

Earle Birney's "Mappemounde": Visualizing Poetry With Maps

Adele J. Haft
Department of Classical
and Oriental Studies
Hunter College
The City Univ. of New York
695 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10021
ahaft@hunter.cuny.edu

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*.

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Earle Birney was one of Canada's most beloved writers and public figures, a man whose life spanned most of the twentieth century from 1904 to 1995. Among his finest poems is "Mappemounde," written in 1945 when Birney was forty-one. This paper introduces "Mappemounde," then explores the poem's inspirations and analogues—literary as well as cartographic. These range from Anglo-Saxon poetry and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* to medieval *mappaemundi* and maps from the Age of Discovery. Our survey reveals not only the complexity of "Mappemounde" but the degree to which Birney uses medieval world maps as visual metaphors for his life and the world he knew.

Earle Birney's "Mappemounde"

No not this old whalehall can whelm us
shiptamed gullgraced soft to our glidings
Harrows that mere more which squares our map
See in its north where scribe has marked *mermen*
shore-sneakers who croon to the seafarer's girl
next year's gleewords East and west *nadders*
flamefanged bale-twisters their breath dries up tears
chars in the breast-hoard the brave picture-faces
Southward *Cetegrande* that sly beast who sucks in
with whirlwind also the wanderer's pledges
That sea is hight Time it hems all hearts' landtrace
Men say the redeless reaching its bounds
topple in maelstrom tread back never
Adread in that mere we drift toward map's end

Line 1. "Whalehall": i.e., "the sea" (Birney 1972, 85)¹

Line 3. "Mere": Old English, "the sea"

Line 6. "Gleewords": Old English *glitword*, "song" (Jakes 1979, 73) "Nadders": Old English *naedre*, "adder," "serpent," "dragon" (Birney 1972, 84)

- Line 7. "Bale": Old English *bealu*, "evil," "destructive"
 Line 8. "Breast-hoard": Old English *breosthord*, "thoughts"; i.e., "the memory of loved ones" (Birney 1972, 85)
 Line 9. "Cetegrande": Old French *cete grande*, "great whale"
 Line 11. "Hight": Old English *haten*, "called," "named"
 Line 12. "Redeless": Old English *raedleas*, "resourceless," "helpless"
 Line 14. "Adread": Old English *ofdraedd*, "frightened," "terrified"

In 1945, Earle Birney was on his way home. A major in the Canadian Army during World War II, Birney had contracted diphtheria while on duty in Europe. After treatment in an English military hospital, he was awaiting his return on the hospital ship *El Nil*, when he overheard Canadian soldiers and their English girlfriends pledge eternal love. Wondering how many promises would be broken by distance and time, Birney composed "Mappemounde" as he sailed west over the Atlantic. About a seafarer's ill-fated struggle to cross the ocean of medieval world maps, "Mappemounde" laments the ephemerality of love, fidelity, and life itself (Birney 1972, 86; Aichinger 1979, 76-78).

Birney would later credit World War II with making him a poet (Davey 1971, 20-21). He received his first prestigious Governor General's Award for poetry in 1942. The second came in 1945, the year he wrote "Mappemounde." Three years later, Birney placed the poem immediately after the one opening his third collection of poetry, *The Strait of Anian* (Birney 1948, 4). Since then, "Mappemounde" has been heavily anthologized. Acknowledging its importance, Birney included revised versions in his *Selected Poems 1940-1966* (Birney 1966, 90), *Ghost in the Wheels* (Birney 1977b, 34), and the *Collected Poems of Earle Birney*, from which our text derives.² (*The Collected Poems of Earle Birney* by Earle Birney, 2 vols., Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975, 1:92. Courtesy of Wailan Low, executor of the estate of Earle Birney.)

The poem's charm, as well as its difficulty, has its origin in Old English (c.450-c.1100) and Middle English (c.1100-c.1500). An academic as well as a poet, Birney had received his doctorate in English from the University of Toronto in 1936 and taught there before serving overseas. After the war, he went on to teach medieval literature and creative writing at the University of British Columbia (1946-1965). There, he regularly offered courses on Old English and Geoffrey Chaucer, who was the subject of both his dissertation and a book of essays on irony (Birney 1985). Birney was so adept at medieval English "that he often quipped in phrases or lines from early literary works" (Cameron 1994, 380, and 352).

As the words appended to the poem attest, "Mappemounde" abounds in the Anglo-Saxon and Viking-borne Norse vocabulary of Old English. The noun *nadder* ("serpent") may be as obsolete as the adjectives *redeless* ("helpless") and *adread* ("fearful"). But the names of the cardinal directions, the adverbial suffix "-ward," and the strong, monosyllabic verbs "suck," "hem," "tread," and "drift" all betray the Germanic roots of Modern English. "Mappemounde" also mimics the Old English use of vivid metaphorical compounds, called *kennings*, to replace simple nouns: "gleeword" (*glieword*, "entertaining-word") rather than "song," "breast-hoard" instead of "thoughts." For the Anglo-Saxon *scop* ("bard"), kennings displayed poetic talent and aided the oral transmission of verse. Birney imitated their bardic practice. By combining words derived from Old English, he created "whalehall" (*hwael + heall*) along with its wealth of associations no longer obvious in the more prosaic "sea."

Also reminiscent of Old English verse are the poem's alliteration and rhythmic pattern. Accents and italics help us visualize how the second line

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sounds when read aloud, particularly its four major stresses and repetitions of initial “s” and “g”:

shíptamed gúllgraced sóft to our glídings...

“‘Mappemounde’ imagines the sea voyage—with its isolation and terror, its loneliness and awe—as a poignant metaphor for life’s journey.”

In “Mappemounde,” Birney’s division of lines into two parts signals the poem’s roots in Anglo-Saxon poetry. Such obvious *caesurae* (or pauses) are used by editors of Old English poetry to emphasize that every line is actually a combination of two short phrases, each with its own rhythm and two stressed syllables. The scop joined these phrases when he alliterated the sound beginning one or more of their stressed syllables: “shiptamed” and “soft,” “gullgraced” and “glidings.” By inserting central caesurae and eliminating the punctuation that distinguished his *Strait of Anian* version (where the line read “shiptamed, gullgraced, soft to our glidings”), Birney deliberately recast “Mappemounde” in a typography unfamiliar to the non-specialist and made the poem look as strange as it sounds. Yet its very “foreignness” is key to its heritage. Old English might as well be a foreign language, and Anglo-Saxon poetry not only was meant to be heard but was composed and transmitted orally (Birney 1972, 85; Alexander 1966; Bessinger 1974, 587-88).

