

Intertextuality and the context of reception: *Hymn to God in my Sickness* by John Donne

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Lesson plan

Resources

- ❖ **Resource A** – last words quotations
- ❖ **Resource B** – copy of the poem
- ❖ **Resource C** – map work handout
- ❖ **Resource D** – film clip
- ❖ **Resource E** – Adam, Jesus and the resurrection.

Learning objectives

- ❖ To consider Donne's use of geographical references
- ❖ To consider Donne's use of biblical allusion
- ❖ To study and understand the poem.

Starter activity – famous last words

- ❖ Read the last words quotations [**Resource A**] and elicit responses.
 - What do each of these last words quotations suggest about the individual who spoke them?
- ❖ Teacher asks students:
 - What would you like your final words to be?
 - What things might be on your mind in your dying moments?

Main activity 1 – Donne's concerns/overview

- ❖ Read the poem [**Resource B**] and establish basic meaning of the poem. (Donne on his sick bed considers the hope he has of dying and being with God. He uses the metaphor of life as a journey, but in a more complex way. He sees his body as a map, and uses the pun on 'straits' to describe his passing to the afterlife.)
 - Find three things about which Donne is concerned on his death bed and what these reveal about him
 - (Donne's concerns seem to be about his destination - his death, his afterlife described in symbolic terms, and his relationship with God – not surprising for an Anglican minister!)

Main activity 2 – map work

- ❖ Using the map work handout [**Resource C**], students plot all the places mentioned in the poem, working through stanza by stanza
 - Discuss the symbolic significance of the places mentioned
 - What kind of journey does Donne imagine for his soul as he dies?
 - How does Donne picture his afterlife?

Main activity 3 – biblical allusions

- ❖ As well as geographic references, Donne makes use of many biblical references. Watch the film clip [**Resource D**] and make notes on the poem
 - Concentrating on the final two stanzas, and using **Resource E** – Adam, Jesus and the resurrection - consider why Donne feels hopeful about death (i.e. he identifies both with Adam (sinful, perishable) and with Jesus (saviour, imperishable) and therefore feels confident of his resurrection and place in heaven).

Plenary – summing up

- ❖ Teacher writes up: How does Donne view the idea of dying and the afterlife?
 - In pairs/groups, students contribute as many responses as they can, each point supported by a quotation
 - Feed back.

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Resources

Resource A – Last words

Well, gentlemen, you are about to see a baked Appel.

- George Appel, executed by electric chair in 1928.

I should never have switched from Scotch to Martinis.

- Humphrey Bogart

'ΚΑΙ ΟΥ ΤΕΚΝΟΝ;' (kai su, teknon?)

- Translation: **You too, my child?**
- Julius Caesar

In keeping with Channel 40's policy of bringing you the latest in blood and guts and in living color, you are going to see another first -- attempted suicide.

- 30-year-old anchorwoman Christine Chubbuck, who, on July 15, 1974, during technical difficulties during a broadcast, said these words on-air before producing a revolver and shooting herself in the head

That was a great game of golf, fellers.

- Bing Crosby.

One last drink, please.

- Jack Daniel

All my possessions for a moment of time.

- Elizabeth I, Queen of England, d. 1603

I've never felt better.

- Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., actor, d. December 12, 1939

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If any of you have a message for the Devil, give it to me, for I am about to meet him!

- Lavinia Fisher, hanged for murder on February 18, 1820

I did not get my Spaghetti-O's, I got spaghetti. I want the press to know this.

- Thomas J. Grasso, d. March 20, 1995, executed by injection, Oklahoma.

I love you.

- Oliver Hardy

More milk.

- Michael Jackson, his last words to Dr. Conrad Murray
- 'milk' was Jackson's nickname for the anesthetic propofol on which he fatally overdosed on the next afternoon.

Die, my dear? Why, that's the last thing I'll do!

- Groucho Marx

I give my soul to God, my body to the earth, and my worldly possessions to my nearest of kin, charging them to remember the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

- Michelangelo

I am just going outside. I may be some time.

- Captain Lawrence Oates, on Robert Falcon Scott's ill-fated Antarctic expedition

Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I love you.

- Mother Teresa (Sept 5, 1997)

I have offended God and mankind because my work did not reach the quality it should have.

- Leonardo da Vinci

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Resource B

Hymn to God, my God, in my Sicknesse By John Donne

Since I am coming to that holy room,
Where, with thy choir of saints for evermore,
I shall be made thy music; as I come
I tune the instrument here at the door,
And what I must do then, think here before.

