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Topopoetics. Early Modern Allegory and Classical Meanings

Communicated by Michael Meyer

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Topopoetics. Early Modern Allegory and Classical Meanings

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The essay proposes the term 'topopoetics' in order to explain how cultural meanings, ideas and *topoi* originating in classical antiquity change and are transformed in and by artefacts. The artefacts under consideration are especially, but not exclusively, textual ones; they tend to unfold their topological dimensions by means of allegorical procedures. The contribution exemplifies the workings of topopoetics in early modernity by discussing central devices in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Richard Crashaw's poetry and the front matter of Kepler's *Rudolphine Tables*.

Topology; poetics; allegory; transformations of antiquity; early modern artefacts

Der Beitrag verwendet den heuristischen Begriff 'Topopoetik', um damit die Art und Weise zu bezeichnen, wie Kunstwerke antike kulturelle Signifikanzen aufnehmen und transformieren. Allegorische Verfahren rücken dabei in den Vordergrund als besonders geeignet zur Kommunikation und Präsentation topologischer Bedeutungen. Topopoetische Leistungen und Funktionen textueller und visueller Artefakte werden an drei Beispielen aus der Frühen Neuzeit erläutert und demonstriert: an Edmund Spensers *Faerie Queene*, Richard Crashaws metaphysischen Gedichten und an den paratextuellen Materialien, die Keplers *Tabulae Rudolphinae* vorangestellt sind.

Topologie; Poetik; Allegorie; Antikentransformation; Kunst und Literatur der Frühen Neuzeit

Things occupy space, and they have their places. Humans also occupy space. Because we are embodied, we are always somewhere, and we fill a certain amount of space. We move and orient ourselves in space, regarding our homes, the places we live in, as extensions of our selves. Human space, in other words, has symbolic functions. It signals who we are or who we aspire to be. Cultures, too, hold varying relationships to space and place: They tend to be regional or even local, but are capable of extending across geographical, political or historical borderlines. Like homes, they are symbolic structures, but also manifest themselves in space, in sensually perceptible objects, buildings and artefacts, concentrating, as it were, in things associated with the hope that they may outlast time and change. More often than not this hope is disappointed. Culturally highly charged objects may, as we know, be destroyed and as easily lost as homes. Material structures may be defaced and all but effaced.

It is perhaps more difficult to eradicate cultural meanings – ideas, values, convictions, concepts, mentalities, beliefs, not last the commonplaces, stereotypes and items of received wisdom we refer to as *topoi*. These reside equally in minds, languages, and texts. They form the subject of what I call topopoetics. Topopoetics focusses on the cultural significances stored in artefacts, above all texts and especially (but not exclusively) literary ones. It tries to understand, describe and explain the transformations of meanings, especially topological ones, that emerged in classical antiquity, but have migrated through generations of minds and texts; undergoing disruptions and preserving

continuity, responding to changing historical circumstances, interacting with the cultures they entered; adapting, assimilating to, or resisting integration into different texts and contexts, changing them in their turn, sometimes altering or distorting them (almost) out of recognition. The Greek word *poiein* means ‘to make,’ and it is here taken in the literal sense that enables us to perceive the productive, creative and sometimes innovative dimension of these transformations of antiquity.

Topopoetics also implies an aesthetics, or rather: it seeks to describe the aesthetics implicit in the texts it analyses. It will therefore define motifs and structures, identify elements typical for the repertoire of individual texts or groups of texts, speak about signification, figures and tropes, about metaphors and other textual strategies for the conveyance, communication and modification of meanings. It will discuss the devices employed in creating semantic coherence and altering it in order to suit it to the respective cultural agenda. It will deal with the What as well as the How of this mode of referring to the past, its interaction with the present and its spatially relevant products.

Topopoetics is a heuristic tool that emerged from my research for Topoi over the last years; it proved particularly useful in thinking about the literary shapes of the beyond and their classical foundations.¹ What follows is the attempt to demonstrate the way the concept functions and to sketch its potential with a few aspects of its future application. As my main area of expertise is early modern literature, with a focus on texts written during the 16th-century English Renaissance and the ‘long’ seventeenth century,² the following three examples are taken from this period.