Nor did Birney stop there. In theme and content “Mappemounde” recalls such classics of Old English literature as *Beowulf*, *The Wanderer*, and *The Seafarer*. Birney’s *nadders* conjure up the fire-breathing, treasure-hoarding dragons in Germanic literature, like the one Beowulf slays in the oldest extant Anglo-Saxon poem (*Beowulf*, 2000-3187, in Jack 1994; see Raver 2000). Birney’s “wanderer” and his ill-fated “pledges” evoke the speaker of *The Wanderer*, a man forced to sea after the deaths of lord and kin. Birney’s “seafarer” and “whalehall” allude to *The Seafarer*, whose protagonist crisscrosses the *hwaetweg* (“whale-route”), far from his loved ones and *bitter in breosthord* (lines 55-63: see Alexander 1966, 90-105; Crossley-Holland 1982, 47-52). Like *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, “Mappemounde” imagines the sea voyage—with its isolation and terror, its loneliness and awe—as a poignant metaphor for life’s journey.

Birney’s title, however, is not Anglo-Saxon. The medieval word *mappemounde* appears six centuries after the composition of *Beowulf* and three centuries after William the Conqueror installed a French-speaking aristocracy on English soil. In fact, when the word was first recorded near the end of the fourteenth century, the royal court still spoke Anglo-French.³ Birney picked this Middle English word, in part, because Chaucer—the focus of Birney’s scholarly work—may have been the first to write it in English. Here are the opening lines of Chaucer’s lyric poem, “To Rosemounde”:⁴

Madame, ye ben of al beautè shryne
As fer as cerclid is the mappemounde;...

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Mappemounde is one of eleven words that Chaucer rhymes with “Rosemounde,” the name he gives to the poem’s unidentified beloved in line 15. “To Rosemounde” is a light-hearted *ballade* about courtly love modeled on the French forms Chaucer preferred for his shorter poems (Davies 1963, 42-43; Reeves 1970, 157-58). Though the speaker declares undying love in the face of his beloved’s thrice-remarked indifference (“thogh ye to me ne do no daliaunce”: lines 8,16,24), he cannot help also comparing his passion to a fish wallowed in sauce (“...pyk walwed in galauntyne”: line 17). Birney had catalogued some of that poem’s whimsical qualities in his essay “The Beginnings of Chaucer’s

Irony," which was published six years before he wrote "Mappemounde" (1939, in Birney 1985, 56-59). It may, therefore, have been his intent to contrast "Mappemounde" ironically with one of its inspirations: "To Rosemounde" couldn't differ more from Birney's melancholy, heavily stressed verses.

Birney clearly chose the word *mappemounde* for its cartographic implications. To use the words of the Chaucerian editor, Walter Skeat, Rosemounde is the shrine of all beauty "as far as the map of the world extends" (Skeat [1899] 1952, 549). Writing in the second half of the fourteenth century, Chaucer imagined the earth that was portrayed in contemporary world maps—an island "cerceled" by the ocean/sea (cf. Tomasch 1992). Historians call such maps *mappaemundi*, "maps of the world," which is the plural form of the medieval Latin *mappa mundi* (du Cange 1954, 5:255). Approximately 1100 *mappaemundi* survive of those made in Europe between the fifth and the mid-fifteenth centuries. Some are little more than sketches of a "T-O" shaped world: they show the earth as an ocean-embraced circle of land ("O") divided by the cross-like intersection ("T") of the Mediterranean Sea with the Don (Tanais) and Nile rivers forming the boundaries of the three known continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. Other *mappaemundi* are adorned with hundreds of names, pictures, and legends. Still others portray the earth divided into five (later seven) zones, with frigid polar regions, temperate zones, and a central uninhabitable belt at the equator known as the *perusta zona* ("the burnt up zone"). Most represent the world as a Christian allegory, featuring prominent figures from the Old and New Testaments alongside characters from classical mythology and ethnographies. Although gradually modified by trade and travel, *mappaemundi* continued to superimpose Christian theological views about space upon Greco-Roman conceptions of geography. Even during Chaucer's time, in the late Middle Ages, many world maps resembled those made in the thirteenth century and earlier (Harvey 1991, 37; Delano-Smith and Kain 1999, 15-22).

Birney's "Mappemounde," *Mappaemundi*, and Early English World Maps

Birney displays his familiarity with *mappaemundi* throughout "Mappemounde."⁵ His reference to "scribe" reminds us that the vast majority of *mappaemundi* illustrated the Bibles, psalters, and encyclopedic treatises produced in cathedral communities and monastic *scriptoria* ("writing-rooms"). Monks, trained as scribes, copied these texts by hand and drew the accompanying maps (Woodward 1987, 286 and 324; Campbell 1987, 428-29). Birney's emphasis upon the cardinal directions reflects their prominence on *mappaemundi*. Although zonal *mappaemundi* had varying orientations, most medieval world maps feature east at the top because the Bible locates the earthly paradise there (Genesis 2:8; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies* 14.3.1-2). "East" represents man's early innocence and the promise of everlasting life in Heaven. "West," by contrast, symbolizes the world's decay and the eternal damnation of sinners in the depths of Hell (see below, and Baritz 1961). Birney's *nadders* suggest the dragons lurking in the west, below the world's frame on the diminutive Psalter map, made around 1300 (Figure 1, page 65). Though illustrating a book of Psalms, the Psalter map is distinctly apocalyptic. It displays Christ above, in the east, flanked by angels; below, in the west, two dragons represent Satan and his emissaries. In "Mappemounde" Birney multiples the dragons, locating them in the east and west, and calling them *nadders*, which means "devils" as well as "serpents" or "dragons."

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Birney was aware that the medieval term *mappa mundi* did not have to imply a graphic representation of the world; it could also mean a *verbal* description, one like “Mappemounde” itself (Woodward 1987, 287-88; Delano-Smith and Kain 1999, 7). As we shall see, his poem does not describe any single map, nor does it conform to any single image of the world. Instead, it begins by offering a uniquely ironic view of *mappaemundi*—particularly those created, like the Psalter map, in England prior to Chaucer’s death in 1400.⁶

We confront an inadequate representation of these *mappaemundi* in a sketch map by an unidentified artist, Figure 2 (page 66), which is the only illustration in Birney’s critical study, *The Cow Jumped Over the Moon: The Reading and Writing of Poetry* (Birney 1972). Based on actual medieval maps, it was inspired by and illustrates Birney’s five-page guide to “Mappemounde.” At the top of the map, a serpent-entwined tree flanks an embarrassed Adam and Eve; the circle around them represents Eden, from which they are about to be expelled. The map reveals that their descendants spread out from the east, eventually crossing rivers and mountains to build cities as far as the edge of the circumfluent ocean. Beyond the habitable tripartite world of Asia (top), Europe (lower left), and Africa (lower right) lies the “unknown.” Unexplored regions are often graphically expressed by monstrous human hybrids on *mappaemundi*, like those lining the southern border of the Psalter map. On the sketch-map, as in Birney’s “Mappemounde,” the strange creatures in the corners play a similar role.

