



*From the desk of Pierre Beaudry*



## **ROBERT CAMPIN'S *MÉRODE* ALTARPIECE: A MICROMACRO SENSOR OF FORECASTING**

By Pierre Beaudry, 11.11.11



*“Now, the reason that both Plato, in his Letters, and the great Dionysius the Areopagite forbade these mystical matters to be disclosed to those who were ignorant of intellectual heights is that to these ignorant ones nothing will seem more derisory than these lofty matters. For the ordinary man does not apprehend these divine things. But, to those who have an intellect that is exercised in these things, nothing will seem more desirable. So, if at first glance these divine matters appear to you to be vapid absurdities, know that you are found wanting. But, if with the very great desire for knowing you continue for a while in your reflections, and if you accept practical instruction from someone who explains to you the metaphorical process, then you will reach the point at which you will cherish nothing more than that light. Moreover, you will rejoice in having found an intellectual treasure; and you will experience all this within a very few days.” (Nicholas of Cusa, *De Beryllo*, 2.)*

## 1. THE FUNCTION OF METAPHOR IN ARTISTIC COMPOSITION.

How does a metaphor of the mind's creative process work? Lyn answered this question many times before in his writings, but never as clearly as he did during his NEC Meeting of October 26, 2011, at which he said:

*“The principle of the human mind is the principle of metaphor, and then you have to give this concept of metaphor a specifically human expression. Metaphor automatically gives you that, if you understand it. You have a contrast between two values, neither of which is true, to what you intend to say. But, it’s the only way you can say it! That’s true metaphor.*

*“And everybody who doesn’t do that makes a mess of things. All science is based on metaphor, because the ability of the mind, to perform scientific discovery and to execute it, depends upon metaphor, because you can never explain it in terms of mathematics. You can never explain it in terms of objects, as such. The mind, which is located in metaphor, is that.*

*“You have the three, a hierarchy:*

*“You have first of all, metaphor per se. That’s the essence of the human mind. Then you have scientific conceptions of principles, specific concepts which come from metaphor. Then you have the derivatives of metaphor, which are in the form of such things as physical experiments.*

*“In other words, you have an idea, which is a paradox, the metaphor, which has no competent interpretation as a literal statement. It just creates a tension, a paradox.*

*“Then you reduce the paradox to a form. You give it an identity. That’s the idea, which comes from metaphor.*

*“Then, you have the application.”* (Lyndon LaRouche, *NEC Meeting*, October 26, 2011.)

In artistic composition, religious subjects are always metaphorical, because all religious experiences are metaphorical experiments of the creative process in relationship with the Divine Spirit of God; therefore, such a state of affair, must be studied as a matter of scientific concern, because it reflects the natural state of the creative function of the universe as a whole. Take the case of the *Mérode Altarpiece* by the Master of Flémalle, Robert Campin (1375-1444) as an exemplary experimental case, and study it in detail, using Lyn’s three step process of the *metaphorical function*.

The *Mérode Altarpiece* is Campin’s representation of Saint Augustine’s three degrees of knowledge, as, later, Nicholas of Cusa later developed a similar conception in his “*De Beryllo*” (The Creative Mind’s Looking Glass, 1458). The three degrees of knowledge that Cusa identified in that theological study correspond to Lyn’s three steps of the metaphorical process, but in reversed order. The way you want to describe those three steps with Campin is to order them as follows: 1) *sense perception*, 2) *understanding*, and 3) *creative cognition*. Those three levels represent the Augustinian treatment of the development of the human mind, as Plato initially developed them, and as Campin represented them in the *Mérode Altarpiece*. The first level, *sense perception*, is represented by empirical visual objects that are captured through shadows of perceptual impressions. This is not yet knowledge, but a simile of knowledge, that is, the shadowy impression of the domain of universal ideas. The second level, *understanding*, is the knowledge of reason that is completely different from *sense perception*, because its objects are universal principles which are completely invisible to the senses. The third level, *creative*

*cognition*, is different from the first two, because its object is divine. *Creative cognition* is the level of the metaphor as such, the higher intelligence function which comes only from the creative mind.



**Figure 1.** Robert Campin (Master of Flemalle), the *Mérode Altarpiece*, 1425-30. (Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.)

These three levels are the process by means of which the *Mérode Altarpiece* was generated. The first degree measures the beauty of objects, the second degree measures the beauty of universal ideas and principles, and the third degree measures the beauty of universal change, the state of mind of the divine creative process itself, which is a state that we must now attempt to grasp by looking at this triptych as an exemplar of the three steps of Lyn's metaphorical process, a triply-connected manifold.

The first step is the panel of the Patricians (*sense perception*), the second step is the panel of Gabriel and Mary (*understanding*), and the third step is the panel of Joseph (*creative cognition*). The three panels together express metaphor as the process of artistic composition and of scientific discovery. It is the same process for both domains of science and art, and the key to understand the process, therefore, is to discover and solve the paradoxical contrasts between the central panel and the two side panels of the *Mérode Altarpiece*.

At the first level, your *sense perception* is immediately attracted to the interior of a 15<sup>th</sup> century Flemish house decorated with Gothic and Renaissance objects from the Netherlands, Italy, and the Middle East, depicting a room where the Archangel Gabriel is announcing to Mary that she is going to be the

mother of Christ. What do these objects tell you? Nothing. These objects simply inform you that they are noticeable and that they are, possibly, put together for some reason that your *sense perception* cannot understand. So, your purpose is to discover the reason which must reflect the intention that the artist put into them. These objects have no significance in and of themselves, they do not represent what they appear to be; they simply represent the artist's state of mind. If you look at them as things in themselves, you will miss the whole significance of the painting.