The first two involve poems, the third also a visual artefact, the frontispiece image to a milestone work of natural philosophy. Their aim is to show that the transformative poetics indicated by the term topopoetics works not only for verse (or, for that matter, narrative and dramatic texts),³ but also for non-literary works of art such as images, buildings or statues, in fact for a surprisingly large spectrum of created objects. The scope of the concept is wide enough to include references to persons, places, and people; to deal with localizations that are in and beyond – with places in the body and without, in the world and possibly elsewhere, in the individual and its interconnections with others. It ranges from psycho-topological considerations (for instance in texts that thematize faculties or affects) to social and metaphysical concerns, such as the immaterial causes held responsible for transporting the human being out of and beside itself in states of ecstasy or religious enthusiasm.⁴

All three examples presented here involve, in wider and narrower senses, allegories. This cannot surprise, as allegory is the topopoetical device par excellence. As “continua metaphora” (*Inst. Or.* IX, 2, 46) it enables a configuration of ideas that postulates the co-presence of different places. It creates a semantic space that is double, thus making possible a stereoscopic view of its object. Early modern allegory unfolds one topic or narrates one story while it means another. It evokes two levels of significance at the same time, making them interact. By itself, this achievement of extended metaphor is remarkable; in comparison with philosophical discourse its cognitive value is considerable. In my first author, Edmund Spenser, it is topopoetically taken to extraordinary lengths, while with my second author, Richard Crashaw, we will encounter some of its odder realizations.

1 See Lobsien 2012, a study of the aesthetics of the beyond from early modern times to the present.

2 Long, because as a coherent period it extends beyond 1700, including, for instance, authors such as Shaftesbury.

3 As I have shown elsewhere in greater detail; see Lobsien 2012; also Lobsien 2015a, and Lobsien 2016a.

4 To some extent, these examples link the work of the research groups C2 (“Metaphor”) and D4 (“Immaterial Causes”). I have also tested the concept with regard to questions of ancient (and new) economies (the subject of research group B3) in Lobsien 2016b, and in Lobsien 2015b.

The third example tests its validity with respect to visual representations of the invisible in the front matter to Johannes Kepler's "Rudolphine Tables".

I Spenser's spaces: topopoetical allegory in *The Faerie Queene*

The Faerie Queene, dedicated to Queen Elizabeth I., is the greatest English epic of the Renaissance. The author of this vast work, the English poet and administrator Edmund Spenser (c. 1552–1599), appears to have asked himself a number of questions like the following: Can we spatialize virtue? Can we represent cardinal virtues at all, other than by discussing them philosophically? What kind of imaginary space do they need? Is it possible to present the virtues essential to the functioning of an early modern commonwealth so that they will help to "fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline"?⁵ How can these be modelled in a literary text that preserves and refigures what appears most valuable in antiquity, while relating it to present-day concerns? Is there a way of conveying meanings which go beyond the officially permissible? How create a world that is wholly imaginary – a fairyland peopled by errant knights, warrior princesses, evil sorcerers, damsels in distress, dragons and monsters – and that yet refers to burning contemporary issues, such as the current conflict with the Roman Catholic church or the Irish question? How can I please my sovereign so that she will not only take notice of me as a major poet but also grant me a handsome pension?

The Faerie Queene, composed over many years and possibly unfinished, attempts to show what is invisible (ideas) but capable of shaping ("fashioning") individual life-styles as well as political fates. In order to attain this goal it employs the rhetorical strategy traditionally granted with the power to achieve this kind of impossible representation: allegory. Extended metaphors spatialize meaning, multiplying levels of argument and action. Consequently, Spenser's narrative does proceed allegorically over long stretches – for instance with the Redcrosse Knight representing English Protestantism in its difficult relationship to Duessa, the beautiful witch, who stands for the enticements of Catholicism; or with Britomart, the female knight, one of the figurations of Elizabeth, in love with Artegall, the knight of Justice, but never quite married to him; or with the hunting of the "Blatant Beast", the polyvalent representation of many evils, fierce, violent, never to be contained for long, and, it seems, invincible. More often than not, the six virtues presented as essential for a "gentleman" – "Holinesse", "Temperaunce", "Chastitie", "Friendship", "Justice", "Courtesie" – are explored by more than one figure, on more than one quest.

In addition to, and sometimes in competition with, these more traditional strategies of personification, Spenser creates a pastoral topography whose allegorical status is more difficult to determine. *The Faerie Queene* is not only a very long and complicated heroic romance. It also opens up arcadian spaces, blending them with the "plains" through which the various chivalric questers are made to move. By itself, the pastoral mode is, like allegory, deeply rooted in the literary culture of classical antiquity. In Spenser it often serves to question the validity of the politically correct stances the various knights appear to take, sometimes devastatingly so. In this interaction of pastoral with allegorical modes, paradoxical places emerge, which, like the erotic "Bower of Bliss", the Neoplatonic-

5 Spenser formulates part of his aesthetic programme in a letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, appended to the 1590 edition of *The Faerie Queene* (not included in the 1596 edition, hence its immediate reference is only to the first three books), under the title "A Letter of the Authors expounding his *whole intention in the course of this worke* [...]". It appears at the end of each of the volumes of the recent five-volume edition of *The Faerie Queene* which I quote in the following; the present reference is to Spenser's claim that "The generall end [...] of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline." (Spenser 2006a, 205).