The sketch map’s whimsical illustrations, however, are better suited to Birney’s later *explanation* of “Mappemounde” than to the bleak “Hardyeane irony” of the poem he composed thirty years earlier (Birney 1972, 86). Let’s ignore the fact that the *nadders* do not oppose each other across the map, and that the whale is the only creature in its proper place (“southward”). Let’s overlook the fact that the poem contains no mermaid; and that Birney’s 1972 explanation, which *does*, neglects to mention Ulysses’ ball-of-wax trick when he encounters such “treacherous mermaids” on his return from antiquity’s legendary world war (Birney 1972, 85; *Odyssey* 12.177-200). Even so, the creatures in the corners are disconcerting. They look no more terrifying than the figures of Triton, Neptune, Thetis, and Aeolus arrayed around a zonal map in a thirteenth-century copy of the *Etymologies* by Isidore of Seville, for example (Figure 3, page 67). The 1972 sketch-map seems to have combined such naive figures with Chaucer’s light-hearted touch in order to teach well-meaning, if slightly obtuse readers how to approach “Mappemounde.” In his attempt to counter charges of his poem’s obscurity and to increase appreciation of poetry generally, Birney offers a delightful lecture—but strips “Mappemounde” of its dark complexity. The sketch map, for all its charm, trivializes the very material it should help us envision.

To make sense of Birney’s poem, we need to go to the actual maps themselves. Let’s imagine, then, that Birney *had* been offered the opportunity to illustrate “Mappemounde” with the *mappaemundi* that inspired his poem’s setting. Which of them, besides the Psalter map, might he have chosen?

The Anglo-Saxon map immediately springs to mind (Figure 4, page 68). Dating to the tenth or eleventh century, it is one of the earliest world maps that survives, and the *only* example of a non-zonal map from the Old English period.⁷ Also known as the Cotton [Tiberius] map, it is as remarkable for its precocious depiction of the British Isles as it is unusual for the rectangular shapes of land and sea. The Anglo-Saxon map is one of the few *mappaemundi* that matches the wording of the version of “Mappe-

mounde" from *The Strait of Anian*: "Harrows that mere more *that* squares our map" (line 3: italics mine).⁸ This earlier version of the poem seems to mean "that sea—the one that squares our map—torments us more than the 'shiptamed' one we are now crossing." Yet the very rectangularity of its sea prevents the Anglo-Saxon map from having room for anything at the corners, an option on the nearly ubiquitous circular or oval world-maps. It is precisely that extra space that Birney wanted to emphasize when he revised the line to read "Harrows that mere more *which* squares our map" (italics mine). Instead of referring back to the poem's previous lines, the revised sentence looks ahead to his catalogue describing "those strange designs which scribes placed in the corners of that perilous sea" (Birney 1972, 84).

Italian mapmakers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are especially noteworthy for this feature. Pietro Vesconte, the earliest chartmaker known to us by name, worked in Venice. On four of the early fourteenth-century atlases ascribed either to him or to Perrino Vesconte, portraits of saints illuminate the corners of the portolan charts.⁹ (The *portolano*, or early nautical chart, with its geographical accuracy and usefulness for both navigation and trade, its distinctive windroses and network of intersecting rhumb lines, is now treated separately from the *mappamundi*. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, however, the term *mappa mundi* embraced both allegorical world maps and practical sea charts based on compass readings. [Woodward 1987, 287; Campbell 1987, 439]) There is also a fascinating anonymous 1390 Venetian atlas, which pictures the authors of the gospels in the corners of at least one of its portolan charts (Mollat and Roncière 1984, fig.10 and 204). Each evangelist appears as one of the six-winged, many-eyed creatures from the Book of Revelation. In the Bible, they stand beside God's throne proclaiming his eternal glory (Revelation 4:7, in [Bible] 1973):

the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle.

On the chart, each saint presides over one of the earth's four corners, and each holds a scroll bearing his name (Woodward 1987, 336).

The figures on this chart help us read the 1452 *mappamundi* of the Venetian cosmographer, Giovanni Leardo, who incorporated portolan rhumb lines into his world map (Campbell 1987, 379 n.71). Part of the left side of the Leardo map is missing and the figures in the corners are unnamed, but the vague images of the evangelists are recognizable. The Leardo map arranges its figures differently than the anonymous 1390 portolan: Mark, the lion, appears in the southeast (upper right); Luke, the ox, in the southwest (lower right); Matthew, looking like an angel, in the northwest (lower left); and John, the eagle, in the northeast (only his head is visible: upper left). Furthermore, the Leardo map emphasizes the interconnectedness of time and space, an intimacy as explicit on *mappae-mundi* as in Birney's phrase "that sea is hight Time." Leardo's evangelists frame not only the circular world map but also a number of calendrical rings emanating from it. The central ring, for instance, specifies the dates of every Easter until 1547 (Wright 1928, 3-4; Woodward 1987, 338, cf. 355).

In addition to the Italian maps, Birney had an English source that predates them—the twelfth-century Sawley map, formerly known as the Henry of Mainz *mappamundi* (Figure 5, page 69). In contrast to the Anglo-Saxon map, which scholars consider heavily indebted to Roman

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and, possibly, Carolingian models (McGurk 1983, 86; Harvey 1991, 21-26; Delano-Smith and Kain 1999, 34), the Sawley map “is generally accepted as the earliest surviving *English* example of a *mappamundi*” (Delano-Smith and Kain 1999, 37, emphasis mine). Drawn most likely at Durham Cathedral Priory and then transferred to Sawley Abbey in Yorkshire sometime around 1200, this *mappamundi* appears as the frontispiece to a copy of the immensely popular eleventh-century encyclopedia, the *Imago Mundi*, by Honorius Augustodunensis (Harvey 1997, 33, 36-37; Delano-Smith and Kain 1999, 36). Like the Anglo-Saxon *mappamundi*, the Sawley map is oriented to the east, the words *Oriens* and “Paradise” being visible at the top. But this time the world is an oval with four angels gracing its corners.

