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Afterword *Theatrum vitae humanae* Shakespeare's Cosmographic Imagination¹

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Abstract

The article argues that maps and woodcuts in the numerous cosmographic works published in the course of the sixteenth century were an important source of inspiration for Shakespeare. The Globe playhouse, erected in Southwark in 1599, was the equivalent of a *theatrum mundi* where 'men and women [were] only players' (*As You Like It*). In its own way, it allowed the groundlings to be exposed and to understand something of the many cosmographic books that then circulated amongst a restricted élite. On the other hand, these texts and their superb illustrations gave an idea of yet unknown countries and people and stimulated the playwright's as well as the spectators' imagination. The metaphoric links established between the human body and cartography, as in Münster's representation of Europe in his *Cosmographia universalis*, provided an intriguing extension of the then fashionable art of blazoning and counter-blazoning. Finally, map and globe became structurally related to each other, the word 'globe' serving to designate both head and skull, thus allowing painters like Holbein or the anonymous author of the Fool's Cap Map to illustrate this idea in a compressed, small-scale and fairly cryptic representation of the links between macro and microcosm.

Keywords: *Apian, Globe, Münster, Shakespeare, Vexierbild*

The undiscovered country from
whose bourn / No traveller returns.
(*Hamlet*, 3.1.79-80)

1. *Introduction: Compilers of 'Singularities'*

In Europe, the sixteenth century was certainly the century of cosmography given the extraordinary vogue of those encyclopaedias of the world going through numerous editions successively revising and completing the previous recorded

¹ This Afterword is based on Laroque 2005.

knowledge with a description of the new discoveries. As noted by Janet Clare in her ‘Introduction’ to this volume, the mathematician and astronomer Peter Bennewitz, better known as Apianus or Peter Apian, published in 1524 a *Cosmographicus liber* which became a sort of European best-seller as it went through sixty different editions. One of his books of arithmetic lies on the lower shelf represented on *The Ambassadors* (1533),² Hans Holbein’s famous *Vexierbild* with what looks like the painter’s signature, the hollow bone at the feet of the two sitters, a sort of anamorphic map as on the Fool’s Cap Map of the world (c. 1580) based on Ortelius’ *Typus orbis terrarum*.³ As a matter of fact, both works are vanities apparently praising science and the arts (in the presence of musical and navigation instruments in Holbein’s painting and in the map replacing the face of the jester). In the first picture, one becomes aware of the anamorphosis in its oblique perspective and realises that it is in fact a triumph of death, while, in the second, the various mottoes on the shoulder belt medallions and on the fool’s bauble (‘vanitas vanitatum’) deliver a similar message of the vanity of all things. All the apparent symbols of worldly power (*trivium* and *quadrivium* symbols in Holbein, the world’s map replacing the fool’s face in the Fool’s Cap Map) simply vanish out of sight.

Münster’s *Cosmographia universalis*, the first German depiction of the world, came out in 1552, being then constantly reprinted until 1628 and translated into several languages, Italian, French, English and even Czech. Its success, which made it the second most read book after the Bible and which led to the flourishing of the cosmographical genre and to the circulation of this type of book on the continent as well as in England, must have been partly due to the number and quality of engravings and woodcuts by such renowned artists as Urs Graf, Hans Manuel Deutsch or Hans Holbein the Younger. It also contained representations of faraway lands like America and Asia. Indeed, the word ‘cosmos’ in cosmography also referred to an ornament and revealed the humanist cosmographers’ concern with a desire to invite readers to look at the sphere of the world with a sense of pleasure and wonder. As Frank Lestringant puts it:

Restituer dans le désordre apparent de l’exposé l’euphorique diversité du “théâtre de la nature universelle”, tel est le projet avoué des compilateurs de “singularités”. Comme elle prend pour modèle cette ornementation maniériste, parure ou jardin, qu’est d’emblée le monde, et qu’elle entend répéter par là le miracle de la pédagogie divine, une telle littérature se réclame tout naturellement d’une esthétique de la bigarrure et de l’entrelacs. (1991, 51)⁴

Cosmography was thus regarded as a delightful as well as a profitable occupation, as Sophie Chiari also suggests in her Editorial to this volume.