At the second level, a closer study of *the painting as a state of mind* should tell you what the artist intended to tell us, and what his purpose was in composing this work of art in the manner that he did. Even a cursory view of these objects of sense perception will tell you if the arrangement he has made, has, indeed, a definite self-conscious intention or not. Once you discover that they are arranged with some definite purpose in mind, you have reached a first approximation of *understanding*, even if you don't know what that purpose is. However, there is no way to understand what the artist's intention might be, truthfully, until you have perused the entire array of objects in each of the three panels, and you have resolved the paradox behind the Annunciation in the central panel; that is to say, the paradox of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Once you have done that, you must then investigate what lies behind this paradox, but this cannot be found in either the left panel or the central panel. You must then raise yourself to the higher level of the third panel on the right. The Saint Joseph panel should come to you as a shock. At that point, you must be totally confused and ask yourself: What is it that is so disturbing inside of this right panel? Why is Joseph building mousetraps! Are there rodents in the house that we don't see? Does he smell a rat? The more you search, the less you understand. In fact you must understand less and less.

At this third level, treat the curiosity of the mousetraps as the anomaly of the whole composition; that is, as something that should not be there, and which is infecting the other two panels and your mind as well. Ask yourself again: What's the purpose? The purpose is to discover how the laws of the universe apply to the real world through *creative cognition*. For example: how do you apply a metaphor of the creative process of the human mind to the domain of visual artistic composition? How do you adjust your measuring instruments to adopt the intellectual vision of a new discovery of principle? Your physical eyes cannot do the job. You must adopt new extensions to your physical eyes, new sensors. And, those new sensors must be fitted to your intellectual eyes which should be treated as if peering through Cusa's beryl intellectual micromicroscope, coupled with Lyn's inferential method of discovering ironies.

This third step, therefore, is *seeing in darkness* the newly discovered principle as the principle of metaphor. The increase of energy-flux density running through your mind at that time must be like the increased density of electrons generated within the Earth's magnetosphere. The density of electrons must act in the same manner, as in Cusa's intellectual beryl double refraction process: they must act as a minimum-maximum mental looking glass sensor which relates conceptually to the infinitely small and the infinitely large, through which you should be able to imagine a wave-particle acceleration that increases its own electro-magnetic power, anti-entropically. This is, as you look through a glass darkly, what the mousetrap metaphor does by radiating the light of its own intelligence throughout the Campin's *Mérode Altarpiece*, as the fundamental *motivführung* of the entire composition. This is the divine level, because the *creative cognition* of the soul is the goal and the end of all knowable things. As Cusa said:

“From Intellect all things come into existence in order for Intellect to manifests itself; for it delights in manifesting and communicating the light of its own intelligence. Accordingly, because the Creator-Intellect makes itself the goal of its own works in order for its glory to be manifested, it creates cognitive substances that are capable of beholding their own truthfulness. And the Creator offers itself to these substances in the manner in which they are able to apprehend it as visible. This is the first point to know. In it, all that remains to be said is contained in a manifold (*complicat*) way.” (Nicholas of Cusa, *De Beryllo*, 4.)

Now, review the three step process, again, in a different way. Unfold the manifold and look for discontinuities between the three levels. For example, why are the patrons facing the back of an ajar door instead of an open Annunciation scene? Because *sense perception* cannot grasp what is visible only to *understanding*. Why is there, also, a complete separation between Mary’s panel and Joseph’s panel, and why are they located at different floor levels? Because *understanding* cannot grasp what *creative cognition* can see. Note that the Patrons are on the ground floor, the Annunciation scene is on a second floor, and Saint Joseph is working in the third floor attic. You can tell this is the situation by simply looking through the back windows that give you different level views of the City of Tournai. The three panels are completely separated from one another, as if there were no entry point from left to right, yet all three parts are united and participate in the same unity of effect, from right to left. It is like the three dimensionalities of Vernadsky: the progress of evolution does not proceed from Abiotic to Biotic to Cognition, but from Cognition to Biotic to Abiotic.

Look at other discontinuities which reinforce the ordering of the three floor levels. The central panel is treated in an idealized gothic form where the subjects are wearing flattened draperies rather than real dresses, by means of which Campin created the effect of an icon frozen in some idealized eternal space, rather than real persons in a real space-time setting. These forms are from another world. It is as if a leap of faith were required to rise above the ground level of the patrons to the spiritual degree of the Annunciation. But, the irony is that Joseph is raised to a higher intellectual plane than the Annunciation itself, as if that were the level where the solution to the entire enigma would be located. Could it be that Joseph had reached a higher degree of energy-flux density? Why would Joseph have the most elevated view from his attic window?

How does the application of these three different steps work in the *Mérode Altarpiece*? This is where the observer must enter into a higher domain than that of *understanding*, and go into the domain of *creative cognition* per se, the domain of metaphor, which is the domain of learned ignorance. Indeed, Campin is bringing us a new vision of the world which does not yet exist and is based on creativity, a Renaissance through which the function of the artist is to generate a change in the observer’ mind and force him to participate in the artist’s discoveries by projecting his own discoveries into the observer’s mind, and, thus, demonstrate the divinity of the universal process. So, let’s reexamine the whole process, a third time, and discover what these three levels entail in terms of a universal creative process. Look behind the foreground with the Augustinian eyes of Campin. What do you see? Start at the ground level of *sense perception* in the left panel.