Epicurean “Garden of Adonis”, or “Mount Acidale” in the realm of Pastorella, arrest and dynamize the heroes’ wanderings, coming to function as portals of transcendence towards a world beyond, while still suggestively anchored in the here and now of the political landscape of the late sixteenth century in England.⁶

This crossing of arcadian with heroic topographies also provides a way of blending the two basic kinds of allegory. By combining historical or political allegory with the allegory of ideas (moral allegory) Spenser’s epic is capable of translating his England with its burning ideological, religious, social and political issues into a realm of “Faerie” brimming with classical ideas and insights, and vice versa. Literal and figurative significations continually change places, modifying and re-modelling each other. Thus, for instance, “Arlo-Hill”, the scene of the final “Mutabilitie Cantos”, is the place where the personification of Change is tried before Great Nature and, ambiguously, at the same time judged and justified. Simultaneously, however, it is a real place in Ireland, a mountain near Spenser’s own home during his work as colonial administrator. It is closely associated with the bloody history of Ireland and its scenes of rebellion and massacre, but also an imagined place beyond this world, the site for an apocalyptic trial, where philosophical questions are raised and justice is spoken by and over abstract ideas, which in turn reflect back on the political situation as well as on fundamental ethical and theological problems. This is, and is not, part of the classical green and golden world of pastoral, equally, part of the everyday world of conflict and strife.

As I lack space to explore all this in anything approaching adequate detail, I shall try to illustrate this strategy very briefly by referring to some of Spenser’s programmatic passages in his epos – the proems to the individual Books. While the proem to Book Five fittingly enquires into the whereabouts of Justice – is its dwelling place still here and in England, or has it, with the Goddess Astraea, long since, at the end of the Golden Age, left this isle? –, the proem to Book Six is equally concerned about the epistemological status of pastoral, asking whether it can still count as space of virtue, fictional but equipped with truth value, or if it has already turned from a place of courtliness into one of hypocritical dissimulation, a place of lies. Both introductory poems thematize moral questions which are then allegorically unfolded in the Cantos that follow. By contrast, the proems to Books One and Two directly address questions of topoetical method as allegorical procedure. Thus Spenser presents himself as humble pastoral poet in the first proem, forced by political circumstances to exchange Arcadia for the battle field by switching to another, unaccustomed, and more demanding genre, that of the heroic epic: “For trumpets sterne to chaunge mine Oaten reeds” (1.4).⁷ In order to succeed in this much more ambitious enterprise suitable to the mature poet he hopes for instruction by “the sacred Muse” (1.7). Here, too, only one literary and rhetorical mode appears adequate – that of allegory: “Fierce warres and faithfull loves shall moralize my song” (1.9). These will, however, not only play out their adventures in a timeless realm of univocal and static significations, but will also involve present-day Britain and its monarch – “Great Ladie of the greatest Isle” (4.3). Queen Elizabeth, patron of the work, will herself be drawn into the allegory as the “true glorious type” of various personifications that range from Una, Gloriana, and Britomart to the biblical prototype of Sapience (4.7; in an allusion to Wisdom 7.26).

This kind of typological topology extends from the classical past even into the future, as the proem to Book Two claims.⁸ Here Spenser defends his allegorical method especially against detractors and critics who charge him with producing mere fiction, “painted

6 For a more detailed reading of the episodes alluded to, see Lobsien 2012, 95–177.

7 Spenser 2006a. Each of the six books has its own proem; references to *The Faerie Queene* are given in brackets after the quotation, citing stanza and lines of the respective proem.

8 Spenser 2006b.

forgery” (1.4) springing from an “ydle braine” (1.3) with nothing better to do, rather than „matter of just memory” (1.5) based on true “antiquities” (1.9). The poet’s apology is bold enough. He justifies his topopoetic technique by claiming for it prognostic powers. For, although it may be true that “none [...] does know, | Where is that happy land of Faery” (1.6–7), this does not entail that it does not exist. Before they were discovered in recent times, nobody did know of the “*Amazons huge river*” (2.8) or “fruitfullest *Virginia*” either (2.9). And “Who ever heard of th’*Indian Peru*” (2.6) before its conquest? If neither of these locations in the New World are fictions, may not even more unknown worlds – like Faery – merely await discovery? That they are (as yet) inaccessible to the senses does not imply their impossibility, as stanza 3 explains:

Yet all these were when no man did them know,
 Yet have from wisest ages hidden beene:
 And later times thinges more unknowne shall show.
 Why then should witlesse man so much misweene
 That nothing is but that which he hath seene?
 What if within the Moones fayre shining spheare
 What if in every other starre unseene
 Of other worldes he happily should heare?
 He wonder would much more, yet such to some appeare.

