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Medievalism Retold

Translating C.S. Lewis's *The Discarded Image*

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Preface

In 1964, one year after the death of its author C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* was published, a collection of lectures on Lewis's theory on the prevailing ideas and concepts in the Middle Ages. It was the last work of a man who has come to be known as the greatest apologetic of the twentieth century. Born to a Christian family on 29 November 1898 in Belfast, Clive Staples Lewis attended various schools in England and Northern Ireland, before he had his faith farewell and left for Oxford as a student. In 1917 he left to fight on the World War I front in France, where he suffered illness and injury. After returning to England, he continued his studies and became a lecturer at Oxford, first on philosophy and later on English language and literature. During his time at Oxford he became part of a literary group called the Inklings. One member of this group was J.R.R. Tolkien, with whom Lewis would form a long-lasting friendship. He returned to Christianity at the age of thirty-three, and since then wrote many works on a variety of questions and struggles that he dealt with during his life, e.g. the suffering of man and God's role in this in *The Problem of Pain*, thoughts on the basics of a good Christian life in *Mere Christianity*, and the temptations and hardships a Christian deals with seen from the perspective of two demons in *The Screwtape Letters*. When he was older he wrote the renowned fictional works *The Chronicles of Narnia* and the *Space* trilogy, but also continued writing non-fiction, the last of which was *The Discarded Image* (hereafter *TDI*). It aims to take away the common misconception that medievals knew next to nothing about the universe compared to people nowadays. Firstly, Lewis sets out to describe various medieval philosophies, and then goes on to explain the medieval worldview through what he calls the Model, and elaborates on this through a variety of topics.

Many of Lewis's works enjoy a vast, global popularity and have been translated into many languages: his *The Chronicles of Narnia*-series have sold millions of copies worldwide, with *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* alone having been sold more than 85 million

times in 29 languages (Everett). His Christian apologetic non-fiction works are read and have been translated worldwide as well. However, his interest in the medieval period is rather unknown to the general public. Hence the mock commission for this BA-thesis: the Dutch publishing house *Uitgeverij Kok*¹ wishes to publish a Dutch translation of *TDI* in order to introduce the general public to Lewis's ideas about the Middle Ages, as well as to show the literary prowess of Lewis's non-fiction works. This BA thesis analyses *TDI* in order to determine what problems will arise when translating the work and offers the translation of an excerpt passage from *TDI*, in which the results of the analysis will be applied to solve the determined problems.

1. Translating *The Discarded Image*: Contextualisation and theory

1.1. Preface

Translating is more than transferring a word from the source language (hereafter: SL) to the target language (hereafter: TL) counterpart. Because of this, the translator should establish a clear idea of what problems might be encountered while translating the source text (hereafter: ST) to the target text (hereafter: TT) before the text can be adequately or acceptably (see the discussion of Gideon Toury's approach, below) translated. Translation scholars have suggested various means to determine an objectified, structured image of the differences between ST and TT and any elements that may cause problems during the transfer phase. By using various theories, this chapter will analyse both the source text and the hypothetical target text, in order to determine and solve the possible problems that might arise when translating *TDI*.

1.2. Translation-oriented text analysis

One of the most important factors in establishing a proper analysis of the ST and the strategy to be used in the translation process, is the so-called *skopos* theory, introduced by

¹ *Uitgeverij Kok* describes itself as "a leading publisher on philosophy, religion and church, spirituality and the meaning of life" (www.kok.nl).

Hans J. Vermeer in 1978 in an essay entitled “Ein Rahmen für eine allgemeine Translationstheorie.” The theory gained ground after the essay was published in *Lebende Sprachen*. The theory meant a shift in the established translation theories, which focused on “the fundamental notion of equivalence” (Nord in Reiß and Vermeer i). The concept of equivalence is rather abstract and ambiguous, as there is no unambiguous view of when a ST element and a TT element can be deemed equivalent. According to Gideon Toury, the translation process can be regulated and disambiguated by determining the norms set by the actual situation (ST) and the desired situation (TT), to prevent the TT from becoming a collection of individual solutions to translation problems (Toury 323). He distinguishes between translating “adequately” and “acceptably,” a distinction based on whether the translator bases his strategy on the ST norms or the TT norms (324). Following the mock commission, the translation will aim to be as adequately as possible, with the style and register of the TT mirroring the ST’s style as close as possible. A balance has to be achieved between the formal, teaching-style register of the ST, and the somewhat lower, engagingly colloquial style matching the TT *skopos*.

Niklas Luhmann gives a very systematic definition of equivalence in his systemic theory: “A and B are functionally equivalent if both are capable of solving problem X” (Luhmann in Reiß and Vermeer 119). Reiß and Vermeer state a general theory of equivalence: “[E]quivalence includes both the relationship between the individual linguistic signs of a text pair and the relationship between whole texts” (Reiß and Vermeer 121). The *skopos* theory is based on “the aim or purpose, of the translation process” (ibid.). Vermeer states that every act of translation has a purpose, but it is this purpose rather than the act of translation that is key to successfully translating a text. Hans G. Hönl claims that the essential purpose of a translation-oriented text analysis is “to improve [the translator’s]

translating competence”² (Hönig 130). Following Kirchhoff’s suggestions, Vermeer claims there are three phases in the analysis process: 1) determining the target audience, 2) deciding the relevance of certain elements in the ST and 3) transferring the ST to the TT (Reiß and Vermeer 91-2).

The first phase in the process of translation *TDI* can be solved relatively easily, because the TT audience has already been provided in the commission set by the publisher: people that are generally interested in the Middle Ages and the non-specialist perceptions thereof. However, this differs from the ST’s target audience: Lewis describes *TDI* as “based on a course of lectures given more than once at Oxford. ... Some who attended [these lectures] have expressed a wish that its substance might be given a more permanent form” (Lewis *Discarded Image* ix). This implies that the ST’s target audience are students, educated on an academic level.

Hönig elaborates on Vermeer’s theory by interrogating the ST on three fronts, relating to Vermeer’s phases. The outcome of the interrogation will give a clearer view of relevant problems in the transfer phase from ST to TT (Hönig 132-35). The first question focuses on text situation: “who speaks where – and why him?” (Hönig 132); the second question is about the “translation-relevant text dimensions”: “What is the text about and why is it written in this way?” (133). Asking these first two questions of the present ST gives the following information: in the ST, Lewis is the speaker; he aims to describe and explain various views on the universe in the medieval and Renaissance period. *TDI* describes various theories from this period, with the passage serving as ST going deeper into planet Earth and the creatures living on her. Lewis guides his audience past these theories using a presentation that has “hardly dated,” according to Eric Mader in his review of *TDI* (necessaryprose.com).

² Translations from the Dutch are my own, unless indicated otherwise.

Nevertheless, it has to be borne in mind that the ST was originally lecture material: because of this, the discourse is rather formal and academic.

In the article “Tekstanalyse en de moeilijkheidsgraad van een vertaling,” Christiane Nord suggests an elaborate procedure to answer Hönig’s third, most pragmatic question, which sets out to determine the units of translation: “what needs to be translated?” (Hönig 135). By asking this question, “the translator determines which translation units have been clarified through the process of the previous analysis, after which he derives the function of each different unit” (ibid.). Nord’s procedure, which she calls a translation-oriented text analysis, starts by determining the skopos through an extended version of the Lasswell-formula: “Who conveys for which purpose to whom by means of which medium where, when and why a text with what function?” (Nord 146) This formula has to be applied twice: once on the (hypothetical) TT to determine the “desired situation”, and once on the ST to determine the “actual situation” (ibid.). While this seems to be a process that is the wrong way around, Nord deems the TT skopos more important a starting point: “When the translation process is determined by the target text’s demands rather than the source text’s lingual attributes, the source text’s status can strongly be put into perspective” (Nord 145).