## 2. WHAT NEWS IS THE HERALD BRINGING AT THE GARDEN GATE?

In the left panel, the patrons who commissioned the triptych, a rich cloth merchant couple from Mechelen in Belgium by the name of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Inghelbrechts, are respectfully participating in the Annunciation by kneeling behind the door where they are blind to the sacred event that is taking place in the solemnity of the central panel. Their coat-of-arms is seen in the windows of the central section, and is also worn as a badge on the costume of the Mechelen herald standing discretely behind the garden door which opens into the street level of Tournai. The patrons are kneeling at the street level and the herald stands at the same level as a metaphor of forecasting some ominous event similar to the Annunciation to Mary. Because such heralds were generally bearers of princely letters, this one may be the carrier of some significant news. The historical specificity of the 1429-1430 period may be able to tell us what the news from Tournai is about.

**Figure 2.** The Patrons in the left panel.



In the left panel, Campin introduces the *sense-perception* level of forecasting. Furthermore, he emphasizes a conceptual difference between the foreground and the background. He is telling us something that is not visible to our physical eyes, but which is only visible to our mental eyes. These intervals of relations from side to side and from front to back actually represent the effective function and nature of the process of metaphor, the actual measure of change. And, whatever lies in this in-betweenness is not a thing, because the objects of the painting do not represent themselves. What prophetic news, therefore, are these intervals intimating?

I cannot stress enough, that when you study a painting, you must not look for the meaning of objects that are painted on the canvas or the significance of their position. Objects don't mean anything, only minds and what minds intend to do, means something. So, look for the *state of mind of the painting*, look for the intention that the artist had, and the influence that the cultural and political ideas of his time may have had on him, and how they might have acted in shaping the intention of his work, regardless of whether he was conscious of them or not.

For example, what is the herald behind the door doing there? Did he just come in, or is he getting ready to leave? Has he delivered the message, or is he going to? What is the message? We are compelled to investigate whatever he is waiting



for, because it is either relevant to the annunciation itself, or it has to do with the situation with the city of Tournai in the background, or both. Is this the reason why Campin applied the same grayness that is perceptible through the openings of the garden door in the left panel, through the window of the central panel, and through the window of the workshop panel on the right? Why does that gray background have a continuity of effect in the three panels? It almost seems as if the scene of the Annunciation in the foreground were masking another scene that has not yet come to existence, and which is not made visible, even to our physical eyes. Why? What lies in those continuous intervals of differences which are visible neither to our physical eyes or mental eyes?

When you look at these intervals simultaneously, it appears that the scenes of the two side panels represent two forecasts of the same and unique event that is expected to happen, but which is hidden behind the grayness of the Tournai sky in the distance. What are we looking for? It is as if Campin were forcing us to seek a double meaning between the Annunciation of the birth and death of Christ, and some other contemporary event that has just happened or is about to happen, within a triply-connected manifold. You don't know what it is, but if you use Lyn's inferential method of investigation tempered with irony, and apply Cusa's "intellectual looking glass," to the historical period, you will probably be able to discover what Campin's method of forecasting actually is and what it is forecasting.

### **3. THE PARADOX OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF MARY.**

The gothic representation of the Archangel Gabriel and of Mary in the center panel represents the level of *understanding* of Saint Augustine's three degrees of knowledge. Mary is so absorbed in her book that she barely notices the presence of the Angel, whose winged presence, nevertheless, blew out the candle on the table next to Mary. A closer look reveals the presence of baby Jesus coming down on the wing of sun rays through one of the two round glass windows on the left wall. The gothic dresses, the gothic bench, and the gothic water basin with the adorned fireplace, all reflect the rich yet modest state of mind of a 15<sup>th</sup> century Flemish cloth merchant, whose coat-of-arms in the two back windows suggest that this is the Tournai residence of the Mechelen merchant couple kneeling behind the door. Their house has been temporarily rented for the purpose of demonstrating the miracle of the divine creative process.

You are now beginning to understand that the divine insemination of the virgin and the creative process are one and the same process in the mind of Campin, as in mine and yours. At first glance, the observer is provoked and intrigued by the mystery of this Immaculate Conception which was one of the most debated religious questions of the Middle Ages. How can the Virgin be impregnated and remain intact? How can something be created from a Spirit? How can the loss of Paradise through the fall of man be regained by a "New Eve?" How can the laziness of the human mind be jolted into becoming creative? The significance of this Marian status, here, is that it reflects the characteristic of a paradoxical way of thinking that marks the nature of the *understanding* level, and indicates the level of the willful decision of the human mind to rise above the false impressions of *sense perception*. The natural state of this second level is to solve paradoxes. Therefore, recall, here, the stanza from the Hymn of Nativity that Jan Van Eyck had quoted in memory of the *Mérode Altarpiece* in his own painting of the "*Lucca Madonna*" from Frankfurt:

*As the Sunbeam through the glass  
Passeth but not breaketh,  
So the Virgin, as she was,  
Virgin still remaineth.*

(Quoted from Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*,  
Volume I, Harpers and Row, New York, 1971, p. 144.)

And so, the poetic concept of insemination of life and of creative ideas solves the miraculous paradox of Mary Immaculate. The difficulty, here, is to discover how man could measure a cognitive mode which cannot be perceived by sense perception, but which can only be identified through the nature of a paradox. This is the characteristic of the second Augustinian degree of knowledge. In order to demonstrate the ambiguous nature of the double entendre of the metaphor of light, Campin captured the effect of the divine light by projecting double-shadows from the water basin, the hanging towel, the window shutters, as well as from the wooden bench against which Mary is leaning. No other objects in that room actually cast double-shadows, as if everything else had been sanctified by the divine light of *creative cognition*. Thus, at the level of *understanding*, the Annunciation metaphor acts doubly as *umbra* and *penumbra*

**Figure 3.** Central panel of the Annunciation.



The central panel, with its multiple doubly-reflecting shadows, expresses the metaphorical function that says two different things at the same time; that is, not only two different things, but two different historical events that are attracted simultaneously from two different times, as if it were a phenomenon of *déjà vu*. As in the case of history repeating itself, like the memory of water, the function of the Annunciation to Mary in the central panel is caused to be memorized and reflected into the other two panels by forecasting another event that emerges from the function of acting through a thousand year distance, as if the same universal code remained intact

throughout the memory of Universal History. But, what is that code?