However, Spenser’s argument does not only offer “Faerie lond” (4.1) as a species of extraterrestrial world. It goes further by claiming that access to it may be found within *this* world, “By certein signes here sett in sondrie place” (4.2) – because Faerie is an allegory of contemporary England. The deictic “here” thus carries a double meaning: It refers to the text of the epic and its verbal signs, placed so that they afford transitions between literal and figurative senses, marking portals through which the reader may pass from imagined to ‘real’ worlds and back again. And it also refers to present-day, Renaissance England, with Elizabeth as its sovereign, the “fayrest Princess” (4.6), who may in “this fayre mirrhour” (4.7) – that is to say, allegorically – recognize herself, in Faerie her “owne realmes” (4.8) and “in this antique ymage” her own “great auncestry” (4.9).

Topopoetically, this allegorical method of making the past signify the present and linking visible place to invisible worlds of the mind informed by ways of thinking firmly rooted in antiquity, is only adequate to a purpose as high as Spenser’s own. Besides, it includes a justification of the faculty of the imagination, hence of poetry itself. Spenser here presents himself as the “right poet” (according to Sir Philip Sidney’s nomenclature), who combines the gifts of the *vates* and civilizing teacher with the ability to “figur[e] forth”, by means of fiction, truths that need to be known.⁹ Finally, by his strategy “thus to enfold | In covert vele and wrap in shadowes light” (5.1-2) the poet imitates a time-hallowed theological method of allegorical reference to the divine.¹⁰ The highest truth may not otherwise be spoken, God (as well as the person of the monarch who is his representative on earth, *Vicarius Dei*) cannot be described or signified except allegorically – in other words.

9 “A Defence of Poetry”, in Sidney 1973, 80. The reference is to Sidney’s famous definition: “Poesy therefore is [...] a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically, a speaking figure – with this end, to teach and delight” (79–80).

10 Whose anagogical strategies obviously correspond to recurring themes of neoplatonic thinking; for points of contact in Spenser and other poets, see also Lobsien 2010.

2 Crashaw's Saint Mary Magdalene: no (im)material girl

If, in this brief glance at a huge work, our attempt to explain the reach and uses of a topopoetical approach to early modern literature seems to have moved into the realms of philosophy and theology, this seems only right and suitable to its object. For this is not only a major part of European Christian culture, it also includes a whole school of poets and a large complex of poetic texts which quite explicitly and in a highly articulate way deal with issues that reach beyond the material and physical: Metaphysical Poetry. Richard Crashaw (1612/13–1649) is one of these so-called Metaphysicals, and although he may appear marginal in being a Roman Catholic, he is in many respects a typical representative. He is interesting not only for the sometimes daring gendering of his protagonists, but also for his fascination with states of mind and body that appear to transform both. His poems address experiences that move the subject beyond the everyday and the profane into areas not accessible to the senses. He explores the margins of mind and body, not only with respect to their coherence, mutual correspondence, and intimate linkage, but also, and perhaps above all, with an interest in the place and dynamics of the soul in its desire for the divine. He is concerned, we might say, with the immaterial causes that engender transcendence. Here is a contemporary of Descartes who draws the borderlines of *res extensa* and *res cogitans* in a manner very different from the rationalist philosopher, employing the repertoire of traditional psychophysiology, but modifying it in several respects from a neoplatonic perspective. Most interesting, for our purpose, is Crashaw's poetic remodelling of space and the way we orient ourselves in it.

A number of poems offer themselves for illustration; foremost among them those on Teresa of Avila and her ecstatic encounter with the Seraphim.¹¹ I will, however, for this inquiry into the uses of topopoetics, present a cursory reading of another text – one of the strangest in seventeenth-century English poetry: the poem on Saint Mary Magdalene, “The Weeper”. Here, as in the Teresa poems, the overall synaesthetic intuition is remarkable: Body and mind, physical and spiritual, are not perceived as distinct entities, separate, indeed, opposed realms, but as constituting, through the way they merge and blend, one continuous, if graded, sphere of being. The Magdalene's tears directly feed into the heavenly music of praise, providing, in one of Crashaw's boldest conceits, a cherub's “breakfast” and inspiration for his song (30). In full, the stanza runs as follows:¹²

5
 Every morn from hence
 A brisk cherub something sips
 Whose sacred influence
 Adds sweetness to his sweetest lips.
 Then to his music. And his song
 Tastes of his breakfast all day long.
 (25–30)

11 For an interpretation of the way these employ the neoplatonic concept of the *ochema* or vehicle of the soul see Lobsien 2018.

12 All quotations are to Crashaw 2013; “Saint Mary Magdalene; or The Weeper”, 223–229, is cited with line numbers in brackets after the quotation. The editor comments on this and the preceding stanza in his introductory essay to the edition: “Holy tears know their way to heaven. Crashaw is hardly the first to have envisioned that. But his breathtaking dilation of this commonplace, culminating in a dulcet celestial breakfast on the fly, makes of it something else altogether. Such a flight of divine fancy! And yet the twisted play of wit in these stanzas – which torques from the salt tears of remorse to the buoyant cream layer of a literal Milky Way to a toothsome angelic hiccup – imparts a familiar, even familial intimacy to this bizarre tableau. Though they never meet, human penitent and heavenly chorister touch, in their devotion, across a cosmically stretched string of reconcocted metaphysical conceits?” (Rambuss 2013, xxxix–xl).

