the relics of such a famous defender of Christian orthodoxy. Finally, as I suggested earlier, we might consider the translation of Cyprian and Speratus as just a typical aspect of diplomatic gift exchange, alongside the elephant that Charlemagne famously received as a token of friendship from Caliph Haroun al-Raschid at around the same time.

The various interpretations of the translations considered here remain interesting and useful, and I do not mean to suggest that they are incorrect. However, these manifestly political interpretations unnecessarily disregard the explanations presented in the translation accounts themselves, and thus obscure other factors relevant to the question of the new “Mediterranean border.” The scholars who have proposed these interpretations remain justifiably concerned with the historicity of these translations and whether the events the texts describe match reality. I am less concerned with this question and more concerned with the way contemporary authors perceived these translations and presented them to the “consumers” of the translated relics; that is, the participants in their new cults. If we take the authors’ justifications at face value, Islamic persecution as a motivating factor clearly dominates. This belief suggests intriguing ethnographic implications that may help flesh out our picture of the border between Islam and western Christendom during this very early period.

The relevant texts for all three translations portray their relics in a state of imminent peril in faraway communities, either subject to persecution or abandoned. This allows the Christian writers who describe these translations to look out across the Mediterranean, safe in their own Christian kingdoms, and see themselves as the “liberators” of Christian relics, to think of themselves as the only legitimate possessors of these treasures of the church. For them it seemed perfectly appropriate for the part of the Mediterranean under Islamic control—once a major epicenter of Christianity and still manifestly containing large numbers of practicing Christians, but now patently beyond the bounds of Christendom—to be devoid of the relics of its most important saints. Ideally the boundaries of political power should align more tidily with the boundaries of holiness. Thus these translation accounts demonstrate the increasing fragmentation of the Mediterranean world. These texts, intentionally or not, project the areas on the other side of the Islamic boundary in opposition to Christendom and increase the pace of cultural detachment from these formerly Christian areas. From the western Christian perspective of these texts, Muslims look like fools who fail to recognize

the value of relics, and Christians there appear either absent or as downtrodden victims of ongoing institutionalized oppression. These unfortunate Christians, living under Islamic rule, are not applauded as martyrs who struggle bravely in the name of their faith; rather, Christians on the northern side of the Mediterranean prefer to perceive themselves as the retrenched vanguard of Christianity—the ones who should collect these relics. There, on the “right” side of the Christian/Muslim border, the safety of the relics could be assured and the salvific mission of the church continue uncompromised.

I suggest that the Mediterranean boundary between Christian north and Islamic south, as controversial as it has become among modern scholars, remained a complex and, more importantly, real one to writers and readers of eighth- and ninth-century translation accounts. As mentioned earlier, Michael McCormick has suggested that this border was an illusion and life in the Mediterranean continued in the eighth and ninth centuries largely as it had in the seventh, before the Islamic invasions. This paints an incomplete picture; but so does Henri Pirenne's insistence that the Mediterranean had by this time become a sort of early medieval iron curtain that would only be pierced by the Crusades and the Spanish Reconquista. These ideas, in fact, need not be mutually incompatible. This reality demonstrates the fundamental paradox of our three translations: St. Augustine, Sts. Cyprian and Speratus, and St. Mark. Although they clearly illustrate how the boundary splitting the Mediterranean from the Spain to Asia Minor had widened into such a chasm that only kings could cross it and the world on the other side had been wholly pinched off from Christendom in the eyes of our authors, these relics and the people who transported them did in fact cross that boundary. Ironically, the very self-awareness with which medieval authors describe the crossing of this boundary proves just how nearly impassable the barrier had become in their eyes. In other words, it is only by traversing this cultural and military frontier, by moving these relics from one setting to another, that our early medieval authors were forced to contend with the increasingly permanent delineation of the southern limit of the Christian world in the early Middle Ages.

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Mapping the Premodern

The 26th Newberry Library Center for Renaissance Studies

Graduate Student Conference

January 25, 2008

Chicago, Illinois

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