The historical specificity of this painting, therefore, will have to tell us more about the significance of such a memory function through the iconography of the painting, because Campin was involved in a political brawl which took place during the five year period that it took him to compose the *Mérode Altarpiece*.

#### 4. SAINT JOSEPH AND THE METAPHOR OF THE “DEVIL’S MOUSETRAP.”

The right hand panel reflects the third and highest level of Saint Augustine’s degree of knowledge: *creative cognition*. Saint Joseph building mousetraps is a metaphor referring to the doctrine of *muscipula diaboli* about which Saint Augustine said: “The cross of the Lord was the devil’s mousetrap: the bait which caught him was the death of the Lord.” (Saint Augustine, *Sermons*, 261.). American Art Critic, Meyer Schapiro, had a most exciting insight into the significance of the *Mérode Altarpiece*, when he discovered this underlying metaphor of the painting. The “*devil’s mousetrap*” is an Augustinian irony which relates directly to the Annunciation, the marriage of the Virgin Mary, and the death of Christ. Shapiro wrote:

"In the *Mérode Altarpiece* by the Master of Flémalle, the figure of Joseph appears in a wing beside the *Annunciation* as an artisan who fashions mousetraps.... This detail of the mousetrap is more than a whimsical invention of the artist, suggested by Joseph's occupation. It has also a theological meaning that was present to the minds of Christians in the Middle Ages, and could be related by them to the sense of the main image of the triptych. St. Augustine, considering the redemption of man by Christ's sacrifice, employs the metaphor of the mousetrap to explain the necessity of the incarnation. The human flesh of Christ is bait for the devil who, in seizing it, brings about his own ruin. ‘The devil exulted when Christ died, but by this very death of Christ the devil was vanquished, as if he had swallowed the bait in the mousetrap. He rejoiced in Christ's death, like a bailiff of death. What he rejoiced in was then his own undoing. The cross of the Lord was the devil's mousetrap; the bait by which he was caught was the Lord's death.’" (Meyer Schapiro, *Late Antique, Early Christian, and Mediaeval Art: Selected Paper*, George Braziller Publishers, 1979, p. 1.)



Figure 4. St. Joseph on the right panel.

This metaphor was made popular at the time of Campin by the Augustinian monks of the Brotherhood of the Common Life who were very much in demand across the Netherlands, France, and Italy during the first half of the fifteenth century, and became the crucial force behind all of the European renaissance movements of that period. The *devil's mousetrap* created in the minds of people the kind of inversion that is always necessary to cause an axiomatic change in the fight for the truth against popular opinion. This is the reason why this metaphor is the centerpiece of the painting as a whole, the unity of effect of the entire process of its composition, and the invisible truthful connection between the three panels. The effectiveness of this metaphor is to show how *an intention to deceive leads invariably to the inverse result of that which it is expected to achieve: self-destruction!* This metaphor therefore, applies universally to any falsification of scientific discovery, any fake artistic composition, or any fake political situation, at any time, and anywhere throughout human history. Its divine force lies in the truth whereby *evil deeds always end up burying theirs undertakers.*

In this higher degree of knowledge, you have to apply the universal principle of Cusa relative to his beryl intellectual micromacroscopic. Note the position of the mousetrap which is lying on the outside ledge of the open window. Is this a mousetrap in the window, or is this a gibbet in perspective, located in the public square of Tournai below? You cannot tell. Neither of them is true. It is the ambiguity between the two meanings which is the truth. Ask yourself: What is Campin forecasting with this? Let's go back and investigate what historical specificity lies hidden behind the Saint Joseph panel.

During the first decades of the fifteenth century, before the preparatory phase of the Council of Florence organized by Nicholas of Cusa, two friends of Cusa, and of his Brotherhood of the Common Life in France and in the Netherlands and defenders of Jeanne d'Arc, Cardinal Pierre D'Ailly, Bishop of Cambrai (diocese of Robert Campin), and D'Ailly's pupil Jean Gerson, who became Dean of St-Donatien de Bruges, in 1397, were the two theologians who championed the cause of Joseph, and proposed that he be considered more elevated in rank than the twelve apostles. The proposal was introduced at the council of Constance in 1416, but was rejected. Nevertheless, the effort grew into the acceptance of Joseph becoming the humble patron of workers and artisans, with the idea of elevating the value of labor, and, more emphatically, the occupation of carpentry, to a level of artistic composition. The author of *The Imitation of Christ*, Jean Gerson wrote the following truth about Joseph around 1413:

“O what a marvel of deep humility --thus God's graciousness and humanity was such that he willed to be subject of a carpenter, a *charlier* or woodcutter, and to a poor weaver or silk worker. [Joseph] devoted himself to work and toil, so as to be busied well and earn a just and honest living, and gain the blessing the Prophet speaks of when he says: 'Because you eat the toil of your hands (that is, what your hands earn) you are blessed and it will go well with you (Psalm 127).' Thus Joseph in youth took to carpentry, to making carts or sheds or windows or ships or houses, though he was of an honorable and noble line in Nazareth, contrary to the men and women who don't want to work and think it shameful or slavery, and so are often poor and evil in the world and more to God, for such persons are commonly slaves to all the vices.” (Jean Gerson, from [http://www.oneonta.edu/faculty/farberas/arth/arth214\\_folder/Campin.html](http://www.oneonta.edu/faculty/farberas/arth/arth214_folder/Campin.html))