Crashaw's idiosyncrasies and the way he tends to shift the margins of the body, spiritualizing its excretions and materializing the transcendent, become apparent already at this point. To anticipate a possible generalization: None of this poet's women saints are ethereal beings – but they are no mere 'material girls' either.

But apart from its contribution to the early modern charting of body and mind, the exploration of borders and transitional shapes, or the mutual interaction of somatomorphic souls and psychomorphic bodies, Crashaw's poem provides, from a topopoetical perspective, a number of other insights that show how much this text is steeped in classical learning, and, above all, neoplatonic thought. This extends further than the numerous Petrarchisms which are threaded into the poem. Mary Magdalene is, to the seventeenth century, an emblem of love, both spiritual and erotic. The biblical references, conflated into one figure, present her as a woman of formerly dubious reputation, who becomes one of the closest followers of Jesus; one who has "loved much" (Luke 7.47) and whom therefore many sins are forgiven. In her famous act of repentance, Mary Magdalene approaches Christ, washes his feet with her tears, dries them with her hair, kisses, and anoints them with precious ointment.¹³ Also part of the composite figure of the Magdalene is the encounter with the risen Christ in the garden, the Saviour's refusal of sensual contact (*noli me tangere*) marking the difference between earthly and spiritual body. Both these episodes resonate through the poem's 31 stanzas, garnished with repeated Petrarchisms – "Sweetness so sad, sadness so sweet" (35); fair Sorrow (stanzas 6-7); "loves" and "woes", "tears" and "smiles" as "friendly foes" and "kind contrarities" (stanza 16); the "fair floods" of tears as "great flames" of love (97, 99); the Magdalene's tears as "Fountain" (90) watering the garden in which she encountered the resurrected Christ, etc. All these are said to be "here", i.e. in the Weeper's eyes, which are, in accordance with neoplatonic tradition, the seat of the soul and the origin of love, radiating as well as receiving its emanations.

It is above all this structure of mutuality, of a sending out that is at the same time a reflecting back, emission and reception, which shapes this poem in a way that goes beyond a mere punctual insertion of Petrarchan oxymora. In the context of a topopoetical reading this is especially relevant, as it has spatial implications that Crashaw unfolds in a fairly spectacular and memorable manner. For here we are made to witness no less than an inversion of up and down, high and low, things earthly and heavenly. Mary Magdalene weeps upwards:

2
 Heavens thy fair eyes be;
 Heavens of ever-falling stars.
 'Tis seed-time still with thee
 And stars thou sow'st, whose harvest dares
 Promise the earth to counter-shine
 Whatever makes heav'n's forehead fine.
 [...]

4
 Upwards thou dost weep.
 Heav'n's bosom drinks the gentle stream.

13 Cf., e.g., Luke 7.36–50 (the most elaborate rendering of the Bethany episode; synoptic versions: John 12.3–8, Mat. 26.6–13, Mark 14.3–9), also John 19.25 and 20.1–18 (the encounter in the garden). The conflation of the sinner, the sister of Martha, the disciple of Jesus, the woman under the cross, and the visitor of the grave to the composite figure of the Magdalene is a product of later theology and iconography. The anointing of Christ's feet is particularly relevant for a neoplatonic aesthetics, as it is termed by the evangelist not only a "good", but a "beautiful work" (*kalon ergon*). For literary authors, not least for Crashaw, it is above all the sensual, indeed synaesthetic, quality of the act that carries great appeal. For a reading of the *kalon ergon* in the context of a neoplatonic aesthetic, see Lobsien 2010, 1–29.

Where th' milky rivers creep,
 Thine floats above; and is the cream.
 Waters above th' heav'ns, what they be
 We're taught best by thy tears and thee.
 (7–12, 19–24)

These two stanzas focus the poem's central conceit, at the same time providing an allegorical correlative to one of the mainstays of the neoplatonic topology of *noesis*, namely its dynamics of the intelligible, as they convert descent in ascent, falling tears in light, love, and heavenly nourishment reflected back to its source. As the Weeper's tears fall as stars, these are equalled to seed that will bear rich spiritual harvest, enabling the earth to "counter-shine" heaven. In a later stanza (24), the rhythm of the tears dropping marks time in a prayer that is sighed to heaven, "sweet-breathed" like ascending "clouds of incense" (141, 142). The association with delightful physical sustenance also colours the bold conceit in stanza 4 that figures the Magdalene's tears as "cream" of the milky way. They float above it, on top, like the waters that the older, pre-Copernican cosmology thought of as above the firmament. What falls down, rises up, transformed, on high – in fact, in an analogy to the Platonic *huperouranos*, to highest heaven, to the ethereal sphere. These tears cannot be more rarefied. They are the quintessence of love. That is why their downward direction is really the highest possible elevation. In the final lines of the poem they sum up this conversion of the most humble into the most glorious in proclaiming the real aim of their movement: "Crowned heads are toys. We go to meet | A worthy object, our Lord's feet" (185–186).