Whilst my physicians by their love are grown
Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie
Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown
That this is my south-west discovery,
Per fretum febris, by these straits to die,

I joy, that in these straits I see my west;
For, though their currents yield return to none,
What shall my west hurt me? As west and east
In all flat maps (and I am one) are one,
So death doth touch the resurrection.

Is the Pacific Sea my home? Or are
The eastern riches? Is Jerusalem?
Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibraltar,
All straits, and none but straits, are ways to them,
Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Cham, or Shem.

We think that Paradise and Calvary,
Christ's cross, and Adam's tree, stood in one place;
Look, Lord, and find both Adams met in me;
As the first Adam's sweat surrounds my face,
May the last Adam's blood my soul embrace.

So, in his purple wrapp'd, receive me, Lord;
By these his thorns, give me his other crown;
And as to others' souls I preach'd thy word,
Be this my text, my sermon to mine own:
'Therefore that he may raise, the Lord throws down.'

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Resource C – map work

Glossary

Holy room – heaven

Cosmographers – map-makers

South – region of heat (representing his fever?)

West – where the sun sets, therefore the region of death

Straits – i) the narrow passages of water that connect oceans; ii) grim personal difficulties

East – where the sun rises, therefore the region of the beginning

Jerusalem – holy land, in Israel

Anyan – in Nigeria

Magellan – off South America

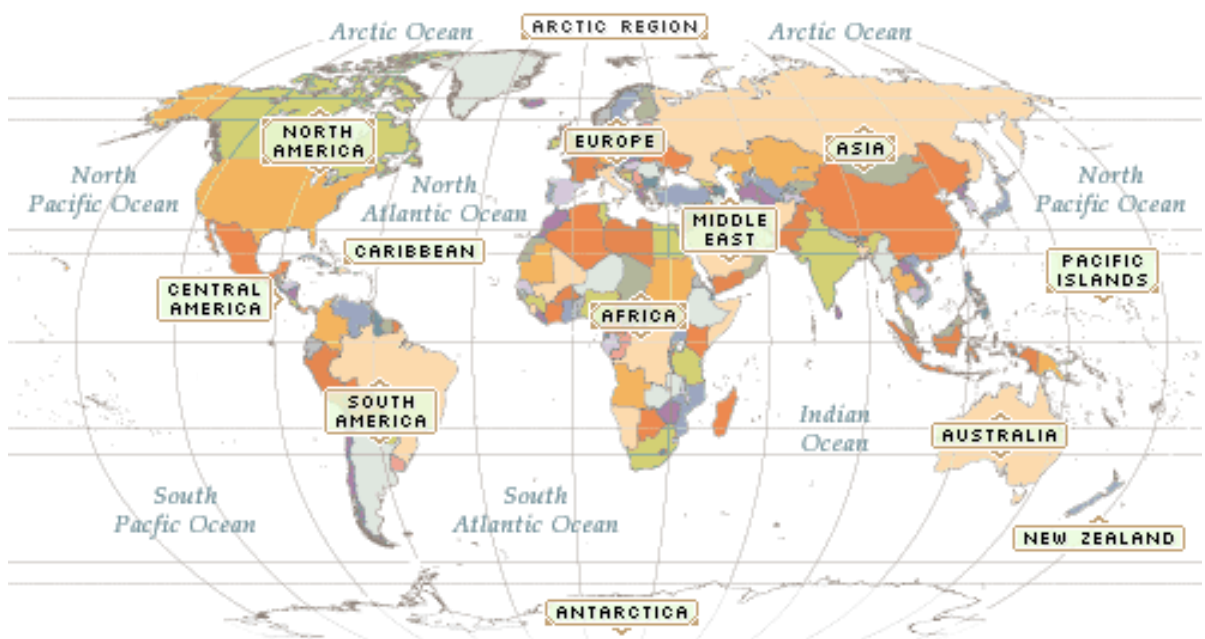
Gibraltar – in Spain

where Japhet dwelt, or Cham, or Shem - Japhet, Cham (usually known as Ham) and Shem were the sons of Noah; Japhet lived in Europe, Ham lived in Africa, and Shem lived in Asia

Paradise – i) the Garden of Eden, contains tree of life; ii) heaven

Calvary – by Jerusalem, where Jesus was crucified

Map



Map View: Robinson Projection

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Resource D – <http://www.crossref-it.info/articles/478/Hymn-To-God-in-my-sicknessResource E>

Adam, Jesus, the resurrection: excerpts from 1 Corinthians 15

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²²For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

³⁵ But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?'

⁴² The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

⁴⁷ The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV)