Thus, Joseph was shown by Campin, as an older and wiser man, working silently and secretly, away from the seductive traps of public opinion, from the highest level of elevation that is humility, and for the purpose of better deceiving the devil by telling the truth through metaphor, which is also the

purpose of all forms of true classical artistic composition. Such is the higher mental quality of the Saint Joseph panel and his *mousetrap-gibbet*. It is likely that Campin met Gerson in Bruges where Gerson was preaching the imitation of Christ in the pulpit of Saint-Donatien. Great works of art always hide within themselves the clues of their creative composition, which become manifest and visible only to the minds of those who have truthfully committed themselves to the same fight against evil.

You have, therefore, a series of contrasts between the three panels that are contradictory, yet each step is necessary to arrive at the truth. The tension of the metaphor reflects the creative state of mind of Campin in this composition. That is the perplexity that the observer must experience, when he is confronted with a paradox or an anomaly of historical proportion. And, as Lyn emphasized, such is the effect of metaphor per se: “The essence of the source of the specific power of the human mind, is expressed in the form of *metaphor*: it is the recognition of the unseen object which defines, in its simplest expression, the lack of a missing quality of efficient relationship between two, or more, otherwise unstated, objects.” (Lyndon LaRouche, [Principle or Party?](#) October 31, 2011.) Thus, the *Mérode Altarpiece* not only relates to a religious experience, but also shows how the creative mind actually works by going through the three steps of the metaphorical process in the way that Lyn has indicated above. In other words, this is a manifold metaphor of the metaphor within a metaphorical process.

## 5. NICHOLAS OF CUSA’S MENTAL BERYL SENSOR AND THE DEVIL’S MOUSETRAP.

How do you recognize what object to look for when it is invisible? You must look for an anomaly with the quality of Cusa’s learned ignorance attached to it. So, you look for something that stands out like a sore thumb, which looks like something that should not belong there at all, yet, it is sitting there, quietly, like the mousetrap of Joseph. Then, you must discover why this object is jarring and not in focus with the subject of the painting. That’s when you discover that the mousetrap is a sort of pointer that must be conceived of like a measure of change. You don’t know what it’s doing there, but it’s bugging your mind like a bee in your bonnet. This is where the beryl lens comes in, and whose role is to correct your mental eye sight and provide fusion between two different images into a single one. But, you don’t know which images they are; you only know they must come into focus with this new mental instrument.

What Cusa tells us is that the range of the beryl is infinite and connects the minimum with the maximum. You can browse the entirety of human history with it provided it is connected to divine things, and is also connected to the metaphorical process of creativity. In other words, this measure of change in your mental gazing applies like a telescope and a microscope all in one, able to find its invisible object regardless of size, and make them visible to your mind in the large as well as in the small. Now, remember how the three sections of the triptych are completely separated from each other, but they are, at the same time, intimately united by the same idea of forecasting. So, what is it in this composition that is not visible and which can only be seen through this beryl looking glass of the creative human mind and become fused with the Annunciation to Mary?

The foreground of the triptych is discontinuous, yet the background is continuous. Why? Note, again, how the fireplace of the Virgin has no connection with the workshop of Joseph, and the wall behind the Archangel has no connection with the open door blinding the kneeling patrons from seeing

inside, as if the wall that lets the divine light through expresses an axiomatic discontinuity between sense perception and reason. This chasm is the insurmountable conceptual gap that also separates belief from knowledge, because belief is always based on sense certainty. Again, remember that you, the spectator, are under the spell of the double effect of the metaphorical process: the ambiguity is expressed by the fact that there are three closed scenes united by the same homogeneous sky and central town square in the back; and, each, in its own closed area, expresses the annunciation of two different events, or more. Two or more contradictory situations at the same time and neither one is the truth. This difference also marks the axiomatic leap from the medieval world to the world of the Renaissance.

Then, the *devil's mousetrap* becomes the beryl looking glass through which you must look for discovering that truth. This is the metaphor that unites all three panels by taking three different forms in the small: the Herald behind the door in the left panel, the almost invisible rays of light carrying baby Jesus to the womb of his mother through the closed window of the central panel, and the mousetrap-gibbet on the window ledge in the right panel. All three separate annunciations represent the same metaphorical creative process of double meaning underlying the painting. But what is that meaning? What does the Cusa metaphor of the beryl stone tell us under these circumstances? How does it work for Cusa and how does it work in this painting?