It is part of Crashaw's art that material things appear to be never quite immaterialized. Although the ideological pressure demands that the literalness of "feet", of the cherub's creamy "breakfast", of the (notorious) "Two walking baths" made by the Magdalene's weeping eyes be weakened, the ingenuity of the invention insists that we never quite forget the metaphor's material sides. The comparatives by which this poem proceeds – and which render the saintly tears superior to the morning dew (stanza 8), "the balsam-sweating bough" (stanza 9), the first berry on the "purpling vine" (stanza 11), the angelic "vials" filled with tears (stanza 12), the "Golden Tagus" (stanza 13), or April and May (stanza 14) – all leave a sensually concrete residue in the reader's mind. This tenacious literality also holds for another group of conceits in the latter half of the poem that are strongly suggestive with respect to a central element of neoplatonic topopoetics – the metaphors continuing the wealth-and-expenditure theme that is already present at the very beginning of the text. As early as stanza 1 the speaker hails the Weeper's eyes as "Still spending, never spent!" (5). For neoplatonic ears, this is a way of referring to the One, the divine origin of everything and source of all that is good, true, and beautiful. And indeed, this paradoxical figure of the inexhaustible fountain or well circumscribes one of the poetic structures determining the text and its remarkable topology. For this is the major theological point Crashaw's poem strives to drive home through stanzas 18–22: that the divine, self-spending love epitomized in the Magdalene's tears is both here and everywhere, ceaselessly mobile, powered by an unstoppable, communicative dynamic:

22
 O precious prodigal!
 Fair spendthrift of thyself! thy measure
 (Merciless love!) is all.
 Even to the last pearl in thy treasure.
 All places, times, and objects be
 Thy tear's sweet opportunity.
 (127–132)

This kind of expenditure and prodigality is the highest virtue. Hence the repeated stress on movement – on feet and ways, on straying, climbing, walking, wandering, hasting, seeking, going. Emotion is here translated into motion, the early modern term that accommodates both spatial and affective meanings. This is why Crashaw can imagine the Weeper’s fruitful eyes as “two weeping motions; | Portable, and compendious oceans” (113–114), following Christ on his way through the Galilean mountains. Thus the physical is transformed into a figure for the ubiquity of love. The generous expenditure of tears can be seen as *imitatio Christi*. It will even appear as a kind of spiritual procreativity that will, by means of the “fugitive sons of those fair eyes | Your fruitful mothers” (164–165) further the communication of the highest truth.

If all this appears rather weird and baffling, we are not the first to wonder. Crashaw has always been regarded as eccentric, his poetry as particularly strange and somewhat embarrassing. He is certainly not as elegant a poet as his (justly) more famous contemporaries, John Donne, George Herbert, or Andrew Marvell, who address similar questions. But his is an instructive eccentricity. His oddity is part of his ingenuity. And wonder, as we all know, is the beginning of philosophy. After all, this poetry and its astonishing *topopoiesis* is no weirder than the things it tries to say. It is, as has recently been pointed out, not more scandalous than the Incarnation with its inverse topology that locates “Heaven in earth, and God in man.”¹⁴ Mary Magdalene’s upward weeping becomes, as I have tried to indicate, understandable as the product of a topopoetics that works with and transforms, metaphorically and by other means, ideas, signs, and figures of thought ultimately deriving from, and re-modelling, the metaphysics of classical antiquity. It is just one of the many routes on which the ancient cultures travel into our present to change it.

3 Kepler’s temple of Urania: topopoetics above the heavens

In Crashaw’s poem, Mary Magdalene’s tears reach places other tears do not reach – above the heavens, *hyperouranos*, as well as below, in their deference to the Saviour’s feet. What is topopoetically striking about this is not only the edifying connection of utmost humility with supracelestial elevation, but perhaps even more the opening of a space that spans the lowest as well as the highest regions, deepest earth and highest heaven, linking the material with the aetherial. Indeed, there is a subversive side to the mutually convertible dynamics of the Magdalene’s upward weeping, for this is certainly not compatible with views of a hierarchically ordered universe that restrict the human to the sublunary sphere, reserving for divine life a realm above the firmament. What Crashaw’s text celebrates and performs above all is motion, sensual, affective, and intellectual, which, in relating the human to the divine, defines holiness as intermediacy and postulates a sympathetic correspondence between both. In the process, the invisible is rendered evident, as it becomes part of an allegorical figure.