The angels should not lure us into thinking that the Sawley map is more sentimental than the Psalter map. They probably symbolize the apocalyptic events preceding the Last Judgment: in Revelation, four angels appear at the four corners of the earth after the Lamb has broken the sixth seal, and together they hold back the four winds (7:1). On the Sawley map, the angel in the northeast (top left) points toward Gog and Magog, warning that the man-eating hordes of Cain’s *gens imunda* (“impure race”) will soon break free from their Caspian confines to ensure the world’s demise (Revelation 20:7-9). More foreboding still are the angels at the bottom of the map: stationed at the western edge of the world, they represent the end of time and the imminent demise of the world as we know it. The final book of Honorius’ text details the medieval belief, popular since Augustine and Bede, that history has followed a westward course since the creation of man. At the end of the sixth age will come the apocalypse, the six-day destruction of the world, followed by the Last Judgment on the seventh. On the Sawley map, the angel in the southeast corner carries a book. Whether this book represents Honorius’ text, the Book of Revelation, or the Bible itself doesn’t matter; each reminds us that the faithful alone will triumph over this terrifying eventuality.¹⁰

Closely associated with the Sawley map in content is the monumental Hereford map in Hereford Cathedral (Bevan and Phillott [1873] 1969, chpt.1, sect.14.3). Wonderfully preserved and detailed, the Hereford map is the only surviving example of what may be a typically English style of *mappaemundi* from the thirteenth century—the large world maps displayed on palace or abbey walls and used, perhaps, as altar-pieces or decorations (Harvey 1991, 25; Edson 1997, 141). Because of its size, the Hereford map is a veritable encyclopedia of legends, cities, and creatures, presenting the interconnectedness of time and space more graphically than any other *mappamundi* (Figure 6, page 70). Not only do we see mythical monsters and historical cities beside scenes showing Christ’s crucifixion and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise; the map also demonstrates that civilization began in the east and has followed a “linear” course west through the center of the known world. The Garden of Eden represents the beginning of life and the knowledge that precipitated our fall; the Tower of Babel, the scattering of peoples throughout the earth; Jerusalem, the central pivot of human history; Delos, the Greek navel of the world, pictured beside a seductive mermaid; Rome, the imperial city turned capital of the Church; and the Pillars of Hercules (Strait of Gibraltar), the traditional western limit of man’s knowledge of the world. The placement of these areas on a vertical line running through the center of the Hereford map highlights their temporal and geographic import for mankind (Moir 1970, 13; Westrem 2001, xxxii; cf. Edson 1997, 26, 34-35, 50, 140-144; and see Haft 2003).

Details in “Mappemounde” reveal Birney’s familiarity with the Hereford map. Two *dracones* (“dragons”) appear in Taphana (Ceylon/Sri

Lanka), the large triangular island in the mouth of the rubricated Red Sea and Persian Gulf on the map's southeast edge (top right). Of the wind gods depicted, eight are dragon-heads spewing fire across the ocean. Just below Jerusalem, at the center of the map, an enchanting mermaid admires herself as she rests on the oversized label *Mare Mediterranea* [sic]. Her position on the map, coupled with her lack of attire, suggest the temptations that beguile unwary pilgrims (Letts 1955, in Moir 1970, 36). In the frame at the top, Christ orders sinners after the Last Judgment into the gaping maw of a dragon-like monster (top right). An angel announces their fate on a scroll issuing from his trumpet: *Leuez—si alez au fu de enfer estable* ("Rise—you are going to the fire prepared in hell"). While most of the inscriptions on the map are in Latin, the angel's words are in Anglo-French, the language spoken by the English court when the Hereford map was made (Harvey 1997, 54; Westrem 2001, 4). And gold letters spelling *M-O-R-S* ("Death") appear on posts that extend from the ocean into the map's frame.

The Limitations of *Mappaemundi* for Understanding Birney's Poem

In many ways, of course, the *mappaemundi* I have described differ markedly from the poem they helped inspire. Though "Mappemounde" begins optimistically with one sea tamed and the other merely "squar[ing] our map," this second sea quickly becomes the center of the map, the poem, and life itself. Most medieval maps, however, privilege land over water—to such an extent that the ocean appears as a narrow ribbon encircling the continents. Yet, despite its appearance on maps, the earth was believed to be spherical by most medieval scholars, including Honorius.¹¹ Consider the ball Christ holds in his left hand on the Psalter map (Figure 1, page 65). It has the "T-O" pattern still recognizable on the Psalter map itself.

Mappaemundi raise the question: what did the other side of the earth look like? Though celestial globes were used for educational purposes in the fourteenth century and earlier, no evidence remains of any terrestrial globe: for all we know, Martin Behaim's *Erdapfel* ("Earth-Apple") of 1492 is not only the oldest extant globe depicting the earth but perhaps one of the first made in Europe since classical antiquity (Stevenson [1921] 1974, 1:43-47; Dekker and van der Krogt 1993, 17-18).¹² Medieval scholars are often vague or conflicting on the subject. The great thirteenth-century scientist Roger Bacon, for instance, posited that land filled six-sevenths of the globe (Wright [1925] 1965, 187-188; Bacon [1267-68] 1962, 1:311). Most others believed that the known world took up only a quarter of the surface; the possibility of other landmasses existing in the temperate zones opposite or south of the known world did not necessarily prevent the ocean from covering half the globe or more (Kimble [1938] 1968, 147, 162-63; Taylor 1966, 53; Westrem 2001, xxxviii). This "oceanic" theory simply can't be conveyed on most *mappaemundi* (Haft 1995, 26-29; Edson 1997, 110). Nor did the portolan charts fill the void. Until the Age of Discovery, they typically depicted coastal sections of the Atlantic and relatively contained bodies of water like the Mediterranean or the Black Sea. Destinations of merchants and sailors, such waters are pictured as embraced by shorelines and filled with comforting names of harbors. Birney, by contrast, focuses on what *mappaemundi* and portolan charts omit altogether: the other half of the globe, with its vast ocean stretching ominously beyond sight of land.

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"'Mappemounde' proves far less optimistic than its mapped counterparts."

"Journey's end is obliteration as
'we'—no longer viewers of the
map (line 3) but helpless
wanderers upon it (line 14)—
envisage 'toppl[ing] in
maelstrom' over the edge of map
and world."

avoid worldly temptations and save their souls. On the back of the Psalter map, for instance, Christ holds a T-O shaped world that represents or, at least, covers his body. Beside his head at the top of the map, four angels appeal with outstretched arms as he tramples the dragons of the west beneath his feet (Edson 1997, fig.7.1).¹³ St. John's vision of redemption and rebirth in the Book of Revelation finds its graphic counterpart on the Hereford map. There, in the upper frame, Mary's plea to Christ is fulfilled as the faithful rise from their graves on his right and line up for Paradise. Birney's "Mappemounde" offers no such escape from our faithless world.