Cusa treats the beryl stone metaphorically as a conceptual magnifying device of double refraction in order to make invisible things become visible to the mind, giving the mind “*a cognitive sight in darkness*,” that is, by causing an inversion by which the invisible becomes visible to the mind through a glass darkly. Cusa wrote:

“Beryl stones are bright, white, and clear. To them are given both concave and convex forms. And someone who looks out through them apprehends that which previously was invisible. If an intellectual beryl that had both a maximum and a minimum form were fitted to our intellectual eyes, then, through the intermediateness of this beryl the indivisible principle of all things would be attained.” (Nicholas of Cusa, METAPHYSICAL SPECULATIONS, *De Beryllo (On [Intellectual] Eyeglasses)*, translated by Jasper Hopkins, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, p. 792-93)

It is through such a sensor instrument of the mind that one is capable of discovering the most unimaginable paradoxes and inversions such as those implied in the *devil's mousetrap*, and see the indivisible principle underlying it. However, what blinds most people in conceiving these more profound matters is the lack of commitment to the truth. For example, Christ's crucifixion is the original case of a real human-divine-maximum-minimum, and all other cases in the Imitation of Christ will reflect the same minimum and maximum unity through that lens. As Cusa explained:

“Let us apply the intellectual beryl to our mental eyes, and let us look out for both the maximum through which there can be nothing greater and the minimum through which there can be nothing lesser, and we will see the Beginning, prior to everything great or small, as altogether simple and as indivisible by any means of division by which any large or small things whatsoever are divisible. And if we look at inequality through the beryl, the object of our gaze will be Indivisible Equality; and by way of an absolute likeness, we will see the Beginning which is indivisible by any means of division by which a likeness is divisible or variable; i.e. we will see the true Reality. For there is no other object of that vision than true Reality, which, by way of any

likeness that is both maximal and minimal, is seen to be the absolute First Beginning of very likeness of it. And so, if we look at division by means of an intellectual beryl, the object of that mental viewing will be an Indivisible Union. A similar point holds true regarding the viewing of proportion, relation to beauty, and the like.” (De Beryllo, 8.)

For instance, imagine that the mental beryl makes you see the unity of the contraries (maximum and minimum) as the one of a new beginning, such as a renaissance, through the Crucifixion of Christ. By correcting your intellectual eyes and focussing them in such a manner that you can see all subsequent examples of the Imitation of Christ, or any other inequality that is to its likeness, you will visualize the shedding of human mortality for divine immortality in the same proportion of a maximum-minimum unity as if it were originating from the First Beginning of the Christ Exemplar. Then, ask yourself: what is the singular event in the Europe of 1429-1430 which corresponded to these conditions, and whose inequality through the beryl gazing of your mind would make your eyes focus on its Indivisible Equality with Christ, and with which the inversion of the *devil’s mousetrap* would be in complete conformity?

Campin followed closely the current events of his time, and he knew that there was something very wrong in the treasonous action of the Dukes of Burgundy and their collaboration with the English, both in France and in the Netherlands, and most emphatically, in Tournai. It had been known for some times to the citizens of Tournai that the Duke of Bedford had written a letter to Philippe le Bon’s father warning him that he should be wary of the fact that the citizens of Tournai were a bit too much willing to be in the service of French Kings. So, with this in mind, let’s examine the historical events of the 1429-1430 situation in France, and see what invisible occurrence might become visible through our beryl metaphorical experiment.

## **6. ROBERT CAMPIN AND THE “KING OF BOURGES.”**

Robert Campin (1375-1444), otherwise known as the Master of Flémalle (or Flemael in the province of Liège, Belgium) was a French-born citizen of Valenciennes who chose to live in Tournai where he became a citizen and the founder of the Flemish school of painting that created the Flemish Renaissance. Two of his most famous students were the celebrated Roger van der Weyden and Jacques Daret. Campin’s influence was so considerable that not a single Flemish artist of the fifteenth century can claim he was not touched by his genius. For example, even the great Jan van Eyck travelled to Tournai in 1427 for the sole purpose of studying the revolutionary method of composition that Campin was in the process of developing in his already famous *Mérode Altarpiece*. To commemorate this inspiring meeting with Campin, Jan van Eyck replicated the same Angel Gabriel in the Annunciation panel of his own famous *Ghent Altarpiece* five years later, in 1432.

In 1423, two years before painting his *Mérode Altarpiece*, Campin became a prominent political figure both as the sub-Dean of the Corporation of Goldsmiths and Painters of the city of Tournai, and as an elected representative of the people to the City Council of the same city, in 1425, a post to which he was re-elected from 1427 to 1428. However, several art historians have reported that he had some encounters with the justice of Tournai, but nothing substantial has come to light. For example, according



to historian, Lorne Campbell, “Campin was victimized for the part he played in the revolt against the Tournai Patrician government.” (Lorne Campbell, *Robert Campin, the Master of Flemalle and the Master of Mérode*, The Burlington Magazine 96, Vol. 116, No. 860, Nov. 1974, p. 634-646.)

Campin joined “the loyalty of 50,000 people to the King of France Charles VII, known then as ‘King of Bourges,’ who succeeded in planting the Lilly in the hearts of the people of Tournai.” (Maurice Houtart, *Les Tournaisiens et le Roi de Bourges*, Casterman, 1908, Tournai, p. v.) This historian of the city of Tournai claimed that the “troubles of Tournai” and the events of Jeanne d’Arc on the Loire River, and her successful rising of the Siege of Orleans were related. But Houtart does not say how Campin is related to this. The Fleur de Lys bouquet in the *Mérode Altarpiece* might have been Campin’s way of showing his allegiance with the King of France, Charles VII, who had been nicknamed “King of Bourges” because that centrally located French city was where the King lived at the time of the English invasion of the Loire valley. However, historians have been reluctant to say more about the Charles VII and Jeanne d’Arc’s relationships to the Flemish city of Tournai. Therefore, we must use Cusa’s intellectual micromacro sensor to help us discover what the relation among Campin, Jeanne d’Arc and King Charles VII of France was all about.