Applying the formula to the skopos of the TT results in the following:

- Who: C.S. Lewis
- Which purpose: to introduce, describe and explain various views on the universe from the medieval and Renaissance period.
- To whom: people who are generally interested in the works of C.S. Lewis; also, people interested in his studies of the medieval period.
- Which medium: print
- Where: The Netherlands
- When: 2015

- Why: *Uitgeverij Kok* wishes to expose more of Lewis's work to a general public.
- With what function: to introduce the Dutch reader to Lewis's views on medieval and Renaissance views on the universe.

When applied on the ST of *TDI*, the formula gives the following results:

- Who: C.S. Lewis
- Which purpose: to introduce, describe and explain various views on the universe from the medieval and Renaissance period.
- To whom: students and anyone keen to learn more about the Middle Ages and Renaissance views on the universe.
- Which medium: print, based on a course of lectures given on the topic.
- Where: at Magdalene College, Cambridge
- When: 1964
- Why: people who had attended his lectures asked Lewis to publish the work (Lewis, *Discarded Image ix*).
- With what function: to let his audience look at the medieval and Renaissance views on the universe from a different perspective.

A comparison between the results show multiple differences between the ST and TT skopoi. The TT aims at a broader audience than the ST has. Moreover, the original purpose of the ST is specifically to educate students, while *Uitgeverij Kok* has set the TT's purpose to introduce a Dutch audience to Lewis's medievalist non-fiction. The time also differs for the ST and TT: the TT is written 51 years after the ST was first published. The ST was published at Magdalene College, Cambridge, the TT's location of publication will be the Netherlands. With these differences in mind, the following general overview of the general translation problems that may arise during the transfer phase can be concluded:

- The difference in time period between TT and ST may have an influence on the overall language transfer process.
- Certain cultural-specific elements from the ST will not be directly transferable to the TT.
- the TT language will be written in a slightly lower register, compared to the ST.
- Text units that are clear to the ST audience may have to be explained in the TT.

To identify the translation problems, Nord divides them into four categories, which are framed in a top-down structure: 1) Pragmatic problems, 2) Cultural-specific elements, 3) Language pair-specific elements and 4) Text-specific elements (Nord 147). The top-down structure, Nord argues, aids the translator in solving the translation problems structurally: any problems caused by extratextual factors will be solved, so that the intratextual categories will remain relatively surveyable (145). Chapter two will elaborate on these four categories of translation problems found in the ST.

1.3. The translator's position

Once the skopos and any translation-related problems of a text have been determined, the translator is one step closer to completing a successful translation. However, the role of the translator is also a factor in the translation process. Due to the large differences between ST and TT, often realised by the difference in source and target language alone, the translator might be tempted to give his creativity free rein in order to deliver a successful translation. However, if the creative input becomes too obvious or marked, this can be deemed undesirable by both the publisher and the audience. For “people who live in a certain culture may not be able to exactly pinpoint any deviation, however, they usually notice when a translator has not conformed himself to the sanctioned methods” (Toury 323).

The ‘visibility of the translator’ has always been a complex issue. Lawrence Venuti, in *The Translator's Invisibility*, explains that there are two ways to measure the degree of

invisibility: Firstly, the TT should be as fluent as possible to render the translator invisible: “Under the regime of fluent translating, the translator works to make his or her work ‘invisible,’ producing the illusory effect of transparency that simultaneously masks its status as an illusion: the translated text seems ‘natural,’ that is, not translated” (5). Secondly, there is the “conception of authorship,” the degree as to how much the TT represents the author’s ideas, thoughts and emotions (6). This position of the translator can be measured by “mathematics-based concepts of semantic equivalence or one-on-one correspondence” (13). When the TT corresponds with the ST in style and meaning without the reader seeing through the illusion of authorship, the invisible translator has succeeded in his task. However, it can be argued that the role of the translator should be acknowledged more: Venuti himself states that translation is “a weird form of self-annihilation,” practiced mainly in the English-speaking countries (ibid.). Reiß and Vermeer argue that the translator is much more in the translation process than just an invisible “language mediator:” “he is the one who ultimately decides what is translated or interpreted, when and how, on the basis of his knowledge of the source and target cultures and languages” (Reiß and Vermeer 78). While the translator has to abide by the restrictions specified by the translation commission, he does have a vital role in transferring a text from one language to the other, which gives him the power, if not the obligation to perform the translation process with a certain creativity. In his translation of *Poems of Paul Celan* Michael Hamburger distinguishes “two distinct functions and processes, which, for simplicity’s sake, I call reading and writing” in the translation process (204). While the primary role of a translator may be seen as writing, which is defined by Hamburger as “the capacity to reconstitute the text in another language,” the target audience’s understanding of the TT (the “reading” function) is a significant factor for the translator to consider: Most of the perennial debates about what translation can or ought to do hinge on the delicate balance between the two functions and processes – and on the differences, either

individual or historical, in the relative importance attached to the one and the other. ... The individual differences have to do with a translator's character and intentions, with the degree to which translation serves him or her as a pretext for doing his or her own thing, writing, and the degree to which he or she subordinates this purpose to that of bringing the original as close as possible to the reader. (ibid.)

Hamburger's theory allows more creativity on the part of the translator. While the mock commission stipulates that the translation be as close the ST in style and content as possible, there are elements that require a creative solution. Chapter 2 will further look into those elements.

Another theory is that translation is "a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the foreign text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the translating language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation" (Venuti 13). Venuti states that every translation is a unique deviation from its original, due to the different interpretations and methods used by each translator: "Meaning is a plural and contingent relation, not an unchanging unified essence" (ibid.). Furthermore, Venuti mentions the possibility of adding information from the target culture, that is unknown to the source culture: the contents of the TT will be enriched, if not completed, but the final translation will deviate from the ST. Venuti states that "[t]he violence wreaked by translation is partly inevitable, inherent in the translation process," but that the translator always has a choice, which begins with "the most urgent question ... : What to do? Why and how do I translate?" (15). This choice situates the translator between two extremes methods of translation, established by Friedrich Schleiermacher. In his essay "On the Different Methods of Translating," he contrasts a "burdensome too much and a tormenting too-little" when it comes to approaching the meaning of a word in the original text (Schleiermacher 48). According to Schleiermacher, one can never achieve the proper meaning by transferring a translation unit

from the source language to the target language: it is always an approximation. He therefore makes a distinction between “two separate parties” of translating (49). Schleiermacher states that both forms “must united either at some point between the two ... or else the one must betake itself to the other” (ibid.). Because it cannot be expected of the audience to understand multiple languages on the same level, it is the translator’s position to find that fragile unity somewhere between these two extreme forms of translation.

2. Determining the source text’s translation problems

2.1. Preface

This chapter will briefly describe the four categories determined by Nord (see chapter 1), and give examples from the ST to illustrate some of the translation problems encountered in the ST. For each category, a few examples will be given. Then, a general strategy for solving these problems, based on the theories and analysis described in chapter 1 will be given. The overall strategy for translating this text will be based on Diederik Grit’s distinction between “exoticizing” and “naturalizing”: either adapting the TT to the ST’s unfamiliar context, or attempting to place the ST’s context into the target culture (Grit 149).