Allegorical linkage between highest, ‘hyper-uranical’ truth and the humble labours of the human mind that strive to make visible what cannot be seen, or at least to render it accessible to the intellect, also seems to describe the topopoetical strategy of a rather different work of art: the allegorical Temple of Urania depicted in the frontispiece image of Johannes Kepler’s “Rudolphine Tables” (*Tabulae Rudolphinae*, Ulm 1627). Similar, too, to Spenser’s awareness of the possibility of “other worldes” to be discovered in “every

14 Crashaw, “In the Holy Nativity”, l. 82; quoted also in Rambuss 2013: “For Crashaw, the conjunctive force of the Incarnation [...] is not only doctrine; it is also predicative of his poetics, the core of his own wonderstruck wit”. According to Rambuss, it is ultimately Christ’s Incarnation which, for this poet, authorizes “new imagistic analogies for conceptually bridging the divide between the heavenly and the human, the mysterious and the familiar, the supernal and the mundane” (xxxix).

other starre unseene”, here we find a self-confident cosmological staging of the new natural philosophy and its potential as realized in the work of an eminent thinker who places himself modestly not only much below the astral level but also well underneath the space occupied by his predecessors in astronomy, and who yet seems to surpass their ambitious endeavours by his own crowning achievement.

The topopoetical paradox here unfolds itself visually as well as textually, as the frontispiece is to a certain extent structured emblematically: If the title can be considered as motto to the *pictura* of the temple, it is accompanied by a *descriptio* in the shape of an otherwise aesthetically unremarkable ekphrastic poem by the humanist Johann Baptist Hebenstreit. This, however, appears to go beyond merely descriptive functions as it adds significant aspects to the image with respect to the interpretation, indeed the allegoresis, it offers both of it and of Kepler’s astronomy. As I should like, in my conclusion to this sketch of the possibilities opened by a topopoetical approach to early modern transformations of classical spatial semantics, to focus above all on the frontispiece’s pictorial side, I shall rely, in my few references regarding Hebenstreit’s long “Idyll”, on the reading presented by Nicholas Jardine and others.¹⁵

The frontispiece to the “Rudolphine Tables” shows a monopteros with a circular dome (Fig. 1), base relief and a star-spangled floor on which are placed Kepler’s predecessors, the astronomers of antiquity next to the temple’s columns, whose shapes and adornments also, by displaying their specific instruments and inventions, represent their achievements. Among them are a nameless Chaldean, Hipparchus, Ptolemy, and, centrally placed in the foreground, Copernicus and Tycho Brahe, whose observations and calculations Kepler had used in preparing the Tables, in dispute. With the words “Quid si sic?” Tycho points towards the ceiling of the temple, where we can discern – with some trouble, since it is heavily shaded – a diagram of his world system. Kepler himself is shown only in one of the four plaques on the base of the temple to the left, with an enumeration of four of his book titles (including his earliest work, *Mysterium Cosmographicum*, 1596, and his *Epitome Astronomiae Copernicanae* of 1618). He is seen seated working at a table and in front of him we perceive a miniature replica of the temple’s dome.

This spatial arrangement with its intriguing genealogy, its reversal of up and down, its placing of the firmament underneath the astronomers’ feet, its elevation of a diagrammatic representation of Tycho’s heliocentric system to a heavenly position centrally on the ceiling above their heads, and its dramatic constellation of the competing scholars is in itself highly suggestive. What appears at first glance to be an elaborate compliment directed at Tycho, appointing to him a place of honour amongst his peers and granting his findings the status of glorious fulfillment of ancient thought, begins to display elements of hubris, as a darkly decorated roofing has replaced the shining firmament. On it the (metaphysical as well as material) heavens are submitted not only to measurement but in fact to disregard. The Danish astronomer’s own gaze and deixis are broken by the level foil on which his geometric reconstruction of the universe appears as if by projection on a plane.

Things become even more questionable when we move to the dome. It is only here that we come out into the light. Sheltered under the wings of the Habsburg eagle and showered by his bounty, a smallish figure – presumably Urania, the goddess of astronomy¹⁶ –, sits enthroned, surrounded, along the edges of the dome and placed at each of

15 The following paragraphs paraphrase the overall description of the image and the interpretation of the poem given in Jardine, Leedham-Green, and Lewis 2014; my conclusions with respect to the relation between the image and Kepler’s doctrine go beyond theirs. I am grateful to Gerd Graßhoff for drawing my attention both to the frontispiece and to the article.