## **7. JEANNE D’ARC CHANGES THE RULES OF THE GAME.**

By 1428, every thinking person in Europe was monitoring how the Pucelle of Orleans was making history by changing the rules of the game. Campin kept up with her activities through the regular mail service that the leaders of the Flemish City of Tournai exchanged regularly with the Duchy of Burgundy, especially through ambassadors of the City who travelled back and forth from Tournai to France. The herald from Mechelen, who is standing behind the garden door, must have been a well know figure to the members of the Tournai City Council of the time and was likely to have been one of the heralds responsible for that mail service between Tournai and Jeanne d’Arc’s army. Whether this herald was used by Jeanne d’Arc is not verifiable. However, what is known is that there was regular communications between the City of Tournai and the army of Charles VII.

In his account of the events of the period, Tournai historian, Maurice Houtart, reported that Henri Rommain, a political associate of the City Council of Robert Campin, left the City of Tournai on June 9, 1429, with two other ambassadors to accompany the army of Jeanne d’Arc between Gien and Rheims during her campaign, and attended the crowning of the French King at Rheims on July 17<sup>th</sup> of that year. Under the protection of a safe-conduct from the Duke of Burgundy, Henry Rommain, General Councilor of Tournai, Jacques Cheval, Jurist, and Barthelemy Carlier, Dean of the Cloth Industry and Great Dean of the Cloth Crafters of the City of Tournai, crossed the countryside of Picardie and Champagne to accompany Jeanne d’Arc in her mission.

Houtart wrote: “Gien was the rendezvous place assigned to the troops. Charles and the Pucelle had already arrived on June 24<sup>th</sup>; our ambassadors joined them and were able to salute the Maiden who carried in her heart the salvation of France. It was, in all appearance, due to that encounter that Jeanne

wrote her letter to the Tournaisians, on June 25<sup>th</sup>” (Houtart, Op. Cit., p. 428) The letter Jeanne had written to the Frenchmen of Tournai is the following:

“Noble and loyal Frenchmen of Tournai, the Maiden lets you know that here, in eight days, she has chased the English out of all of the places they held on the Loire River, by means of battles and by other means. There have been many dead and many have been made prisoners, or have run away from the battle fields. Take note that the Earl of Suffolk, Lord Pole and his brother, Lord Talbot, Lord Scales, and Sir John Fastolf, as well as several knights and captains along with the brother of the Count of Suffolk and Glasdale, are all dead. Take care of yourselves my dear loyal Frenchmen, and I beg you to all come to the crowning of our dear King Charles at Rheims, where we will be for a short time, and come ahead of us when you shall hear that we are close by. I commend you to God, and may God protect you and give you the strength to keep prosecuting this just war for the kingdom of France.” (Jeanne d’Arc “[Letter to the loyal Frenchmen of Tournai](#),” Gien, June 25, 1429. *Procès de Jeanne d’Arc*, par Jules Etienne Quicherat, Vol. V, pp. 125-126. Tiré des archives du Nord, nouvelle série, t. I, p.520.)



**Figure 5.** Prosper. D’Epinay, *Jeanne d’Arc*, Rheims Cathedral.



**Figure 6.** Roger van der Weyden, *Philippe le Bon, Duke of Burgundy*.

At the end of June, 1429, Jeanne sent a letter to Philippe le Bon, one of the six peers of the realm, inviting him to the crowning of the King in Rheims. But, the Duke did not reply, and Jeanne sent another letter on July 17, 1429, the day of the Crowning, in which the relevant portion said:

“...And it has been three weeks since I wrote to you and sent good letters by a herald, saying that you should be at the anointing of the King, which this day, Sunday, the seventeenth

day of the current month of July, is taking place in the city of Rheims, of which I have not had any response. Nor have I ever heard any word from this herald.”

The “missing herald” may have been immortalized by Campin in his *Mérode Altarpiece*. He may have disappeared, since couriers travelled dangerously between Tournai, the Loire River, and the Duchy of Burgundy. It is known that the English had already imprisoned heralds during the siege of Orleans, and the same fate may have also fallen upon the one that Jeanne had sent to the Duke of Burgundy from her camp in Gien, at the end of June 1429.

Upon their return to Tournai on July 22, 1429, two months after their departure, the three Ambassadors rallied the population of Tournai in the City Hall to announce to the people assembled the crowning of the “King of Tournai.” They also read a letter that King Charles VII had written to the Frenchmen of Tournai after his crowning. After reading the King’s letter, Rommain declared: “From its very foundation, the City of Tournai has always obeyed the Kings of France, and she will do it again, one more time.” (Houtart, Op. Cit., p. 432.) In fact, from the time of Charles VII, the French Royal Ordonnances relating to the City of Tournai reach back nine hundred years.

During her incarceration in Arras, Jeanne again sent a messenger to the Tournai City Council, on October 30, 1430, asking for their help. Five days later, on November 4<sup>th</sup>, the herald Jean Lecomte went to visit Jeanne in the Arras prison and brought her the amount of 22 écus that the Tournaisians had raised for her.

## **8. HOW THE DEVIL’S MOUSETRAP FORECASTED THE BURGUNDIAN BETRAYAL.**

The Duke of Burgundy had dreams of grandeur about becoming the New Emperor of Europe. He was considering the revival of the Lotharingie Empire with the Burgundian control of the Netherlands, a political fallacy that went back to the time of the treachery of the two grandsons of Charlemagne at the Oath of Strasbourg, Charles the Bald and Louis the German, in 832, who had leagued themselves against their older brother, the legitimate King Lothar, and destroyed the Charlemagne Kingdom of the Franks.