For the translation of quotations from sources used by Lewis, recently published Dutch sources will be used as much as possible. References will be placed within the body of the text.

2.2. Pragmatic and culture-specific problems

Pragmatic translation problems deal with “the communicative situations from which the ST and TT originate” (Nord 147). Extratextual factors like time and location are relevant for finding a solution to these problems. However, Nord’s “culture-specific foreknowledge” (147), which she also places in this category, is a highly problematic item, since it causes a major overlap with the category following the “pragmatic translation problem”: at which point prior knowledge of a specific source text cultural item becomes a “pragmatic problem”

and at which a “culture-specific” remains unclear. Here, I will focus on Lewis’s use of intertextual references as pragmatic problems. Because Lewis wrote *TDI* based on the lectures he had given earlier, the text is rather academic and anticipates a fair amount of prior knowledge on the topic. There are many references to and quotations from other historical and literary works (*Iliad*, *Aeneid*, the *mappemounde*, Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*), some of which are referenced in footnotes in the ST. Also, Lewis mentions many names of historical figures (Cicero, Isidore, Pliny) and locations, some of them indicated by their medieval (the Levant, Abyssinia, Cathay) rather than their contemporary names. Names of historical places and persons will be further identified, where necessary, by either in-text specifications or end notes to the text. Following on from this, the ST’s culture-specific elements (culture-related translation units from the ST that do not have equivalents in the TT culture [Nord 147]) are the many references to classic English literary works without specifying their source, such as the “Wife of Bath” tale and Margery Kempe. Lewis also mentions the Hereford *mappemounde*. Since they are known to the ST’s target audience, these elements need no specification in the ST. The hypothetical TT’s audience will be less likely to be familiar with these terms, so they will be explained briefly either in-text or by using end notes. A separate preface to the translation will further briefly inform the reader of my handling of the various CSE’s.

2.3. Language pair-specific elements

Language pair-specific problems are translation problems on the syntactical level: “they originate from the difference in structure between the source language and target language” (Nord 147). This results in sentences that, when translated as closely to the ST as possible, in sentences that are either ungrammatical or very hard to contemplate. While trying to maintain Lewis’s style as much as possible, the text will be made more easily understandable for the

target audience of the hypothetical TT. Large changes in syntactic structure will be clarified in a footnote.

2.4. Text-specific elements

Lewis uses a rather archaic style, sometimes combined with an almost fragmented writing style. Furthermore, the ST contains neologisms, e.g. “Flat-earthers” (140). These will be translated literally, and where necessary, an in-text clarification will be given.

Furthermore, Lewis cites a large variety of sources, some of which he has already introduced in earlier part of his work. Also, not all of these have been translated into Dutch, or have been easy to find. I have chosen to, whenever a source could not be found, to copy Lewis’s reference to the source.

2.5 *The Discarded Image* and parallel texts

James Holmes claims translation studies to be an “empirical discipline ... to describe particular phenomena in the world of our experience and to establish general principles by means of which they can be explained and predicted” (Holmes 311). By analysing texts that are ? with the ST, parallel texts can assist in the translator in determining a suitable translation strategy due to their similarity to the ST on various levels, e.g. texts with a similar genre, style or from the same time period as the ST. Comparing parallel texts to their translations will give an insight in the translation problems and solutions of those texts. This will help determining a suitable strategy for translating *TDI*. C.S. Lewis’s *The Problem of Pain* will be compared to its Dutch counterpart, *Het Probleem van het Lijden*. This work closely resembles Lewis’s style in *TDI*, and can therefore be used as a useful reference for style-related problems. Problems that have been solved in the translation of *TDI* by analysing *The Problem of Pain* will be highlighted through a footnote in the translation.

3. Annotated translation of Chapter VII: “Earth and its Inhabitants”

3.1. Preface

This annotated translation contains page 139-148 of chapter VII from *TDI*. I have inserted footnotes in the text to indicate a translation problem, my considerations and chosen solution. End notes have been used as notes to the text itself: elements that needed clarification to the reader, or a brief elaboration on a theory or term explained in a passage before the ST, are explained in these end notes. References to other texts have also been put into end notes.

Lewis's quotations in the ST are often from sources that proved impossible to locate or turned out not to have a Dutch translation. For the sake of ease and with my supervisor's consent, in those cases I have simply copied Lewis's source without further pinpointing it in the bibliography. There have also been some changes in spelling of certain words, or a misspelling in a citation. I have indicated the changes I have implemented myself with square brackets.

3.2.1. Inleiding van de vertaler

De volgende tekst is een vertaling van een passage uit het zevende hoofdstuk, ‘De aarde en haar bewoners,’ van C.S. Lewis’ werk *Verworpen denkbeelden*,ⁱ door hem oorspronkelijk geschreven en uitgegeven onder de titel *The Discarded Image*. In dit hoofdstuk behandelt Lewis verscheidene middeleeuwse visies op de aarde en alles wat er op leeft. Lewis bouwt voort op diverse theorieën van middeleeuwse filosofische en literaire werken, en heeft een aantal van die theorieën reeds uitgewerkt in eerdere hoofdstukken in het boek. Passages die uitleg behoeven, zijn door middel van eindnoten uitgelegd. Verwijzingen naar de door Lewis genoemde en gebruikte teksten zijn eveneens opgenomen in eindnoten, waarbij er zoveel als mogelijk gebruik is gemaakt van bestaande en bruikbare Nederlandse vertalingen. Er is in de vertaling geprobeerd de stijl en tekstwereld van Lewis zo goed als mogelijk te waarborgen. Waar nodig is de tekst aangepast naar moderner Nederlands, maar wel Lewis’ schrijfstijl is geprobeerd te handhaven.

3.2.2. Hoofdstuk VII – De aarde en haar bewoners

‘In tenui labor.’ⁱⁱ – Vergilius

A. De Aarde

In het hoofdstuk ‘De hemelen’¹ zagen we al dat alles in het ondermaanse veranderlijk en onzeker is. We hebben ook gezien dat ieder hemellichaam door een hogere macht bestuurd worden. Over het algemeen werd er geen hogere macht aan de aarde toegeschreven, omdat ze niet bewoog en daarom ook geen begeleiding nodig had. Dat duurde, voor zover ik weet, totdat Dante de geniale suggestie deed dat ze er toch een bezat, en dat die aardse hogere

¹ Lewis has explained more about the Earth’s mutability and contingency earlier in his book. However, he gives no indication as to where or what exactly he has said about these topics in the ST. This has been revealed to be the chapter “The Heavens”, which I have added in the TT as “*In het hoofdstuk ‘de hemelen’...*”

macht niemand anders dan vrouwe Fortuna² was. Vrouwe Fortuna stuurt, ter verduidelijking, de aarde niet in een bepaalde baan; ze vervult haar taak als hogere macht zoals het een stationaire planeet betaamt. God, aldus Dante, was degene die de hemelen een gids gaf, ‘die licht uitstraalt naar alle hemelkringen, en het gelijkelijk distribueert. Ook aan wat flonkert in de aardse sferen, gaf ij een landvoogdes die het beheert, die ijdel geld en goed laat circuleren van volk naar volk, van bloed naar ander bloed; geen mens kan zich ertegen weren, zodat een volk óf heerst óf kwijnen moet.’ Om die reden wordt haar naam vaak door sterfelijke monden misbruikt, ‘maar zij is zalig, luistert daar niet naar. Zij draait haar [bol] en zalig doet zij blijde haar werk, als heel de hemelingschaar.’ⁱⁱⁱ Normaal hield Fortuna een rad vast; door haar met een bol onder haar voeten te beschrijven legt Dante de nadruk op de nieuwe rol die hij haar heeft toegekend³.

