Earle Birney’s “Mappemounde”: Visualizing Poetry With Maps

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Abstract

This paper is about “Mappemounde,” a beautiful but difficult poem composed in 1945 by the esteemed Canadian poet Earle Birney. While exploring the reasons for its composition, we examine the poem’s debts to Old and Middle English poetry as well as to medieval world maps known as mappaemundi, especially those made in England prior to 1400. But Birney took only so much from these maps. In search of more elusive inspirations, both cartographic and otherwise, we uncover other sources: Anglo-Saxon poems never before associated with “Mappemounde,” maps from the Age of Discovery and beyond, concealed details of Birney’s personal life. Then we trace Birney’s long-standing interest in geography and exploration to show how he used maps, especially mappaemundi, as visual metaphors for his intellectual, spiritual, and personal life.

Keywords

Poetry about Maps; Medieval World Maps/Mappaemundi; Medieval Poetry; Renaissance Maps; Moby Dick

Full Text: [PDF]

Refbacks

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Mappemounde. by Earle Birney. No not this old whalehall can whelm us, shiptamed, gullgraced, soft to our glidings. Harrows that mere more that squares our map. See in its north where scribe has marked mermen, shore-sneakers who croon, to the seafarer’s girl chars in the breast-hoard the dear face-charm. Southward Cetegrande, that sly beast who sucks in. with whirlwind also the wanderer’s pledges. That sea is hight Time, it hems heart’s landtrace. Men say the redeless, reaching its bounds, topple in maelstrom, tread back never. Adread in that mere we drift toward map’s end. Rate this poem: Report SPAM. @inproceedings{Delmonte2015VisualizingPW, title={Visualizing Poetry with SPARSAR - Visual Maps from Poetic Content}, author={Rodolfo Delmonte}, booktitle={CL@NAACL-HLT}, year={2015} }.

Rodolfo Delmonte. Published in CL@NAACL-HLT 2015. DOI:10.3115/v1/W15-0708. In this paper we present a specific application of SPARSAR, a system for poetic analysis and TextToSpeech "expressive reading". We will focus on the graphical output organized at three macro levels, a Phonetic Relational View where phonetic and phonological features are highlighted; a Poetic Relational View that accounts for a poem rh