In 1570, Ortelius’ *Theatrum orbis terrarum*, published in Latin and translated into English in 1606, was quickly followed by Mercator’s *Atlas* (also published in Latin in 1595) and this new geography represented the last flowering of the ‘old cosmography’ because Ortelius and Mercator conceived of geography in cosmographic terms, something which lasted until about 1613, the date of Galileo’s *Sidereus nuncius*.

² See the online illustration: <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/profzucker/48433143377/>>, accessed 1 February 2023.

³ See the online illustration: <<https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-206385/>>, accessed 1 February 2023.

⁴ (To retrace in the apparent disorder of discourse the exhilarating diversity of ‘the theatre of universal nature’, such is the avowed project of those compilers of ‘singularities’. As it takes as a model this mannerist ornamenting, either as finery or garden arrangement, which the world immediately looks like, and thereby intends to repeat the miracle of divine pedagogy, such literature claims to take its sources in an aesthetics of variegation and knotwork). Unless otherwise stated all translations are mine.

This afterword takes up on Jane Grogan's study of the influence of cosmographic literature on a number of popular romances and travel narratives so as to try and complement what has already been written on the topic. I have chosen to focus on what the theatre, and Shakespeare in particular, brought in order to enrich the cosmographic production while being influenced by it. As far as literature is concerned, cosmography in the sixteenth century indirectly inspired such humanist pioneering productions as Thomas More's *Utopia* and Rabelais' fourth and fifth books of *Gargantua* telling of the peregrinations and circumnavigations of Pantagruel. Grogan calls attention to romances such as Thomas Lodge's *A Margarite of America* and William Warner's *Albions England*. In the context of drama, theatre and cosmography were obviously interrelated. The theatre was cosmographic and, to an extent, geographic, and Shakespeare's Globe, erected in Southwark in 1599, is a relevant example, while cosmography itself was then thought of as 'theatrical' in the sense that 'theatrum', or 'theatre', is a recurrent image to designate the sphere of the world or *orbis terrarum*. As Frances Yates puts it:

The Globe theatre was a magical theatre ... designed to give fullest support to the voices and the gestures of the players as they enacted the drama of the life of man within the Theatre of the World ... His theatre would have been for Shakespeare the pattern of the universe, the idea of the Macrocosm, the world stage on which the Macrocosm acted his parts. All the world's a stage. The words are in a real sense the clue to the Globe Theatre. (1969, 189)

Of course, Shakespeare's career did not begin with the creation of the Globe playhouse: earlier plays contain many allusions to maps, to the earthly sphere and to globes of various sorts.⁵ But from then on, his theatrical production became, as it were, more cartographically conscious, more concerned with faraway countries, with real as well as with never-never lands. *The Tempest*, his last single-authored play, was written at a time when many sharers of the Globe and of the King's Men theatrical company also became investors in the Virginia Company. Such a collaboration between the world of the theatre and the world of travelling and navigation may have been one of the results of the circulation of all those cosmographical treatises.

2. Shakespeare's Imaginary Geography

Quoting Lucien Febvre and Georges Gusdorf, Numa Broc sees in such imaginary representations or inventions, in their hybridity and multiplicity, a step towards 'real' geography:

La géographie de la Renaissance demeure une science conjecturale qui, comme les autres disciplines de l'époque, baigne dans un monde de "fantaisie, d'imprécision, d'incertitude". Comment dans cette atmosphère de "temps flottant et d'espace encore mal ordonné", la géographie pourrait-elle échapper au flou, l'imaginaire, au merveilleux? Aussi, ne nous étonnons pas devoir des savants distingués mettre autant d'acharnement, disserter sur des terres inexistantes qu'à étudier les terres réelles. Il ne faut pas négliger cette géographie imaginaire, "fausse géographie en attendant la vraie, projection de l'espace mental dans le videgéographique", comme l'écrit G. Gusdorf. (1986, 166)⁶

⁵ On this, see Sophie Chiari's definition in her 'globe' entry: 'This word symbolizes the thriving conquests and travels of the early modern age as well as its new ordering of the world in opposition to the medieval period when a majority of people were unaware of the earth's shape and geography, even though England lagged behind its European neighbours as regards mapmaking' (2022, 144).