Dit is de rijpe vrucht van de Boëthische wijsheid^{iv4}. Het feit alleen dat het toeval op de gevallen ondermaanse wereld zou regeren, is geen onzekerheid op zichzelf. Juist omdat wereldse pracht en praal bedrieglijk zijn, is het passend dat zij altijd rondwaart. Een vijver moet immers niet te lang stilstaan, opdat het water niet bederft. De engel die het water roert is net zo verrukt over die handeling als de hemellichamen over hun eigen handelingen.

Het idee dat de opkomst en de val van wereldrijken niet door nalatigheid, noch door enige ‘trend’ binnen de menselijke ontwikkeling, maar simpelweg door de onweerstaanbare grilligheid van vrouwe Fortuna, die ieder zijn eerlijk deel toebedeelt, verdween niet met het einde van de Middeleeuwen. ‘Niet iedereen kan op hetzelfde moment gelukkig zijn,’ zegt Thomas Browne, ‘omdat de glorie van een natie bepaald wordt door de val van een ander; dat

² The Dutch personification of ‘Fortune’ is *Vrouwe Fortuna*. In the 2013 translation of *La Divina Commedia*, translated by Cialona and Verstegen under the title *De Goddelijke Komēdie*, ‘Fortune’ is indeed translated as *Vrouwe Fortuna*.

³ Cialona and Verstegen translated what Lewis states as “sphere” as *rad* in their 2013 translation. Dante’s original Italian text, however, says “spera”, which means “*bol*” (Source: <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1009/1009-h/1009-h.htm>>). I have therefore replaced “*rad*” with “[*bol*]”, to stay true to Dante’s text and the ST.

⁴ A short introduction on Boethius and his doctrine have been put in an endnote.

is de revolutie en wisselvalligheid van hun grootsheid.’^v We zullen bij dit punt moeten terugkeren wanneer we de middeleeuwse kijk op geschiedenis behandelen.

Fysisch gezien is de aarde een globe; alle schrijvers in de Hoge Middeleeuwen waren het daar over eens. In de eerdere ‘Donkere Middeleeuwen’, net als in de negentiende eeuw, kunnen we ‘Plat-aarders’ vinden. William Lecky, die het bagatelliseren van het verleden nodig had om zijn doel te bereiken, trok zelfvoldaan de zesde-eeuwse auteur Cosmas Indicopleustes uit de kast, die geloofde dat de aarde een plat parallellogram was. Maar in zijn uiteenzetting toonde Lecky zelf aan dat Cosmas in zijn werk ten dele, waarschijnlijk met religieuze motieven, een toentertijd gangbare, tegengestelde visie die in de Antipoden^{vi} geloofde weerlegt. Bisschop Isidorus van Sevilla zag de aarde als wielvormig, en de IJslandse historicus Snorri Sturlason beschreef het als de ‘wereldschijf’, of *heimskringla* – het eerste woord en eveneens de titel van zijn beroemde koningssage. Maar Snorri/Sturlason leefde en schreef in de zo goed als volledig geïsoleerde Noorse cultuur; rijk aan inheemse ideologieën, maar min of meer afgesneden van het Middeleeuwse gedachtegoed waar de rest van Europa zich mee verrijkte.

De notie van een bolvormige aarde werd algemeen aanvaard. Dat wat wij zwaartekracht noemen – door de Middeleeuwers ‘natuurlijke buiging’ genoemd – was ook in die tijd bij iedereen bekend. Vincent van Beauvais wijdt in zijn *Speculum Naturale*^{vii} uit over de zwaartekracht door de volgende hypothese: wat zou er gebeuren wanneer door de hele aarde een gat geboord zou worden, opdat er een vrije doorgang van de ene naar de andere zijde zou ontstaan, en er een steen in dat gat geworpen zou worden?⁵ Zijn antwoord luidt dat de steen op het middelpunt tot stilstand zou komen. Door, naar ik meen, de temperatuur en

⁵ In the ST, this passage reads: “Vincent of Beauvais expounds it by asking what would happen if there were a hole bored through the globe of Earth so that there was a free passage from the one sky to the other, and someone dropped a stone in it” (Lewis *TDI* 141). The sentence has been split up, by changing the second part of the sentence into a question and adding a colon before that question, generating a question that has been stated by Beauvais as a hypothesis.

bewegingsenergie, zou het resultaat feitelijk anders zijn, maar in principe heeft Vincent van Beauvais het bij het rechte eind. Jan van Mandeville bespreekt diezelfde waarheid in *De reis van Jan van Mandeville* op een concretere wijze: ‘Waar ter wereld men ook leeft, erbovenop dan wel eronder; voor eenieder geldt dat daar waar zij leven altijd beter is dan de plaats van enig ander volk. En alzo ons lijkt dat zij onder ons zijn, alzo denken zij dat wij onder hen zijn.’^{viii6} De beschrijving die het meest tot de verbeelding spreekt is die van Dante, in een passage uit zijn *Inferno* waarin hij een intense scheppende kracht tentoonspreid, die in de middeleeuwse verbeelding vreemd genoeg naast de nietigheid op het gebied van schaal bestaan kan. In Canto XXXIV treffen de twee reizigers in het absolute middelpunt van de aarde de ruig behaarde, gigantische Lucifer aan, die daar tot zijn middel in het ijs zit opgesloten. Zij kunnen hun reis slechts voortzetten door langs zijn zijden flanken naar beneden te klimmen – er is immers voldoende haar om zich aan vast te grijpen – en zich vervolgens door de opening in het ijs te wurmen om zo bij zijn voeten te komen. Ze ontdekken dat het ijs tot onder zijn middel, maar tot boven zijn voeten reikt. Want, zoals Vergilius Dante vertelt, ze zijn het punt waar alle zware objecten zich toe aangetrokken weten gepasseerd.^{ix7} Dit is het eerste ‘sciencefictioneffect’ in de literatuur.

Tot enige tijd geleden kende het foutieve denkbeeld dat alle middeleeuwers ‘Plataarders’ waren voldoende draagvlak. Dit zou een tweeledige oorsprong kunnen hebben. Eén is dat middeleeuwse kaarten, zoals de dertiende-eeuwse *mappemounde* die in de kathedraal van Hereford hangt, de aarde als een cirkel weergeven; dat is wat mensen die geloven dat de aarde een schijf is zouden doen. Maar hoe zouden ze te werk zijn gegaan toen ze, wetende dat de aarde een bol is maar ze deze tweedimensionaal willen weergeven, de latere en bovendien

⁶ I have been able to locate a Dutch translation of the last sentence of this quotation only. <<http://www.volkoomenoudeherbariaenmedisch.nl/Reis%20van%20Jan%20Mandeville.htm>>. The translation of the first sentence is my own; like the existing translation of the first sentence, I have aimed for the ST’s archaic style.

⁷ The citation has been removed and will be put into an end note.

lastige kunst van de projectie nog niet beheersten? Gelukkig hoeven we die vraag niet te beantwoorden. Er is geen enkele reden om aan te nemen dat de *mappemounde* het gehele aardoppervlak weergeeft. De Vijf Zones-theorie^{8x} leerde dat de zone rond de evenaar te heet was om er te kunnen leven. Het andere halfrond was voor ons volledig onbereikbaar. Daar zou je sciencefiction over kunnen schrijven, maar geen aardrijkskunde. Het is eenvoudigweg onmogelijk om het in een kaart op te nemen. De *mappemounde* geeft het halfrond waarop wij leven weer.