16 Although Jardine, Leedham-Green, and Lewis 2014 leave this personification unidentified; going by Hebenstreit’s ekphrasis, the supreme goddess may even be “*Archetypica* [...] in full accord with Kepler’s



Fig. 1 | Frontispiece to the book “Rudolphine Tables”

the (presumably, since not all of them are represented) twelve corners of its pediment, by female personifications of Kepler’s achievements, saintlike and together with their technical attributes. Of these, only six are visible (*Magnetica*, *Stathmica*, *Doctrina triangulorum*, *Logarithmica*, *Optica*, *Aegle*), the other six are identified and named in Hebenstreit’s poem

conception of governance of mind and world by the divine geometrical archetypes” (9). From a topoetical perspective, the precise identification of the allegorical figure is less important than its position on the cusp of the temple.

as *Geographica*, *Hydrographica*, *Computus*, *Chronologia*, *Mensoria*, and *Harmonia*. This then is the highest stratum presented in the topo-poetic imagery of this temple of astronomy: a Platonic heaven peopled by allegorical figurations of Kepler's very own 'muses' and scientific accomplishments. While Tycho is allocated centre stage in the somewhat crowded and controversial space underneath the temple's roof, it is the absent Kepler's thought with which it seems to be filled, for to him the whole construction appears to be due and to him the crowning achievement is ascribed. In the light of this celebration of the author of the *Tabulae Rudolphinae* the seeming *humilitas* of placing the portrait of Kepler at a level underneath the very feet of his forebears and competitor appears as a subversive strategy: "[...] he is fashioning the dome of the temple itself, a dome that sits over Tycho's heavily shaded world system on the ceiling, and on which stand goddesses displaying specifically Keplerian devices."¹⁷

But apart from secretly asserting Kepler's superiority over his fellow-astronomer, the topo-poetical strategy of the frontispiece offers potential insights that point beyond those of academic or disciplinary power politics. I should like to argue that, together with Hebenstreit's ekphrastic encomium, it is, in the way it marshalls its elements and organizes its spatial semantics, particularly apt to Kepler's own enterprise. To begin with, this strategy rests on the paradoxical evidence of the invisible: the absent figure of Kepler on the temple's floor (though represented in its extra frame underneath) and the invisible perfection of the twelve Keplerian muses on the pediment (the zodiac number is completed only by those at the back enumerated in Hebenstreit's poem). Add to this the visually articulated claim that it is really Kepler who has master-minded the construction and finishing of a temple in honour of a goddess who is also not emphatically present and whose worship appears to consist not so much in sacerdotal rites than in abstract discursive, intellectual, and technical activities that result in architectural and geometrical representation as well as mathematical calculation rather than in visible ceremony. A hidden order emerges that the frontispiece teaches us to see.

This is also an order that seeks to unify, and to some extent reconcile apparently opposed modes of thought. While eschewing the demonstratively hermetical with its hieroglyphical and signaturist devices, the topo-poetics of the temple of Urania still seems to some extent to proceed *more Hermetico* by claiming the validity of speculative platonic-pythagorean insight, such as put forward in Kepler's early work on the Platonic solids but also in his dissertation *Mysterium Cosmographicum*, the *Tertius Interveniens*, or his *Harmonice Mundi*.¹⁸ Kepler's work as Imperial Mathematician at the court of Rudolph II in Prague would have placed him squarely in a context dedicated to furthering the Hermetic arts and ancient wisdom in what Frances Yates referred to as a "failed Renaissance, or premature Enlightenment".¹⁹ While Tycho's "Quid si sic?" remains an open question, ultimate meaning appears to be allocated by Kepler's quest for a mathematical certainty that equals and necessarily complements, the theological in showing the *forma mundi*.

Finally, the topo-poetics of the frontispiece can be seen to correspond structurally to a central aspect of Kepler's teaching and the innovative, if not revolutionary, consequence of his mathematical remodelling of the heavens: As the spectator's gaze is guided, in search of the author of the *Tabulae*, up and down, from top to bottom of the image and back again, it is led to perform a movement similar in its spatial dynamic to Kepler's replacement of a hierarchical, two-tiered model of the heavens that ontologically dis-

17 Jardine, Leedham-Green, and Lewis 2014, 14.

18 Volker Bialas presents a view of Kepler not only as eminent astronomer and mathematician, but also as dedicated reader in the Book of Nature with a strong platonic-pythagorean bent (Bialas 2001, 906–919). Similar to Francis Bacon, this protagonist of the new natural philosophy appears still very much as a Renaissance thinker striving to unite the divergent approaches to the truth in a *philosophia perennis*.

19 Yates 1996 [1972], 28.

tinguishes between sub- and supralunary spheres by one that avoids hard-and-fast stratification and postulates instead a cosmological equivalence of planetary motion. For a dual scheme based on differences of dignity between sacred and mortal, permanent and transitory spheres with their divine and human realms of being, a model is offered that allows physical equivalence between all planets in their circulating movements. If in Kepler's cosmos there is no up and down, the frontispiece to his "Rudolphine Tables" offers an intriguing topopoetical correlative to his doctrine.

This, then, is something topopoetics can help us to observe. It directs our attention towards ways in which artefacts teach us to see things differently. It may also guide our critical gaze through the transformations of spatiality arranged by visual as well as textual allegories. By sharpening our conceptual instruments and descriptive terminology, it supports the attempt to make sense of our concerns in the light of classical culture and the hermeneutic enterprise of reading antiquity from a present-day vantage point.

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