

HISTORY OF CARTOGRAPHY PROJECT

No. 11: A MAP OF TIME

Commentary

Much like a map, William Oxley's poetry functions as a guide helping us find our way in today's complicated world of time and place. The narrative aspects of his poetry engage our sense of the outer world we inhabit while his philosophical insights touch our inner being. Because of this engaging dualistic quality, one also occasionally found in maps, Oxley's poem *A Map of Time* has been selected for the textual element of this year's broadsheet.

Born and raised in Manchester, England, Oxley lived in and near London for many years working as a chartered accountant and developing his poetic talent. In 1976, he and his family moved to Brixham, Devon, where he began concentrating full-time on his poetry. His publications include over a dozen books, and he has a strong interest in the "long poem"—an involved poetic form that interleaves several simultaneous themes for hundreds and sometimes thousands of lines. Today, at age 64, he continues writing as well as coediting *The Long Poem Newsletter*, which he helped establish in 1995.

Oxley's autobiographical poem, *A Map of Time*, follows his passage through life and brings out his views and observations through the course of five poetic phases plus an epilogue.¹ Events, people, and comments divulge a landscape lived, places visited, and times remembered. In this long poem of 3,103 lines, his ambition is to "take the poet's wordy pen and try to compass out a map of time for men: show them first the stunted world they've made. . .," and to state "that maps are of time, not place."² Oxley's poem succeeds because only a "long poem can tell a complex tale" like this and, for that reason, it becomes "the best vehicle for an integrated vision of life."³ To this end, Oxley's long poem, much like a map, integrates different aspects of his life (and our world) and tenders the result in a passionate form.

Joining Oxley's poem on this year's broadsheet is a map by seventeenth-century German mathematician Franz Ritter. What at first appears to be a confused map of the western hemisphere turns out to be a highly mathematical map that uses a projection design linked to time as well as place. Ritter's 1610 gnomonic projection map displays a strong relationship to sundials with the ability to show time using a gnomon. It is an intriguing map form. Meridians and the Equator are shown as straight lines while the other parallels

are drawn as conic sections. The center point of the map, i.e., where the gnomon would be placed so the map could be used to tell time, is 45°N 10°E, and a shadow point would be cast onto a meridian that then indicates the local sun time. The prime meridian on this map runs through the Fortunate Islands. Engraved by P. Troeschel, a Nuremberg engraver, this map will be featured in Volume Three of the *History of Cartography*.⁴

In uniting the artistic works of Oxley and Ritter, time's subtle aspects appear in interesting ways. For Oxley, the words from *A Map of Time* mark out a map based on a life lived and places visited, a translation of place into time. Ritter's map converts time into place because the gnomonic projection uses shadow touching place to tell time. This intermingling of time and place suggests that, while time may be a single entity, we see it emphasized in various ways depending on the form of map used.

1. William Oxley, *A Map of Time: An Autobiographical Poem* (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1984). Lines 3,071 through 3,103 reprinted with permission from the author.

2. Oxley, *A Map of Time*, 60-61.

3. Tom Scott, "The Long Poem: A Reading of 'The King's Quair,'" *Chapman* 30 (1981): 51-62, esp. 55.

4. Photograph courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago (Novacco 2F7). The map was published in Franz Ritter, *Speculum solis, das ist Sonnenspiegel: Beschreibung und unterricht derer in das Kupffer gestochenen Sonnenuhren*. (Nürnberg: Christoff Lochner, in Verlegung Balthasar Camoxen, 1611). Others of this period who used some form of the gnomonic projection include Johannes Kepler, Christoph Grienberger, and Orzio Grassi. For additional details, see John P. Snyder, *Flattening the Earth: Two Thousand years of Map Projections* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 18-20; and David Woodward, "Early Gnomonic Projection," *Mapline* 13 (March 1981): 1-2.

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