De tweede reden op grond waarvan men incorrect veronderstelde dat de Middeleeuwers ‘Plat-aarders’ waren, is te vinden in verwijzingen naar de fysieke rand van de aarde die we in de middeleeuwse literatuur aantreffen. Vaak zijn die even vaag als vergelijkbare verwijzingen in onze eigen tijd. Maar soms zijn ze een stuk gedetailleerder, zoals bij John Gower, die in een geografische passage in de *Confessio Amantis* het heeft over

Vanaf daar naar de rand van de aarde,

Oostwaarts, waar Azië ligt^{xi}

Maar eenzelfde uitleg zou zowel dit als de kaart van Hereford kunnen verklaren: de ‘wereld’ van de mens, de enige wereld die voor ons van belang is, eindigt daar waar ons halfrond ook eindigt.

Een blik op Herefords *mappemounde* suggereert dat de gemiddelde dertiende-eeuwse Engelsman volledig onkundig op het gebied van de geografie was. Toch kunnen ze niet zo incapabel zijn geweest als de cartograaf lijkt te zijn. Ten eerste zijn de Britse Eilanden een van de belachelijkste fout weergegeven gebieden in zijn kaart. Honderden, misschien wel

⁸ There is a reference to a passage earlier in *TDI* (“See above, p.28.”). Since this is not a part of my ST, an end-note will give a short explanation of the theory. Because, according to the earlier passage, the theory states five zones and this has been erroneously changed to four in the ST, this has been translated as *Vijf Zones-theorie* in the TT.

duizenden van hen die de kaart aanschouwd hebben, moeten op zijn minst toch wel geweten hebben dat Schotland en Engeland geen afzonderlijke eilanden waren; daarvoor waren de kilts⁹ te vaak de grens voor gepasseerd om daar enige illusie over te laten bestaan. Ten tweede was de middeleeuwer geenszins een statisch wezen. Vorsten, legers, prelaten, diplomaten, kooplui en rondtrekkende geleerden waren altijd onderweg. Dankzij de populariteit van pelgrimages reisden zelfs vrouwen, en vrouwen uit de middenklasse, naar verre plaatsen; bijvoorbeeld Chaucers vrouw van Bath en Margery Kempe.^{xii} Praktische geografische kennis moet behoorlijk wijdverspreid geweest zijn. Maar die kennis bestond, vermoed ik, niet in de vorm van kaarten of zelfs kaartachtige afbeeldingen. Het was met name een kwestie van de wind afwachten, het herkennen van landpalen, kapen omzeilen, welke weg er bij een splitsing ingeslagen moet worden. Ik betwijfel of het de maker van de *mappemoude* ook maar enigszins verontrustte dat veel ongeletterde zeekapiteins genoeg wisten om zijn kaart op een tiental plaatsen te kunnen weerleggen. Ik betwijfel eveneens of zij hun superieure kennis voor een dergelijk doel gepoogd hebben te gebruiken. Een kaart van het gehele halfrond op een dergelijke schaal kon ook nooit bedoeld zijn om enig praktisch nut te hebben. De cartograaf wenste een glansrijk juweel te maken dat de nobele kunst van de cartografie weergaf; met het aardse Paradijs als een eiland weergegeven aan de uiterste rand in het oosten, - het oosten is, net als bij andere kaarten uit de Middeleeuwen, aan de bovenzijde van de kaart weergegeven - met Jeruzalem toepasselijk in het middelpunt. Zeevaarders zouden het met bewondering en verrukking aanschouwd kunnen hebben, maar ze zouden hun koers er niet mee bepalen.

Een groot deel van de middeleeuwse geografie is, desalniettemin, slechts romantisch. Mandeville is een uitzonderlijk voorbeeld; maar ook nuchterdere auteurs houden zich bezig met de locatie van het Paradijs in de wereld. De oorsprong van de traditie die het in het verre oosten plaatst lijkt herleidbaar tot een joodse romance over Alexander, geschreven voor 500

⁹ The ST says "blue bonnets," which is a distinctive type of Scottish headwear. As this will probably not be as well-known to the Dutch reader, it has been changed to a more well-known Scottish garment: the *kilt*.

en in de twaalfde eeuw naar het Latijn vertaald onder de titel *Iter ad Paradisum*.^{xiii} Dit zou aan zowel de *mappemounde* als aan Gower ten grondslag kunnen liggen, maar ook aan Mandeville, die het Paradijs verder dan het koninkrijk van Priester Johannes^{xiv} in India, Taprobana in het huidige Sri Lanka en het donkere land.^{xv10} Een latere visie plaatst het Paradijs in Abyssinië, het huidige Ethiopië, bijvoorbeeld wanneer Richard Eden schrijft: ‘In het oosten van Afrika, onder de rode zee, huist de grote en machtige keizer en christenkoning Priester Johannes. In deze streek zijn vele, overschaduwend hoge bergen, waarop volgens de overlevering het Paradijs is gevestigd.’^{xvi} Zo nu en dan neemt het gerucht over een geheime, verrukkelijke plaats op die bergen een andere vorm aan. Peter Heylin zegt in zijn *Kosmografie*: ‘De heuvel van Amhara is een dagreis hoog, en op de top zijn vierendertig paleizen waarin de jongere zonen van de keizer ten allen tijde zijn opgesloten.’ Milton, wiens verbeelding als eens spons werkte, combineerde beide overleveringen wanneer hij schrijft over ‘Am[h]ara, hemelhoog ... lang voor dezen | door Eden’s zonen tot hun woonplaats uitgelezen.’^{xvii11} Amhara is in Samuel Johnsons *Rasselas* de plaats waar de Gelukkige Vallei gelegen is. Indien dit ook, zoals ik vermoed, de inspiratie is geweest voor de ‘Berg Abora’ die Samuel Taylor Coleridge noemt in het gedicht *Kubla Kahn*, heeft die afgelegen berg vreemd genoeg veel Engelsen tot een doel gediend.

Echter, naast deze verhalen reikte de geografische kennis van de middeleeuwen vele malen verder dan wij altijd bedenken. De kruistochten, handelsreizen en pelgrimages (in sommige perioden een zeer georganiseerde industrie) hadden het Midden-Oosten ontsloten. Franciscaner missionarissen hadden de Grootkahn in 1246 en 1254 te Karakorum, de hoofdstad van het Mongoolse rijk, bezocht. Nicolo en Maffeo Polo bezochten 1266 het hof

¹⁰ For clarity’s sake, an indication of the present-day locations of the places mentioned in the ST has been given as much as possible. “The Dark Country” could not be identified as one particular region or country, so this has been translated as “*het donkere land*” without any addition.

¹¹ The ST repeatedly mentions “Amara” when referring to the hill in Ethiopia. The region in which this hill is located is called Amhara nowadays. I have chosen to use the modern spelling, and have added the [h] in the quote from Milton.

van Kublai Kahn in Peking; hun beroemde neef Marco verbleef daar al langere tijd, tot ze gedrieën terugkeerden naar Venetië in 1291. Maar de komst van de Ming-dynastie maakte in 1368 een einde aan vergelijkbare contactleggingen.