Then there is Birney's representation of the ocean itself. If *mappaemundi* picture anything in that narrow band, it is the heads of wind gods blowing across the sea; some add islands, fish, even the occasional boat.¹⁴ Birney's sea is both lonelier and more threatening than the one plied by the speaker of *The Seafarer*; in "Mappemounde" the seafarer's only company is treacherous and destructive monsters. Confronted by references to divine mercy in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, scholars remain divided as to whether these brief prologues and epilogues are additions to a pagan poem that posited no afterlife (Crossley-Holland 1965, 107; Alexander 1966, 84-88). Birney's "Mappemounde," of course, includes no such postscript, and no Christian message at all. It remains as irreconcilably pessimistic as the lines preceding the contested final stanza of *The Wanderer* (Alexander 1966, 96):

Wealth is lent us, friends are lent us,
man is lent, kin is lent;
all this earth's frame shall stand empty.

Despite his emphasis on the cardinal directions, Birney favors none of them. Portolan charts share this lack of orientation so that they may be read from every direction (Campbell 1987, 378). But in "Mappemounde," there is no way to navigate the "dreadful ocean" (Birney 1972, 84). Journey's end is obliteration as "we"—no longer viewers of the map (line 3) but helpless wanderers upon it (line 14)—envisage "toppl[ing] in maelstrom" over the edge of map and world. So Birney, medieval scholar and master of irony, plays his final cartographic trick: echoing the nineteenth-century view that the earth was considered flat in the Middle Ages (see Jones 1934, 296-307).

"Like the devil, the whale is
sly, tempting fish into his maw
by the sweetness of his breath.
Then 'those grim jaws snap
around their prey,' just as the
devil 'slams shut hell's doors
after the slaughter'."

Other Inspirations: Cartographic and Otherwise

Maps, of course, were not Birney's only inspiration. In *Patience*, an anonymous poem written in the northwest Midlands around the time of Chaucer's "To Rosemounde," a *wylde walterande whal* ("a wild, rolling whale") swallows Jonah after he attempts to shirk his duty to God (Gollancz 1913, line 247; Kurath 1952-). There is also "The Whale," an Anglo-Saxon poem never before linked to "Mappemounde." "The Whale," an anonymous composition from the ninth century, was recorded over a century later in the Exeter Book, the same manuscript that contains the texts of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. Unlike these, however, "The Whale" is a short poem from a Bestiary (or *Physiologus*), a compendium of strange beasts that proved enormously popular in the Middle Ages. Only two other pieces survive from the Anglo-Saxon Bestiary, namely "The Panther" and the fragmentary "Partridge"; yet they contextualize "The Whale" as part of an ancient tale overlaid with Christian instruction. The panther represents Christ; the whale, the devil. Like the devil, the whale is sly, tempting fish into his maw by the sweetness of his breath (lines 49-62). Then "those grim

jaws snap around their prey," just as the devil "slams shut hell's doors after the slaughter" (61-62, 77-78, trans. Crossley-Holland 1982, 251-252, 257-259; see Krapp and Dobbie 1936, 171-74). More appalling is how the whale deceives weary sailors. Mistaking his back for an island, they secure their ships "to this pretence land" (14) and cook their dinner before sleeping. Only then does the whale, "master of evil" (24), make its treacherous move, dragging both sailors and ships to the "hall of death" (30), just as the devil plunges sinners into hell's "bottomless swell beneath the misty gloom" (46-47). A manuscript illumination from the Latin *Ashmole Bestiary* highlights the danger the whale poses to men and fish alike. On that image, created perhaps in England's North Midlands around 1210, three men in a fragile vessel seem unaware that a whale is devouring its meal below them, or that the whale is as large as the ocean.¹⁵

Similarly, the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* ("Navigation of Saint Brendan the Abbot"), which was in circulation by the early tenth century, tells how the Irish monks accompanying Saint Brendan nearly succumbed to that same fate while sailing west four hundred years earlier. They survived, of course, celebrating several Easters on the whale's back and visiting the terrestrial Paradise before their return to Ireland (Short and Merrilees 1979). Saint Brendan's Islands became a cartographic "reality," first on the Hereford map and subsequently on charts and globes well into the eighteenth century (see Figure 9, below; Bevan and Phillott [1873] 1969, 106-108; Babcock 1922, 39-49; Westrem 2001, 388-389). Most often associated with the Canaries, the islands appear in the Atlantic as far south as the Cape Verde Islands and as far north as Newfoundland.

Early maps portray Saint Brendan's encounter with the whale. The Piri Re'is Chart of 1513, for example, pictures two men in the North Atlantic making dinner on the back of a whale. From their ships nearby, three cowed monks look on anxiously (Mollat and Roncière 1984, fig.28; Soucek 1992, 269-272 and fig.14.7). That Birney had access to these later maps and sources is obvious from the title he gave to his collection, *The Strait of Anian* (see below). Whales seem to appear on maps in the fifteenth century and are commonplace in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, thanks to the whaling industry in the North Atlantic.¹⁶

Birney's specification of *Cetegrande* as "southward" is reflected by the sixteenth century in the world maps of Sebastian Münster, whose whale-like monsters grace his otherwise empty southern ocean (Cumming et al. 1972, 44; Portinaro and Knirsch 1987, plate xvi). In the years leading up to World War II, Birney would have known of the southern whaling stations (Ellis 1988, 43 and 69). Furthermore, he would certainly have remembered the direction that Herman Melville's ill-fated Pequod was sailing in its final weeks. After Ahab destroyed his quadrant, a typhoon disoriented ship and crew in the Japanese fishing-grounds (Melville [1851] 1972, 609-611). The Pequod then headed "south-eastward...by Ahab's level log and line...toward the Equator" (631). There, in the uncharted waters of the "Southsea fishery" (664) and somewhere near "the line" (631), the Pequod encountered the enormously crafty sperm whale, Moby Dick, whose death throes ultimately sucked the Pequod and its crew beneath the sea (Figure 7, page 71).¹⁷ And the southern constellation Cetus, usually imagined as a giant whale, has been pictured on star charts since antiquity. Melville himself refers to this celestial sea monster (378):

Nor when expandingly lifted by your subject, can you fail to trace out great whales in the starry heavens, and boats in pursuit of them;....
Beneath the effulgent Antarctic skies I have boarded Argo-Navis, and joined the chase against the starry Cetus far beyond the utmost stretch of Hydrus and the Flying Fish.

