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AN Errant Eye: Poetry and Topography in Early Modern France

Tom Conley

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An Errant Eye studies how topography, the art of describing local space and place, developed literary and visual form in early modern France. Arguing for a "new poetics of space" ranging throughout French Renaissance poetry, prose, and cartography, Tom Conley performs dazzling readings of maps, woodcuts, and poems to plot a topographical shift in the late Renaissance in which space, subjectivity, and politics fall into crisis. He charts the paradox of a period whose demarcation of national space through cartography is rendered unstable by an ambient world of printed writing.

This tension, Conley demonstrates, cuts through literature and graphic matter of various shapes and forms-hybrid genres that include the comic novel, the emblem-book, the eclogue, sonnets, and the personal essay. *An Errant Eye* differs from historical treatments of spatial invention through Conley's argument that the topographic sensibility is one in which the ocular faculty, vital to the description of locale, is endowed with tact and touch.

Detailed close readings of Apian, Rabelais, Montaigne, and others empower the reader with a lively sense of the topographical impulse, deriving from Conley's own "errant eye," which is singularly discerning in attentiveness to the ambiguities of charted territory, the contours of woodcut images, and the complex combinations of word and figure in French Renaissance poetry, emblem, and politics.

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