Het wereldberoemde *Il Milione* van Marco Polo is een toegankelijk boek en zou in ieders boekenkast moeten staan. Op een gegeven moment wordt er een interessant verband met onze literatuur gelegd. Marco beschrijft de Gobiwoestijn als een plaats die zó door boze geesten geteisterd wordt, dat reizigers die dralen tot ‘de karavaan niet langer meer in zicht was’ door een voor hen bekende stem bij hun naam genoemd zullen worden. Als ze die stem volgen zullen ze verdwalen en omkomen. Ook dit wordt door Milton overgenomen, wanneer hij het in zijn *Comus* heeft over die

Tongen van lucht die namen hardop spellen,

Ter land, ter zee en in zanderige hellen.^{xviii}

Recentelijk is een interessante poging ondernomen^{xix} om aan te tonen dat er achter de legende over de reis van Sint Brandaan van Clonfert daadwerkelijk accurate kennis over de Atlantische eilanden en zelfs Amerika schuilt. We hoeven dit geval in het licht van deze theorie echter niet te bespreken, want zelfs als er dergelijke kennis bestond had het geen grote invloed op het middeleeuwse gedachtegoed. Ontdekkingsreizigers zeilden westwaarts om het rijke en vruchtbare Cathay, tegenwoordig China, te bereiken. Als zij hadden geweten dat er een enorm, onbeschaafd continent tussenin lag, zouden zij waarschijnlijk nooit aan hun toch begonnen zijn.

B. Het dierenrijk

In vergelijking met de middeleeuwse theologie, filosofie, astronomie of architectuur doet de middeleeuwse zoölogie kinderachtig aan; tenminste die vorm van zoölogie die vaak in boeken aangetroffen wordt. Want zoals er praktische geografie bestond die niets met de *mappemoude* van doen had, bestond er eveneens praktische zoölogie die niets met de bestiaaria te maken had. Het percentage van de bevolking dat een grote hoeveelheid kennis van bepaalde dieren bezat moet in de middeleeuwen vele male groter zijn geweest dan in het huidige Engeland¹². Dat kon ook niet anders in een maatschappij waarin iedereen die het kon ruiter, jager of valkenier was, en anders wel stroper, visser, boerenknecht, schaapherder, varkenshoeder, ganzen- of kippenhoedster of bijenhouder was. De middeleeuwen-deskundige A.J. Carlyle zei eens in mijn bijzijn: ‘De middeleeuwse ridder was veel geïnteresseerder in varkens dan in toernooien.’ Maar er zijn slechts weinig primaire teksten die dit beeld kunnen bevestigen. Wanneer teksten dat wel doen (zoals wanneer de dichter van *Heer Gawain en de Groene Ridder* er vanuit gaat dat de lezer tot op zekere hoogte bekend is met de anatomie van het hert) blijken niet de middeleeuwers, maar wij zelf het lachertje. Dergelijke teksten zijn echter zeldzaam. De zoölogische teksten van die tijd zijn veelal een verzameling sterke verhalen¹³ over dieren die de auteurs zelf nooit hadden gezien, of over creaturen die nooit hebben bestaan.

De verdienste van het uitvinden, of de schande van het geloof hechten aan dergelijke verzinsels is niet besteed aan de middeleeuwers. Over het algemeen handelden ze naar wat ze vanuit de Oudheid hadden meegekregen. Aristoteles had inderdaad de fundamenteën voor een wetenschappelijke vorm van zoölogie gelegd; had hij als eerste bekend geworden en was hij exclusief gevolgd, dan hadden we wellicht nooit een bestiariium gehad. Maar dit is wat er gebeurd is. Vanaf Herodotus staan de klassiekers vol met verhalen van reizigers over vreemde

¹² To maintain as much of the ST’s setting as possible, in accordance with the mock commission’s stipulation to maintain the style of Lewis in the work, I have also chosen to maintain this location specification in the TT.

¹³ The expression “cock-and-bull stories” is used in the ST. This can be translated as “broodje-aap-verhalen”, but I deemed that translation too informal for the TT. I have toned it down to “sterke verhalen”.

dieren en vogels; verhalen die te intrigerend zijn om eenvoudig van de hand gedaan kunnen worden. Aelianus uit de tweede eeuw voor Christus, en Plinius de Oudere uit de eerste eeuw na Christus schreven boeken vol over deze onderwerpen.¹⁴ Maar ook het middeleeuwse euvel van het niet kunnen onderscheiden van auteurs van compleet verschillende genres speelde een rol. De intentie van de eerste-eeuwse fabeldichter Phaedrus was in wezen niets meer dan het schrijven van Aesopische dierenfabels.^{xx} Maar de draak uit zijn fabel (een wezen, geboren onder de toorn van kwaadaardige sterren, dat gedoemd was om de schatten die hij zelf niet gebruiken kon te bewaken tegen anderen) lijkt de voorvader van al die draken die we als Germaans beschouwen, wanneer we ze in het Angelsaksisch en oud-Noors tegenkomen. Het beeld bleek een dusdanig geschikt archetype dat het devotie voortbracht, en zelfs toen die devotie verdween bleef, de mensheid het beeld niet wilden loslaten. In tweeduizend jaar tijd heeft de westerse mensheid het niet verworpen noch verbeterd. De draken van Beowulf en Wagner zijn onmiskenbaar dezelfde als de draak van Phaedrus. (Ik meen dat de Chinese draak daadwerkelijk anders is.)

Velen, niet allen zijn meer te achterhalen, dirigeerden ongetwijfeld veel van dergelijke overleveringen door naar de Middeleeuwen. Isidorus is een van de toegankelijkste bronnen. Bij hem kunnen we bovendien het ontwikkelingsproces van de pseudo-zoölogie waarnemen. Vooral zijn passages over het paard zijn erg leerzaam:

‘Paarden kunnen strijd aanvoelen; ze worden door het geluid van de trompet aangespoord tot oorlog.’^{xxi} De zeer hoogstaande lyrische passage uit Job 39 vers 19-25 wordt hier tot een natuurhistorische voorstelling omgevormd. Ondanks dat zijn we niet volledig los van natuurlijke observatie: ervaren cavaleriepaarden, met name hengsten, kunnen zich inderdaad op een dergelijke manier gedragen. We bereiken een hoger stadium wanneer Isidorus vertelt dat de adder, om zichzelf tegen de slangenbezweerdere te beschermen,

¹⁴ The ST contains the metaphor: “are storehouses of such matters” (Lewis *TDI* 147). The metaphor couldn’t be translated literally, so it has been replaced with its intended connotated meaning.

zichzelf met één oor tegen de grond drukt en haar staart opkrult om de andere toe te stoppen – een duidelijke prozaische overgang naar de pseudowetenschap vanuit de metafoor in psalm 58 vers 5 over de adder die ‘zijn oren sluit.’

