

# [Donne the cartographer: mapping, writing, and female agency in "the good morrow” ...](https://assignbuster.com/donne-the-cartographer-mapping-writing-and-female-agency-in-the-good-morrow-and-a-valediction-of-weeping/)

In her book Maps and Memory in Early Modern England: A Sense of Place, Rhonda Lemke Stanford discusses the importance of maps in early modern English literature. She explores how mapping metaphors are not “ merely another trope of description,” but how poets and authors use early modern techniques of mapping to inform the structure of their writing; as a result, she claims that often in early modern writing, “ a poet describes the details of the landscape and the architecture as a surveyor might, and a female poet names and describes parts of London as a cartographer would” (14-5). Notably absent from her study, however, is an in-depth review of the work of John Donne, who frequently employs images of maps in his poetry. Stanford groups Donne, along with Shakespeare, as an author who often employs maps as a metaphor for “ sexual congress and/or conquest,” and whose poetry maps out “ woman as a land or country to be conquered” (140-1, 59). In contrast to this assertion, I argue that Donne in fact uses maps in exactly the way Stanford’s book proposes: rather than acting as stagnant images, the maps in Donne’s poetry are constantly in flux, and the way maps are continually made and un-made serves as a comment on representation and creation, and parallels Donne’s project in writing poetry. Two of Donne’s poems dealing with the theme of map-making are “ The Good Morrow” and “ A Valediction of Weeping.” In these poems, rather than using the map as a means of understanding the body, as Stanford claims he does, Donne’s process of mapping instead reflects on his ability to create poetry; perhaps most interestingly, rather than being a subject of the poet’s mapping, the women in both poems become unlikely co-cartographers. The map is one of the most commented-on images in Donne’s poetry; many of these varied interpretations of Donne’s maps, however, share a common thread in that they look to tie Donne’s maps, as Stanford does in her book, to the body. The map image in “ The Good Morrow,” is the subject of essays by both Richard Sharp and Julia Walker: both grapple with the paradox that Donne presents the two lovers as simultaneously two separate “ hearts” and “ faces,” and also two “ hemispheres” of the same whole, in the following four lines:“ My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears, And true plain hearts do in the faces rest; Where can we find two better hemispheresWithout sharp north, without declining west?” (15-8)In order to make sense of these lines, Sharp assumes that Donne must have been using a cordiform map as the source of his image; in this way, Sharp seeks to overlay the body onto the map by giving the map a heart shape. In looking to tie Donne’s images of the body to language in her essay “ Donne: ‘ But Yet the Body is His Booke’,” Elaine Scarry notes that when “ Donne continually takes an inventory of the body,” he often finds it “ coinhabited by towns,” “ names,” “ lens[es],” and “ compass[es],” all of which evoke the image of the map, as well (91). The consensus, it seems, is that the map serves as a metaphor for the body, and that mapping represents Donne’s exploration and categorization of the body’s surfaces. I do not deny that the trope of body-as-map is certainly present in Donne’s poetry, and this is evident in the two poems I have chosen. In both these poems, Donne employs metaphors in which maps are the vehicle and the body is the tenor. Walker is correct in noting that “ The Good Morrow” is a “ complex pasticcio of eyes, maps, hearts, and hemispheres” (61). The body that Donne describes in this poem, however, is not a woman but a de-gendered body: Donne leaves the subject of the woman’s feminine “ beauty” to focus instead on the lovers’ shared “ true plain hearts,” “ faces,” and “ eyes” (6, 15, 16). In this image, Donne’s speaker is both map-maker and the subject, as he maps his body onto his beloved’s, and vice versa. “ A Valediction of Weeping” uses the metaphor of a globe to describe the beloved’s tear; the tear quickly grows and becomes its own “ a globe, yea world,” providing a complex interplay between vehicle and tenor (16). In these metaphors, maps do serve, in one sense, as a means to describe the body. In privileging the tenor of the metaphor (the body), however, one risks reading reductively and missing the complexity of the map and the way it functions as a nuanced image. In both these poems, Donne is literally concerned with space and place, and the map is key to understanding and manipulating these concepts: in “ The Good Morrow,” Donne wants to eliminated the space between his speaker and his beloved; in “ A Valediction of Weeping” (as in “ A Valediction Forbidding Mourning”), he wants to eliminate the threat that travel, being “ on a divers shore,” poses to his union (9). As a result, these poems are as much about manipulating place through map-making as they are about love (indeed, the map image literally lies at the center of these two poems) and map-making and playing with space is the means by which Donne can attain his vision of union with his beloved. In paying more attention to the map as a central image in these two poems, it is important to note that the map is not a static image; rather, both poems describe a process of map-making. This is most evident in “ A Valediction of Weeping,” in which “ a workman” places “ an Europe, Afric, and an Asia” onto a blank globe (11, 12). Donne is careful to emphasize that the globe begins as “ nothing,” just “ a round ball,” but through the workman’s craft becomes “ all,” highlighting the process as well as the finished product (10, 13). The map in “ The Good Morrow” is also described as in motion: north is “ sharp,” suggesting a turn, while west is “ declining” (18). The poem also describes “ sea discoverers” traveling to and mapping out “ new worlds,” again emphasizing maps in the process of being created (12-3). These images of the workman creating a globe and of discoverers charting the new world are paralleled by the act of writing poetry itself. In writing, Donne assumes the power and agency of