At the beginning of 1429, the totality of France north of Orleans was under the control of the English who threatened to take over the rest of France, south of the Loire River. The English John of Lancaster, First Duke of Bedford and regent of Henry VI of England in France, laid siege to Orleans, the last bastion of French loyalists who were preventing the English from taking over the rest of France. That siege, however, was interrupted by the brilliant intervention of Jeanne d’Arc, who chased the English away from the walls of Orleans by simply standing at the door of the city, staring down the English army, while sitting still and silently on her horse. (see **Figure 5**) On March 22, 1429, Jeanne had written to the King of England warning him, in no uncertain terms, that unless all of the above mentioned English Lords and Counts left France immediately, they would all be killed. By making her letter to the Frenchmen of Tournai public, Jeanne was also demonstrating that she knew how to keep her promise.

At about the same time, in 1429, the province of Namur in Belgium was bought by Philippe le Bon, Duke of Burgundy, and the citizens of Tournai in the Hainaut feared a military invasion by the Duke. The forecasted invasion took place in 1432, during the last segment of the Hook and Cod Wars. The protector of Robert Campin, Princess Jacqueline of Holland and of Hainaut, was defeated by Philip,

who incorporated Hainault and Holland into the Burgundian territory, thus, making Campin a citizen of the Duchy of Burgundy.

The Cod and Hook Wars (1350-1432) refer to power struggles between the bourgeois faction (Cod) and the nobility faction (Hook) who fought to gain control over the territories of the Netherlands and Belgium. The Hook referred to the stick that was used to catch the slow fat cods. In 1428, after Jacqueline, Countess of Hainaut had lost her territories to Philippe le Bon, Campin was thrown out of the City Council of Tournai because he had sympathies with the King of France, while the Cods rallied behind the forces of Phillip le Bon, Duke of Burgundy. Jacqueline lost her territories and eventually her titles.

What is invisible to normal eyes, here, behind the grey sky background of the three panels of the *Mérode Altarpiece*, which can only be perceived through the beryl intellectual looking glass of Cusa that Campin has provided the spectator with the form of a *devil's mousetrap*, is also the world shattering advent of Jeanne d'Arc who had just won the major victory of Orleans and crowned King Charles VII in Rheims in July 1429. In this way the mousetrap on the window ledge projects its shadow of uncertainty as a forecasting precursor through the appearance of a gibbet, as if by a beryl-like foreshortening effect of intellectual perspective. But, is it really a gibbet? It doesn't look exactly like a gibbet, but it doesn't look quite like a mousetrap either. In fact, Campin composed this object just enough to make it look like both of them as well as neither of them, at the same time. That's precisely the function of metaphor. So, what is that metaphorical anomaly warning us about?

This mousetrap-gibbet is pointing to the up and coming betrayal and treachery of Philippe le Bon, Duke of Burgundy, in his alliance with the English against Jeanne d'Arc. Campin knew of the evil role that the Duke was playing against the sovereignty of France and against the Netherlands. It was Philippe le Bon who captured Jeanne d'Arc at Compiègne in 1430, and who delivered her to the English for 10,000 crowns, before they orchestrated a mocked trial against her for heresy and burnt her at the stake in Rouen on May 30, 1431. As Shapiro might have said: *"The sacrifice of Jeanne d'Arc was the bait for the English who, in seizing her, brought about their own ruin."* In other words, the reason for Philippe's treasonous action was due to a betrayal by John of Lancaster, Duke of Bedford, who used Jean Louvet and Tanguy du Chastel to instigate the death of Philipp's father, Jean Sans Peur, whose bloody shirt was then pinned to the door of Charles VII. This deception sealed the alliance between the Burgundian and the English against Jeanne d'Arc and Charles VII; and Campin knew that. Can you think of any contemporary situation where this metaphor might also apply to the British somewhere around the world today?

However, after the death of Jeanne, Philippe le Bon discovered the error of his ways and was made to recognize that his treachery against France had been based on the wrong assumption that the Dauphin had been accused of the tragic death of his father. In 1435, after the death of the Duke of Bedford, Philippe le Bon broke his alliance with the English, and concluded a Treaty in Arras with Charles VII of France. That was the necessary tilt in the balance that forced the end for the occupation of France by the English. Here again, the effect of the *devil's mousetrap* is the irony of a trap that strikes back at the deceiver who sets it up. By burning Jeanne d'Arc as a witch in Rouen, the English did not realize that they had made Jeanne into a popular heroine and saint, and thus, four years later, they lost their false claim to France. Jeanne d'Arc had been used as bait in the English *devil's mousetrap*.



**Figure 7.** Roger van der Weyden, *Philippe le Bon receiving the History of Hainaut*. (Miniature 1447) Among the selected dignitaries are Jean Vauquelin, Philippe le Bon, Charles le Téméraire, Nicholas Rolin and Jean Chevrot, all wearing the necklace of Philippe’s Order of the Golden Fleece.

What Campin knew in advance, and was thus able to forecast was that France would become the first nation state of Europe a few decades later, when Louis XI, following in the footsteps of Jeanne d’Arc, defeated and killed the imperialist oligarch Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, in the winter of 1477. The point to be made is that Campin’s method of classical artistic composition is a true scientific method of investigation. It is not simply artistic, or theological, or even entertaining, it is scientific in the most elementary meaning of the term. It tells the truth about how the universe works. Thus, in that sense, the *Mérode Altarpiece* is not simply a testament to the fighting spirit of the French of Tournai, or a true metaphor of forecasting the advent of the first sovereign nation state of Europe a few decades after the sacrifice of Jeanne. It is a most precious sample of the scientific method of enquiry and a courageous example of what Mas’udi called the science of “snatching precious fragments of the past from oblivion.” Campin may not have been in any position to improve politically the situation of Tournai, but he was in a position to reach into the souls of men in the best way that he knew how, through the metaphorical power of artistic composition, reaching in, and revealing a fundamental hidden truth of history.

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