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- ⁱ Titel door mijzelf bedacht.
- ⁱⁱ ‘Het object van arbeid was maar klein’
- ⁱⁱⁱ Dante Alighieri, *De goddelijke komedie; Hel.* Canto VII: 74-96
- ^{iv} In het hoofdstuk “Een bloemlezing: de rudimentaire periode” gaat Lewis in op de theorie van Boëthius. De vroegchristelijke theoloog (480-525) schreef het boek *De vertroosting van de filosofie*, waarin hij allerlei belangrijke vraagstukken over het ware geluk, de vrije wil en de voorzienigheid behandelt.
- ^v Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*, p.36. (Vertaling DMM)
- ^{vi} Antipoden betekent letterlijk ‘tegenvoeters,’ en is de benaming voor de mensen die precies tegenover ons op het andere halfrond wonen.
- ^{vii} Vincent van Bauvais, *Speculum Naturale VII*, p. vii.
- ^{viii} Jan van Mandeville, “Hoe dat Jeruzalem recht in het midden van de wereld is en andere dingen.” In *De reis van Jan van Mandeville*.
- ^{ix} Dante Alighieri *De goddelijke komedie; Canto XXXIV*.
- ^x De Vijf Zones-theorie van Cicero deelde de aarde op in vijf zones: twee poolzones, een equatoriale zone en twee gematigde zones. De eerste drie zones waren vanwege respectievelijk de kou en de hitte onleefbaar, en doordat de equatoriale zone tussen de twee leefbare, gematigde zones inlag, waren beide zones voor elkaar onbereikbaar. Dit resulteerde in de theorie van de Antipoden.
- ^{xi} John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, VII: 568-9
- ^{xii} *The Book of Margery Kempe*, geschreven door ‘Engelands eerste autobiografe’ beschrijft het leven van Margery Kempe, die veel pelgrimages naar Jeruzalem, Santiago de Compostella en Italië maakte. Ook reisde ze veel in Engeland en werd ze bekend als een christelijke mystica door heel Groot-Brittannië.
- ^{xiii} Zie hiervoor G. Carey’s *The Medieval Alexander* (1956).
- ^{xiv} In de volksmond ook bekend als ‘Pape Jan’: een legendarische koning, die heerste over een christelijk rijk in het verre Oosten.
- ^{xv} Jan van Mandeville, *De reis van Jan van Mandeville*, h. xxxiii.
- ^{xvi} Richard Hakluyt, “Briefe Description of Afrike” in *The Principal Navigations*.
- ^{xvii} John Milton, *Het paradijs verloren*; Vierde boek, p.76.
- ^{xviii} John Milton, *Comus*, 208-9
- ^{xix} Zie hiervoor G. Ashe’s *Land to the West* (1962).
- ^{xx} Een dierenfabel wordt ‘Aesopisch’ genoemd als de moraal die ze bevatten expliciet verwoord wordt; naar de Griekse dichter Aesopus. (Bron: Gera en Sneller).
- ^{xxi} Isidorus, *Etymologiae XII.i.43*.

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5. Appendix: ST Chapter VII: “Earth and its Inhabitants”

Chapter VII

EARTH AND HER INHABITANTS

In tenui labor.

VIRGIL.

A. THE EARTH

[139] We have already seen that all below the Moon is mutable and contingent. We have also seen that each of the celestial spheres is guided by an Intelligence. Since Earth does not move and therefore needs no guidance, it was not generally felt that an Intelligence need be assigned to her. It was left, so far as I know for Dante to make the brilliant suggestion that she has one after all and that this terrestrial Intelligence is none other than Fortune. Fortune, to be sure, does not steer the Earth through an orbit; she fulfils the office of an Intelligence in the mode proper to a stationary globe. God, says Dante, who gave the heavens their guide ‘so that every part communicates splendour to every other, equitably distributing light, likewise ordained a general minister and guide to worldly splendours; one who should from time to time transfer these deceptive benefits from one nation or stock to another in a fashion which no human wisdom can prevent. That is why one people rules while another grows weak.’ For this she is much abused by mortal tongues, ‘but she is blessed and never hears them. Happy among the other primal creatures, she turns her sphere and rejoices in her bliss.’¹ Ordinarily Fortune has a | [140] wheel; by making it a sphere Dante emphasises the new rank he has given her.

This is the ripe fruit of the Boethian doctrine. That contingency should reign in the fallen world below the Moon is not itself a contingent fact. Since worldly splendours are deceptive, it is fit that they should circulate. The pond must be continually stirred or it will become pestilential. The angel who stirs it rejoices in this action as the heavenly spheres rejoice in theirs.

The conception that the rise and fall of empires depends not on desert, nor on any ‘trend’ in the social evolution of humanity, but simply on the irresistible rough justice of Fortune, giving all their turs, did not pass away with the Middle Ages. ‘All cannot be happy at once,’ said Thomas Browne, ‘for, because the glory of one state depends upon the ruins of

¹ *Inferno*, VII, 73-96.

another, there is a revolution and vicissitude of their greatness.’² We shall have to return to this point when we come to the medieval view of history.

Physically considered, the Earth is a globe; all the authors of the high Middle Ages are agreed on this. In the earlier ‘Dark’ Ages, as indeed in the nineteenth century, we can find Flat-earthers. Lecky,³ whose purpose demanded some denigration of the past, has gleefully dug out of the sixth century Cosmas Indicopleustes who believed the Earth to be a flat parallelogram. But on Lecky’s own showing Cosmas wrote partly to refute, in the supposed interests of religion, a prevalent, contrary view which believed in the Antipodes. Isidore gives Earth | [141] the shape of a wheel (XIV, ii, I). And Snorre Sturlason thinks of it as the ‘world-disc’ or *heimskringla*—the first word, and hence the title, of his great saga. But Snorre writes from within the Norse enclave which was almost a separate culture, rich in native genius but half cut off from the Mediterranean legacy which the rest of Europe enjoyed.

The implications of a spherical Earth were fully grasped. What we call gravitation—for the medievals ‘kindly enclyning’—was a matter of common knowledge. Vincent of Beauvais expounds it by asking what would happen if there were a hole bored through the globe of Earth so that there was a free passage from the one sky to the other, and someone dropped a stone down it. He answers that it would come to rest at the centre.⁴ Temperature and momentum, I understand, would lead to a different result in fact, but Vincent is clearly right in principle. Mandeville in his *Voiage and Travaile* teaches the same truth more ingenuously: ‘from what part of the earth that men dwell, either above or beneath, it seemeth always to them that dwell that they go more right than any other folk. And right as it seemeth to us that they be under us, right so it seemeth to them that we be under them’ (xx). The most vivid presentation is by Dante, in a passage which shows that intense realising power which in the medieval imagination oddly co-exists with its feebleness in matter of scale. In *Inferno*, XXXIV, the two travellers find the shaggy and gigantic Lucifer at the absolute centre of the Earth, embedded up to his waist in | [142] ice. The only way they can continue their journey is by climbing down his sides—there is plenty of hair to hold on by—and squeezing through the hole in the ice and so coming to his feet. But they find that though it is *down* to his waist, it is *up* to his feet. As Virgil tells Dante, they have passed the point towards which all heavy objects move (70-111). It is the first ‘science-fiction effect’ in literature.

² *Religio*, I, xvii.

³ *Rise of Rationalism in Europe* (1887), vol. I, p. 268 sq.

⁴ *Speculum Naturale*, VII, vii.

The erroneous notion that the medieval were Flat-earthers was common enough till recently. It might have two sources. One is that medieval maps, such as the great thirteenth-century *mappemounde* in Hereford cathedral, represent the Earth as a circle, which is what men would do if they believed it to be a disc. But what would men do if, knowing it was a globe and wishing to represent it in two dimensions, they had not yet mastered the late and difficult art of projection? Fortunately we need not answer this question. There is no reason to suppose that the *mappemounde* represents the whole surface of the Earth. The theory of the Four Zones⁵ taught that the equatorial region was too hot for life. The other hemisphere of the Earth was to us wholly inaccessible. You could write science-fiction about it, but not geography. There could be no question of including it in a map. The *mappemounde* depicts the hemisphere we live in.

The second reason for the error might be that we find in medieval literature references to the world's end. Often these are as vague as similar references in our own [143] time. But they may be more precise, as when, in a geographical passage, Gower says

Fro that into the worldes ende
Estward, Asie it is (VII, 568-9)

But the same explanation might cover both this and the Hereford map. The 'world' of man, the only world that can ever concern us, may end where our hemisphere ends.