"The Piri Re'is Chart of 1513 pictures two men in the North Atlantic making dinner on the back of a whale."

"Birney's specification of Cetegrande as 'southward' is reflected by the sixteenth century in the world maps of Sebastian Münster, whose whale-like monsters grace his otherwise empty southern ocean."

"Birney's use of multiple sources when creating 'Mappemounde' means that we can't expect any single mappamundi to contain all the details in his poem."

"In the Age of Discovery, maps abound with mermen, the most fascinating of which is the crooning merman on a 1570 map by the Dutch cartographer Abraham Ortelius."

"In May of 1943, Birney had sailed in a troopship to England over an Atlantic infested by German U-boats, those mechanical analogues of Cetegrande."

Because sailors have long used the stars to find their way across featureless seas, the location of the constellation Cetus in the night sky may have given Birney another reason for portraying *Cetegrande* "southward."¹⁸

Birney's use of multiple sources when creating "Mappemounde" means that we can't expect any single *mappamundi* to contain all the details in his poem. The Triton figure in the Isidore manuscript, for instance, doesn't look like the merman he is traditionally described as being (Pliny, *Natural History* 9.4; Pausanias 8.1.7; Benwell and Waugh 1965, 36-39). Medieval writers and painters nevertheless continued to catalogue the merman's unusual appearance and habits. That fish-tailed men frequented the British Isles was the report of the English historian Gervase of Tilbury (Benwell and Waugh 1965, 76). Author of the *Otia Imperialia* (1211), Gervase may have been responsible for the creation of the Ebstorf map, the monumental thirteenth-century *mappamundi* destroyed in the bombing of Hanover during World War II. In the Age of Discovery, maps abound with mermen, the most fascinating of which is the crooning merman on a 1570 map of Scandinavia from the groundbreaking *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* by the Dutch cartographer Abraham Ortelius. In the northern latitudes so appropriate for Birney's mermen, Ortelius pictures a ship sailing west from the British Isles towards North America. Just below, as if waiting for the sailors to lose sight of land, a lute-playing merman slowly makes his way toward the fair maidens they've left behind (Figure 8, page 72).

Love and Loss

Finally, there is a deeply personal side to "Mappemounde," one that Birney concealed behind the ironist's filters of temporal distance, indirectness, and universality (see Nesbitt 1974, 53-54, 132, 156; Cameron 1994, 163 and n.9). A year before Birney died at the age of ninety-one, Elspeth Cameron published *Earle Birney: A Life* (1994). The biography is a brilliant piece of research, painstakingly culled from hundreds of letters, drafts, and personal papers housed in the University of Toronto's Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. From that extensive collection Cameron assembled a rich portrait of the man who had composed "Mappemounde" nearly half a century earlier.

Birney, it turns out, had reason to dread the monsters he italicized in "Mappemounde." In May of 1943, he had sailed in a troopship to England over an Atlantic infested by German U-boats, those mechanical analogues of *Cetegrande* (see Churchill 1951, 12). True, the war in Europe had ended by the time Birney stepped onboard the *El Nil* in July of 1945. But if "this old whalehall" was now "shiptamed," the sea Birney calls "Time" stretched perilously out before him. At the end of his journey lay his wife, their baby son, and the stability his family represented; for prior to marrying Esther Bull in 1940, Birney had suffered the failures of two engagements and of his brief first marriage (Davey 1971, 8-12). But his return came at a huge cost. Behind, in England, he left the woman who arguably was the love of his life, Margaret Crosland (Cameron 1994, 230 and 567).

Birney had met the twenty-five-year-old student on his fortieth birthday while on duty in England (Cameron 1994, 220-242). They shared a year together, in which their passion for poetry, medieval French, and Anglo-Saxon literature infused the letters and sonnets they exchanged, ultimately inspiring "Mappemounde." Birney had used the word to describe his desire for Margaret: "We've leapt into a land as wide as you...and cry

to chart our *mappemounde* of love" (228 and n.23). Margaret, in turn, called Birney her "*flammenwerfer* love" ("German flame-thrower"), alluding to their intimacy and to his time at a flame-throwing unit in Sussex (229 and n.27). And Birney's *Cetegrande* echoes Margaret's interest in medieval French (220 and 225) even as it recalls her lines: "In the great ocean of our love, whales/ are the utterance to swing your being's tide" (242).

To the brevity of life, a theme already evident on many *mappaemundi*, Birney has added the dissolution of faithfulness and love.

Epilogue: After "Mappemounde"

Time, the great bugbear in "Mappemounde," was also to be a healer in Birney's life. He and Margaret remained friends until she hurt him irreparably years later by selling the letters and poems he had once written to her. His marriage to Esther withstood his ambivalence and love-affairs until 1977, three decades after his return from the war. By that time, Birney had discovered in Wilan Low the ideal companion for the final quarter century of his long life (Cameron 1994, 518-570; "...o many and many/ and happiest years": Birney 1975, 2:180).

In the meantime, "Mappemounde" was published in *The Strait of Anian*, a collection whose name derives from the strait much sought after from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries (Nunn 1929; James Ford Bell 1956; Keating 1970, esp. 51-67; Gough 1988).¹⁹ Now identified with the Bering Strait, the Strait of Anian provided the western access to the Northwest Passage, a northern water route thought to link the riches of Asia with the ports of Europe while bypassing the enormous and largely unexplored landmass in between. Birney refers to this strait twice in his 1948 collection. The first time is in his epigraph, a quote from Thomas Blundeville's description of the circumnavigation of the globe by Sir Francis Drake from 1577 to 1580. It relates how the explorer hoped to return to England by sailing north through the "narrow sea Anian," then eastward and home; but his mariners, stung by the cold, refused to go in that direction. Drake had reason for optimism: the strait had been mapped in 1562 by Giacomo Gastaldi. And a year before Blundeville's account was published, the Dutch cartographer Cornelis de Jode came out with a detailed and seemingly authoritative map entitled *Quivirae Regnum cum aliis versus Boream* (Figure 9, page 73). This map complements Birney's own vision in its recognition of the importance of North America, especially Canada. De Jode portrayed the region on this map and on the two-page *Americae Pars Borealis*, both of which he created in 1593 for the second edition of his atlas *Speculum Orbis Terrae*. Figure 9 shows the western part of North America and presents the Strait of Anian (*El Streto de Anian*) and the Northwest Passage as a direct and unhindered water route north of the continent. Between Alaska (*Anian Regio*) and California (*Quivirae Regnum*) ships sail in waters frequented by a sea unicorn and another strange creature reminiscent of Birney's "Mappemounde" (see Nebenzahl 1990, 152-155).

