

A Periegetical Poem from Jacobean New College:  
Richard Zouche's *The Dove* (1613)

In 1613 there appeared in duodecimo a long, unusual poem called *The Dove, or Passages of Cosmography*, by Richard Zouche, who identified himself on the title-page of the work as a 'Ciullian, of *New Colledge* in OXFORD'. Now a 'Civilian' is a student of Roman law ('civil', as opposed to the English 'common' law), and Zouche was to become one of the most famous civil lawyers of the seventeenth century, the man more responsible than any in contemporary England for codifying civil law into textbooks, and for championing its relevance in an age displaying considerable metropolitan bias against the bookish law of the universities. *The Dove*, however, is a poem unblemished by its author's legal trajectory, and is rather a homage to its Greek literary model, the *Oikoumenes periegesis* or 'Description of the World' by Dionysius Periegetes, a poet who had lived most probably at Alexandria in the time of the emperor Hadrian, in the early second century AD.

Zouche, when he published his *Dove* fifteen centuries later, was in his mid-twenties, having arrived in the college in 1607. The normal route through the academe was to take the bachelor of arts degree, four years after matriculation, and then the master of arts three years after that. Those set on law, however, pursued a parallel



poet John Milton, for instance, who ran a private academy in London in the 1640s, read both texts with his students, and their twin influence on his later epic poem *Paradise Lost* is easily felt.

Dionysius had found an English translator in 1572, when Thomas Twyne, fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford—one of several scholarly Twynes—published his *The Surveye of the World, or Situation of the Earth, so much as is inhabited*. (H



but the story of female rule still persisting somewhere in Africa derives from more recent rumours of such a society, and also stories of the left-handed Amazons of 'Monomotapa' (i.e. Mutapa, a kingdom in what is now northern Zimbabwe)

And here is Zouch, really just a cento of the passages in bold above:

CHINA her farthest Region in the East,  
By Portugals to vs discovered late,  
Is with much Pleasure, and rich Plentie blest,  
With People, and with Princes fortunate:  
Yet most procuring wonder doe excell  
The Cities where her Prince and People dwell.

The skill of Printing and Artillery,  
Rarest inuentions which these dayes haue seene,  
(If we beleue the Fame which thence doth flye)  
Here in the ancient'st times haue practis'd beene:  
And sure that People is or should be wise,  
Which say We see with one, They with both eyes.

A second example is 'Prester John', i.e. Presbyter John, the mythical Christian king supposed to be ruling over Ethiopia/Abyssinia, and often appealed to in medieval and early modern times as the saviour-in-waiting of Turk-oppressed Europe. Prester John is the kind of figure that was mentioned in Ortelius

very markedly back to the waterway as an organising principle, and especially as the poem works its path into western Europe, it becomes increasingly a rather inert catalogue of rivers, for instance:

Downe from the Alps spring Cloud-despising heads,





John Reynolds, for instance, continuing in the tradition of the most famous of all Neo-Latin epigrammatists, John Owen of New College; but now we start to encounter more and more verse being written and published in English. Zouche was a younger contemporary of John Heath, for instance, whose *Two Centuries of Epigrammes* (1610) favoured the vernacular, again following in the footsteps of the notorious, pioneering Thomas Bastard in his *Chrestoleros* of 1598. (Bastard had been expelled from the college for libellous verse in 1591.) Zouche himself was a bilingual poet, and examples of his Latin verse survive, from an early Winchester piece of *c.* 1600 to salute a prospective visit of Elizabeth I (it never happened), right up to some verse to celebrate the Restoration in 1660.<sup>22</sup> But his one play and his major poem are in English,<sup>23</sup>