A glance at the Hereford *mappemounde* suggests that thirteenth-century Englishmen were almost totally ignorant of geography. But they cannot have been anything like so ignorant as the cartographer appears to be. For one thing the British Isles themselves are one of the most ludicrously erroneous parts of the map. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of those who looked at it when it was new, must at least have known that Scotland and England were not separate islands; the blue bonnets had come over the border too often to permit any such illusion. And secondly, medieval man was by no means a static animal. Kings, armies, prelates, diplomats, merchants, and wandering scholars were continually on the move. Thanks to the popularity of pilgrimages even women, and women of the middle class, went far afield; witness the Wife of Bath and Margery Kempe. A practical knowledge of geography must have been pretty widely diffused. But it did not, I suspect, exist in the form of maps or even map-like visual images. It would be an affair of winds to be waited for, landmarks to be

⁵ See above, p. 28.

picked up, capes to be doubled, this or that road to be taken at a | [144] fork. I doubt whether the maker of the *mappemounde* would have been at all disquieted to learn that many an illiterate sea-captain knew enough to refute his map in a dozen places. I doubt whether the sea-captain would have attempted to use his superior knowledge for an such purpose. A map of the whole hemisphere on so small a scale could never have been intended to have any practical use. The cartographer wished to make a rich jewel embodying the noble art of cosmography, with the Earthly Paradise marked as an island at the extreme Eastern edge (the East is at the top in this as in other medieval maps) and Jerusalem appropriately in the centre. Sailors themselves may have looked at it with admiration and delight. They were not going to steer by it.

A great deal of medieval geography is, none the less, merely romantic. Mandeville is an extreme example; but soberer authors are also concerned to fix the site of Paradise. The tradition which places it in the remote East seems to go back to a Jewish romance about Alexander, written before 500, and Latinised in the twelfth century as the *Iter ad Paradisum*.⁶ This may underlie the *mappemounde*, and Gower (VII, 570), and also Mandeville who puts it beyond Prester John's country, beyond Taprobane (Ceylon), beyond the Dark Country (xxxiii). A later view puts it in Abyssinia; as Richard Eden says 'in the East side of Afrike beneath the red sea dwelleth the great mighty Emperour and Christian King Prester John... in this province are many exceeding high mountains upon the which is said to be the earthly | [145] paradise'.⁷ Sometimes the rumour of a secret and delectable place on those mountains takes another form. Peter Heylin in his *Cosmography* (1652) says 'the hill of Amara is a day's journey high, on the top whereof are thirty-four palaces in which the younger sons of the Emperour are continually enclosed'. Milton, whose imagination absorbed like a sponge, combined both traditions in his 'Mount Amara' 'where Abassin kings their issue guard... by some suppos'd True Paradise' (*P.L.* IV, 280 sq.). Amara is used by Johnson for the Happy Valley in *Rasselas*. If it also suggested, as I suspect it did, Coleridge's 'Mount Abora', this remote mountain has deserved strangely well of English readers.

Side by side with these stories, however, the geographical knowledge of the medievals extended further East than we always remember. The Crusades, mercantile voyages, and pilgrimages—at some point a highly organised industry—had opened the Levant. Franciscan missionaries had visited the Great Kahn in 1246 and in 1254, when the meeting was at Karakorum. Nicolo and Maffeo Polo came to Kublai's court at Peking in 1266; their more

⁶ See G. Carey, *The Medieval Alexander* (1956).

⁷ *Briefve Description of Afrike* in Hakluyt.

famous nephew Marco long resided there, returning in 1291. But the foundation of the Ming dynasty in 1368 largely put an end to such intercourse.

Marco Polo's great *Travels* (1295) is easily accessible and should be on everyone's shelves. At one point it has an interesting connection with our literature. Marco describes the Gobi desert as a place so haunted by evil spirits that travellers who lag behind 'until the caravan is | [146] no longer in sight' will be called to by names and in some well-known voice. But if they follow the call they will be lost and perish (I, xxxvi). This also passes into Milton and becomes those

airy tongues that syllable men's names
On Sands and Shores and desert wildernesses.

(*Comus*, 208-9)

An interesting attempt has recently been made⁸ to show that some real knowledge of the Atlantic islands and even of America lies behind the legend of St Brendan. But we need not discuss the case for this theory since, even if such knowledge existed it has no general influence on the medieval mind. Explorers sailed west to find rich Cathay. If they had known that a huge, uncivilised continent lay between, they would probably not have sailed at all.

B. BEASTS

Compared with medieval Theology, philosophy, astronomy, or architecture, medieval zoology strikes us as childish; such zoology, at least, as they most often put into books. For, as there was a practical geography which had nothing to do with the *mappemounde*, so here was a practical zoology which had nothing to do with the Bestiaries. The percentage of the population who knew a great deal about certain animals must have been far larger in medieval than in modern England. It could not have been otherwise in a society where everyone who could be was a horseman, hunter, and hawker, and | [147] everyone else a trapper, fisher, cowman, shepherd, swineherd, goose-girl, henwife, or beekeeper. A good medievalist (A.J. Carlyle) once said in my hearing, 'The typical Knight of the Middle Ages was far more interested in pigs than in tournaments'. But all this first-hand knowledge appears very seldom in the texts. When it does—when, for example, the poet of *Gawain* assumes in his audience a familiarity with the anatomy of the deer (1325 *sq.*)—the laugh turns not against the Middle

⁸ G. Ashe, *Land to the West* (1962).

Ages but against ourselves. Such passages, however, are rare. The written zoology of their period is mainly a mass of cock-and-bull stories about creatures the authors had never seen, and often about creatures that never existed.

The merit of having invented, or the disgrace of having first believed, these fancies does not belong to the medievals. They are usually handing on what they received from the ancients. Aristotle, indeed, had laid the foundations of a genuinely scientific zoology; if he had been known first and followed exclusively we might have had no Bestiaries. But this was not what happened. From Herodotus down, the classics are full of traveller's tales about strange beasts and birds; tales too intriguing to be easily rejected. Aelian (second century B.C.) and the elder Pliny are storehouses of such matters. The medieval failure to distinguish between writers of wholly different kinds was also at work. Phaedrus (first century A.D.) was, in intention, merely writing Aesopic fables. But his dragon (IV, xx)—a creature born under evil stars, *dis iratis natus*, and doomed to guard against others the treasure it cannot use itself—would seem to be the ancestor | [148] of all those dragons whom we think so Germanic when we meet them in Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse. The image proved so potent an archetype that it engendered belief, and, even when belief faded, men were unwilling to let it go. In two thousand years western humanity has neither got tired of it nor improved it. Beowulf's dragon and Wagner's dragon are unmistakably the dragon of Phaedrus. (The Chinese dragon, I understand, is different.)

Many conductors, no doubt, not all of them now discoverable, helped to transmit such lore to the Middle Ages. Isidore is one of the most easily accessible. In him, moreover, we can see actually at work the process by which the pseud-zoology grew up. His sections on the Horse are particularly instructive.

'Horses van scent battle; they are incited to war by the sound of the trumpet (XII, i, 43). A highly lyrical passage from Job (xxxix. 19-25) is here being turned into a proposition in natural history. But we may not be quite out of touch with observation. Experienced cavalry chargers, especially stallions, probably do behave in some such way. We reach a further stage when Isidore tells us that the adder (*aspis*), to protect herself against snake-charmers, lies down and presses one ear to the ground and curls her tail round to stop up the other (XII, iv, 12)—patently a prosaic conversion into pseudo-science of the metaphor about the adder who 'stoppeth her ear' in Ps. Lviii. 4-5.