Birney's second reference to the Strait of Anian appears in "Pacific Door," the poem that bookends "Atlantic Door" to frame the first half of the collection, "One Society" (1-37). Within this section are Birney's poems about Canada, titled and organized "geographically" from east to west coast and emphasizing the stunning variety of the country's physical landscape—its plains, forests, mountains, cities, and waterways. But what has been called Birney's "Pan-Canadian vision" must be viewed in the context of "Atlantic Door" and "Pacific Door" (Livesay 1948, in Nesbitt 1974, 60). For these poems emphasize the vastness of the oceans separat-

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"This map complements Birney's own vision in its recognition of the importance of North America, especially Canada."

“Although de Jode’s depictions of the Strait of Anian and Northwest Passage are highly optimistic, Birney’s poems focus on the failure of early explorers to navigate such treacherously icy waters.”

ing Canada from Europe and Asia, and warn of the “bleak and forever capacious tombs” at the ocean depths (Birney 1948, 3 and 37). Although de Jode’s depictions of the Strait of Anian and Northwest Passage are highly optimistic, Birney’s poems focus on the failure of early explorers to navigate such treacherously icy waters. For Birney, the Strait of Anian became a metaphor for Canada’s isolation from the rest of the world. In “Pacific Door,” Birney summarizes eighteenth-century attempts to cross from the Strait of Anian into the Northwest Passage (Birney 1948, 37; cf. *Oxford Atlas* 1997, 140-141):

Here Spaniards and Vancouver’s boatmen scrawled
the problem that is ours and yours,
that there is no clear Strait of Anian
to lead us easy back to Europe,
that men are isled in ocean or in ice
and only joined by long endeavour to be joined.

With his usual irony, Birney calls the second half of *The Strait of Anian* “One World” (41-84) and fills it with war poems. The world war was one way of shattering Canada’s physical and cultural isolation.

An inveterate wanderer, Birney retained his interest in exploration, geography, and maps throughout his long career. “Pacific Door” would be followed by “Trial of a City” (Birney 1952 [1957], published later as *The Damnation of Vancouver*, Birney 1977a), “Vitus Bering” (1953), “Captain Cook” (1958-59), “Giovanni Caboto/John Cabot” (1965), and “Conrad Kain” (1974). His fascination with geography is evident in the way he arranged the poems for his collection about the city of Vancouver, *Trial of a City* (Birney 1952, esp. 47-57); in the titles and subjects of poems like “North of Superior” (1946), “Alaska Passage” (1960), “Perth, Australia, I Love You” (1968); and in later collections like *Ice Cod Bell or Stone* (Birney 1962) or *Near False Creek Mouth* (Birney 1964), both of which describe his international ports of call from the 1950s on. *Near False Creek Mouth* is not only filled with place-name titles (“Guadelupe,” “Machu Picchu,” “Epidaurus”) but includes four playful sketch maps illustrating the places Birney wrote about during his many travels. The only place these maps share is “False Creek Mouth,” another name for Vancouver, emphasizing that city’s—and its poet’s—connection with the rest of the world.

Not until the late 1960s, however, did Birney return to maps as the subject of his verse (Birney 1971; 1975, 2:159). Always the experimenter, Birney chose an entirely different format from the linear, sonnet-like appearance of “Mappemoude.” This time he turned to visual poetry and created poems *shaped* like maps. His 1967 poem “up her can nada” ironically observed his nation’s centenary. A sketch-map of Upper Canada, Ontario’s official name from 1791-1841, Birney’s poem is a masterpiece of concrete poetry caricaturing Ontario’s pretensions as well as historical maps of the province. And shortly after he won the Canada Council Medal in 1968 “for distinguished achievement over an extended period” (Aichinger 1979, 44), Birney composed “Hare Krishna.” Read aloud, it sounds like the mantra chanted by the sect’s members to purify their souls. In its appearance, however, the poem resembles Hindu and Jain cosmographical diagrams (see Schwartzberg 1992, figs. 16.6, 16.29; and plates 25 and 28). So unique is Birney’s “Hare Krishna” that it may be the *only* visual poem based on traditional east Indian maps to have been composed in the twentieth-century by a North-American poet. But discussions of Birney’s other map-poems will have to wait for another day (see Haft 2000, 74-75).

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“Not until the late 1960s, however, did Birney return to maps as the subject of his verse.”

1. Birney did not include etymological notes with "Mappemounde." Unless otherwise noted, medieval English translations and etymologies derive from Jember 1974, Borden 1982, and the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED 1989); Latin phrases, from Lewis and Short [1879] 1975, and Niermeyer and van de Kieft 1976. (Note that the Old French word for "great whale" spawned the medieval English *Cethegrande*.)
2. Regarding these revisions, the following do not affect the poem's meaning: the replacement of "NO" by "No" (line 1) or of "the dear face-charm" by "the brave picture-faces" (line 8); the fact that "in" ends line 9 instead of beginning line 10. More significant are two changes discussed below: Birney's replacement of "that" by "which" (line 3) and his typographic alterations. The typography Birney adopted in *Selected Poems 1940-1966* and later collections remains controversial (Birney 1966, ix; Nesbitt 1974, 10, 142-43, 153-54, 159-60, 212-13).
3. The French word *mappemonde* derives from the medieval Latin *mappa mundi*. The forms *mappemond* and *mappemonde* also appear in Middle English (OED 1989). For French spellings prior to 1500, see Tobler and Lommatzsch 1963, 5:1102-1103, s.v. *mapemonde* (with alternatives *mappamonde* and *mappemonde*) as well as "mapemont" (with *mapemund*). Birney helped his Canadian readers translate his title "Mappemounde" by reminding them of their high-school French (Birney 1972, 84).
4. The quote comes from an edition familiar to Birney: Skeat [1894-1900] 1926-54, 1:389. Skeat, who first published the poem and gave it a title, notes that the late fifteenth-century manuscript containing the untitled poem actually uses the spelling *mapamonde*. The current edition spells the word *mapamounde* (Benson 1987, 649). Chaucer's contemporary, John Gower, also uses the word in his *Confessio Amantis*: "And sette proprely the bounde/ Aftre the forme of Mappemounde" (3.102: OED 1989).
5. At the time when Birney was composing "Mappemounde," the great compendium of medieval maps was Miller (6 vols., 1895-98). Also important were works by A.E. Nordenskiöld (1890s), Charles Raymond Beazley, especially *The Dawn of Modern Geography* (3 vols., 1897-1906), J.K. Wright, and Richard Uhden (1930s); see Woodward 1987, 513-558, for fuller bibliography.
6. Harvey suggests that the Psalter Map was drawn in London (1996, 29). According to Delano-Smith and Kain (1999, 38), "about two dozen English *mappaemundi* are known (excluding 19 copies of the Higden map) of which fewer than half are extant." (The Higden map illustrated the *Polychronicon* of Ranulf Higden, a fourteenth-century monk from Chester; see Harvey 1997, 35.)
7. The manuscript in which the Anglo-Saxon map appears features a zonal map as well (McGurk 1983, 65-66); both seem to have been drawn by the same person to suit the manuscript's "overall plan" (Edson 1997, 3, and 77-78, 95, 106-107). Delano-Smith and Kain suggest that the "apparent dearth [of English *mappaemundi*] from the seventh to the twelfth centuries may be due to rarity or to loss" (1999, 8).
8. The Albi *mappamundi* of the eighth century and the Ashburnham Beatus map of the tenth have rectangular frames (McGurk 1983, 79 and 85; Woodward 1987, 348, fig.18.56; Williams 1998, 3:27-28). On the shapes of *mappaemundi* and their symbolism, see Woodward 1987, 318 n.149.