⁶ (Renaissance geography remains a conjectural science which, like all other disciplines of the time, bathes in a world of 'fantasy, imprecision, uncertainty'. In this atmosphere of 'floating time and badly ordered space', how could geography escape fuzzy, imaginary and marvellous visions? So we should not be surprised to see reputed scholars be

Shakespeare's plays constantly refer to maps, to the lie of the land, to forests, seas, cities as well as to various aspects of the countryside, even though the playwright never uses the words 'cosmography' or 'geography'. His plays often foreground the place of the action, both as real location and imaginary configuration ('the baseless fabric of this vision', *The Tempest*, 4.1.151), as elements of decor and decorum. In fact, geography, maps, places and details that serve to characterise and particularise the plot are necessary elements in the theatre to allow the spectator to 'suspend disbelief' and use his/her imagination to people the empty stage as in the first 'Prologue' of *Henry V*:

Can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?
O, pardon: since a crooked figure may
Attest in little place a million,
And let us, ciphers to this great account,
On your imaginary forces work.
Suppose within the girdle of these walls
Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
...
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.
Into a thousand parts divide one man,
And make imaginary puissance. (Prologue, ll. 11-25)

At the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the poet's pen becomes a means to scan space and occupy the void thanks to the invention of *topoi* and shapes that give an identity and a visage to the empty spaces of the *terrae incognitae* on the *mappa mundi*:

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name. (5.1.12-17)

Like a cartographer (whether it be Münster, Peter Apian, Ortelius, Gemma Frisius, Mercator, William Cuninghame, Oronce Fine or André Thevet) who draws a map with its plains, mountains and cities, the eye of the poet has the power of making the invisible visible by giving it a place to identify and inventory its various placenames. For, even if the art of map-making serves as a metaphor of poetic creation which, in Theseus' monologue, suggests that a new world is being created, thus giving to 'imaginary puissance' a form of *hic et nunc* reality, such a statement remains somewhat general and theoretical. The playwright naturally associates his *dramatis personae* with a spatial location (the city or court) by opposing it to another one situated at the antipodes of the first (the forest, the wilderness or some aristocratic house), thus piling a whole

as keen to discourse on non-existent lands as to study real lands. This imaginary geography should not be neglected, 'this false geography preparing the real one, projection of mental space into the geographic void', according to what G. Gusdorf writes). In this passage, Broc quotes Febvre (1947, 367) and Gusdorf (1969, 381).

series of fictitious or imaginary elements on the realities of the map. The exact place is left vague so that the name or toponym takes on a polysemic value. The forest of Arden, India, Illyria, Egypt, Rome or the Bermudas are used to allow a number of poetic echoes to reverberate and to introduce symbolic correspondences in the playtext. All these complex signifiers take on verbal, historical and magical connotations. They are turned into incantations with a particular power of evocation or equivocation which makes them almost impossible to define once and for all, so that their definite meaning is never really stable or fixed. As Richard Wilson puts it,

... the fact remains that so many of these plays contain *aporia*, blind-spots, or liminal places which give them meaning, and retain the potential for resistant readings to the extent that, though under the very eye of power, they are never in its sight: worlds within – rather than off-stage. (2002, 173)

In his invaluable book on Renaissance geography, Numa Broc writes that the only Shakespeare play with a geographical background is *The Tempest*, insofar as most places mentioned by the playwright are theatrical decors, even if certain details apparently reveal that he was conversant with the great voyages and explorations published by Richard Eden and Richard Hakluyt for example (1986, 225).