the workman or cartographer to manipulate space within the poems; this fits into Franz Reitinger’s assertion about early modern maps that “ the graphic formula of cartography lent itself to be used in attempts at extensive overview and control, and the map became the modus scribendi for phenomena that were otherwise not readily comprehensible” (111 emphasis mine); Donne uses the power of mapping to gain control over his speaker’s relationship with his beloved, and to circumvent any obstacles that separation and distance might pose. In “ A Valediction of Weeping,” place causes a problem: Donne’s speaker claims that he and his lover “ are nothing then, when on a divers shore” (9); indeed, as a valediction, the poem is occasioned on the speaker’s imminent departure, as he fears what the “ sea…may do too soon,” and that the wind may “ do me more harm than it purposeth” as he travels over the water (22, 25). Rather than remaining victims of separation, however, Donne uses the rest of the poem to create an alternative “ map,” in which the beloved becomes the world, the “ sphere” in which the speaker might be drowned (20). The way Donne seeks to name and chart places in the poem mimics the way a cartographer draws out a map. These tears even “ overflow / this world” indicating that Donne’s new world has overtaken the old (17-8). Donne’s new envisioning of the world allows his speaker to remain with his beloved throughout the journey, because she is the entire world, eliminating the threat of separation.“ The Good Morrow” deals with space on a much smaller scale than the worldly imagery of “ A Valediction of Weeping.” The poem specifically posits that love can assume power and control over place: “ For love all love of other sights controls, / And makes one little room an everywhere” (11). In addition, the speaker and his beloved condense the “ worlds on worlds” that “ maps” show into a singular world that only they inhabit, again creating an alternative “ map” that privileges the lovers (11, 13-4). The speaker wants to fuse his and his beloved’s bodies and identity into one, and uses the mapping trope to do this, as well: at the beginning of the third stanza, the speaker maps his face into his beloved’s eye, and then maps hers into his, relocating the lovers within each other and eliminating the physical space between them (15). Here, Donne is not mapping out a body that already exists, but is instead creating an entirely new one. In both poems, Donne solves the lovers’ problems by allowing the poem to act as an alternate world in which space and place work with the lovers rather than against them. In examining the map-making process in these poems, however, it becomes clear that Donne’s male speaker (or Donne himself, as male author) does not have sole authority and power as cartographer; rather, in both poems, the female beloved takes an active role in map-making, as well. The agency that these women have challenges and complicates the notion put forth by Rebecca Ann Bach that Donne’s work is pervaded by “ a virulent sexual misogyny” (262). In “ A Valediction of Weeping,” it is the woman who cries the tears that become the world; in the previous stanza, as well, she “ coins” the speaker’s tears with her “ stamp” (3). In both these metaphors, Donne uses language of craftsmanship and trade (through the imagery of coins and building), concepts usually belonging to the public, masculine sphere, to describe the woman’s actions and reinforce her agency. “ The Good Morrow” gives the woman agency by positing a kind of collaborative, shared identity between the lovers: in creating his new vision of the world, the speaker says, “ let us possess one world,” placing an emphasis on the lovers’ shared agency (14 emphasis mine). The woman in “ The Good Morrow” is not like the other nameless women the speaker “ desired, and got,” because rather than being possessed, she is now a possessor (7). The idea that the speaker and his beloved are “ mix’d equally” truly speaks to the shared sense of power and control the lovers have in these two poems, and to how essential the woman is to Donne’s process of mapping (19). In this way, as Stanford notes, Donne’s map imagery does indeed relate to gender; however, rather than having her gendered body mapped by the poet, the woman is instrumental in creating the map herself. In both “ The Good Morrow” and “ A Valediction of Weeping,” the process of mapping is what ultimately solves the problem that faces the lovers in the poem, that of physical separation. Viewing map-making as a central process informing Donne’s poetry, rather than merely as a symbol meant to comment on something else, yields new complexity to the map images in the rest of Donne’s work: the most famous image that can be re-interpreted in this way is the compass at the end of “ A Valediction Forbidding Mourning.” Few note that the compass itself is a tool of map-making, and, as in “ The Good Morrow” and “ A Valediction of Weeping,” the compass allows the speaker and his beloved to remain together not only because they are literally connected, but also perhaps because it has the potential to re-draw the map that threatens to separate them; again, as the woman stands as one leg of the compass, she is instrumental in the process of mapping. By writing about place and using mapping as a technique for writing, Donne bridges the distant spaces between his speaker and his beloved, between science and art, and between traditional masculine and feminine spheres of agency within the world of his poems. Works CitedBach, Rebecca Ann. “(Re)placing Donne in the History of Sexuality.” ELH 72 (2005): 259-89. Donne, John. “ The Good Morrow.” Songs and Sonnets. Luminarium. (January 2000).[12 March 2010].—. “ A Valediction of Weeping.” Songs and Sonnets. Luminarium. (January 2000).[12 March 2010]. Scarry, Elaine. “ Donne: ‘ But Yet the Body is His Booke.’” Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons. Ed. Elaine Scarry. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 1988: 70-105. Sharp, Robert L. “ Donne’s ‘ Good Morrow’ and Cordiform Maps.” Modern Language Notes 69 (1954): 493-5. Stanford, Rhonda Lemke. Maps and Memory in Early Modern England: A Sense of Place. New York: Palgrave, 2002. 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