NOTES

9. See Campbell 1987, 398 and n.226, for the atlases; and 406-407, for Perrino's identity. See Mollat and Roncière (1984, fig.6 and 200), for a portolan chart from Pietro Vesconte's Lyons atlas (c. 1321) depicting the coasts of England, Ireland and France and framed by St. Nicholas, the Virgin Mary, and an angel.
10. For the myth of the six ages, see Honorius Augustodunensis, *Imago Mundi*, Book 3; and, more generally, Wright [1925] 1965, 233-35; Edson 1997, 98-99 and *passim*. Interpretation of the Sawley Map is provided by LeCoq 1989, 22; 1990, 155-201, esp. 160-62; Edson 1997, 111-17.
11. See Honorius' *Imago Mundi* 1.1.5; and 1.6, for his discussion of zones. That medieval scholars did not consider the earth flat and wheel-shaped, see Woodward 1987, 318-21, 342; and Russell 1991, esp.13-26.
12. See Mollat and Roncière 1984, plate 20. Behaim's globe depicts the ocean between Europe and Japan as an inland sea occupying only 130 degrees of longitude, filled with texts about the various climates, and freckled with islands, ships, hippocamps, a triton, and mermaid.
13. By the ninth century, the "T" on the "T-O" maps was identified with the cross: Edson 1997, 5. The earth represented Christ's body on the enormous Ebstorf map (3.5 m or 11' 8" in diameter), destroyed in 1943 during the bombing of Hanover, Germany: Christ's head, hands, and feet indicate the cardinal directions as they emerge from the world-map into the circumfluent ocean (Woodward 1987, 307-309 and fig.18.19; Harvey 1991, 28; 1997, 31). For similar images of the earth as Christ's body, see Hahn-Woernle 1988, 40 and 50-51.
14. Besides the Psalter, Hereford, and related Ebstorf maps, the Duchy of Cornwall map (c.1150-c.1220) and at least one Ranulf Higden map from the late-fourteenth century are among the English *mappaemundi* depicting wind gods and islands in the ocean: see Woodward 1987, plate 14 and fig.18.67, respectively. (Birney duplicated this Higden map [British Library, Royal MS. 14 C.IX., ff.1v-2] and a modern rendering of Eratosthenes' world view of about 200 B.C. to show the illustrator of the 1972 sketch map [Figure 2, above] how different our own views of the earth are compared with those held in antiquity and the Middle Ages. See note 6 and Birney's "xerox 'notations'" [*sic*] in Box 114, p.122, of the Birney Collection at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto.) Fish appear on the Ebstorf map; fish and (sometimes) boats fill the ocean on Beatus maps like the St. Sever *mappamundi* (Wright [1925] 1965, 69; Edson 155, fig.8.4; and, on Beatus maps generally, Williams 1994-98). The early fifteenth-century Borgia World Map, similar to world maps made two centuries earlier, shows sailing ships in its ocean (see Harvey 1991, 68); see also the Andrea Bianco world map of 1436 (Bianco 1869). By the sixteenth century, monsters and ships filled the empty spaces on maps (Edson 1997, 16).
15. Manuscript illumination of the Whale, from the section "De Balena" (Bodleian Library, Oxford: MS Ashmole 1511, fol. 86r). See Morgan 1982, 1:64-65, and *Vollständige Faksimile-Ausgabe* 1982.
16. See the 1413 Mecia de Viladestes chart in Campbell 1987, 393 and 446, fig.19.22; and in Mollat and Roncière 1984, 205-206 and fig.12. Several sixteenth-century "whale" maps are reproduced in Portinaro and Knirsch 1987, esp. plates VII, XVI, XXVII, XL, XLI, XLIV, L, LV, LVII, LXVII.
17. Birney's phrases "the sly beast who sucks in/ with whirlwind" and "the redeless [who] topple in maelstrom" may recall Melville's use of "whirlpool" (660), "boiling maelstrom" (669), and "vortex" (685, 687) to describe the Pequod's sinking by Moby Dick.
18. One of the most beautiful star charts ever made is the "Sterre Kaert of

Hemels Pleyn" by Remmet Teunisse Backer, bound in Johannes van Keulen's *Boeck zee-kaardt* of 1709. On this map of the heavens, *Argo Navis* sails off while *Cetus Balena* straddles the celestial equator near the central line drawn through the vernal equinox (Stott 1991, 9 and 88-89). The position of Cetus' head on this Dutch chart bears an uncanny correspondence to the Pequod's terrestrial coordinates during its encounter with Moby Dick. For maps of Melville's novel locate the disaster near the intersection of the equator and the international date-line, that fateful place where past and present collide. (See the map in Herman Melville [1851] 1972, 1014-15, which places the disaster between Kingsmill Island ["On the line—East"] and Fanning Island ["On the line—West"].)

19. The name "Ania" is medieval and comes from Marco Polo's accounts, see *Travels* [1908] 1921, 331 n.1, where "Ania" is identified as Tung-ki(a)ng in eastern Manchuria, north of Japan.

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I dedicate this piece, with love, to another Canadian writer and poet, Jordan Zinovich, who lives his poetry and guides me with his maps.