It is true that Shakespeare used the narratives of classical writers such as Herodotus or Pliny (Philemon Holland's translation appeared in 1601) as well as images borrowed from the Greek myth of the Fortunate Isles or from the medieval *Travels of John Mandeville* (1357-1371), where Jerusalem is situated at the centre of the world and where one finds a naïve desire to give 'a local habitation' to paradise or to the legendary realm of Priester John. Similarly, when Shakespeare turns the city of Milan into a port in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1.1.71) or when he invents a sea-coast in landlocked Bohemia in *The Winter's Tale* (3.3.2), he becomes part of this literary tradition of imaginary cosmography and of impossible localisations (Orgel 1996, 37). In those days, maps and atlases were not only bought by navigators and explorers but were also read as marvellous books filled with images of such monstrous creatures as Amazons or Blemmyes ('men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders', *Othello*, 1.3.145-146) as well as of other monsters or curiosities present in Münster and in the first edition of Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations* (1589).

Though Shakespeare's history plays and tragedies are mostly confined inside the European frontiers (with the exception of *Antony and Cleopatra*), they also often refer to an exotic elsewhere, to India, Arabia or Africa. Europe then defined itself in opposition to the world of pagans and infidels like Lear's 'barbarous Scythian / Or he that makes his generation messes / To gorge his appetite' (*King Lear*, 1.1.115-117). Shakespeare's imagined cosmography thus seems to create places with a double face or function, simultaneously real and imaginary like the city of Verona and the forest in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the city of Athens and the woods nearby where the lovers get lost in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the court and the forest of Arden (itself referring both to the Warwickshire forest and to the French 'forêt des Ardennes') in *As You Like It*, or Venice and Belmont in *The Merchant of Venice*. This technique allows him to play with perspective, to create the equivalent of a vanishing point in a painting which allows the spectator to call upon what the first Chorus of *Henry V* defines as an 'imaginary puissance' (Prologue, l. 25). The main function of this double or double-sided space is to allow the main topography to be completed or contradicted by another one suggesting flight, exile or nostalgia.

The cosmographic dream becomes synonymous with escape, detour or indirection for characters in quest of liberty since, for various reasons, they are obliged to live in a country or city which, like Denmark for Prince Hamlet, looks like a prison to them. The fascination with travel and faraway lands establishes a link between geography and desire, seduction, and

the marvels of strange languages. It arouses curiosity, creates a feeling of wonder and invites the reader or spectator to launch himself/herself into a quest of the unknown. If, in all this, there are echoes of ancient times and a form of return to the enchanted and fabulous worlds of mediaeval literature, the place of cosmography in the Shakespearian canon, be it imaginary or real, is part and parcel of this taste for discovery and experience at the time of the Renaissance, a taste which turned the world into a vast cabinet of curiosities.

3. *The 'Body' of the World*

In *The Comedy of Errors*, the female body is associated with a number of foreign countries and with more or less exotic lands in the bawdy dialogue in which Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse exchange their impressions about Nell, the kitchen wench:

Syracuse Dromio ... she is a wondrous fat marriage.
Syracuse Antipholus How dost thou mean, a fat marriage?
Syracuse Dromio Marry, sir, she's the kitchen wench, and all grease ... I warrant her rags and the tallow in them will burn a Poland winter ... she is *spherical*, like a *globe*; I could find out countries in her.
Syracuse Antipholus In what part of her body stands Ireland?
Syracuse Dromio Marry, sir, in her buttocks; I found it by the bogs.
Syracuse Antipholus Where Scotland?
Syracuse Dromio I found it by the barrenness, hard in the palm of the hand.
Syracuse Antipholus Where France?
Syracuse Dromio In her forehead ...
Syracuse Antipholus Where England?
Syracuse Dromio I looked for the chalky cliffs, but I could find no whiteness in them. But I guess it stood in her chin, by the salt rheum that ran between France and it.
Syracuse Antipholus Where Spain?
Syracuse Dromio Faith, I saw it not; but I felt it hot in her breath.
Syracuse Antipholus Where America, the Indies?
Syracuse Dromio O, sir, upon her nose, all o'er embellished with rubies, carbuncles, sapphires, declining their rich aspect to the hot breath of Spain, who sent whole armadoes of carracks to be ballast at her nose.
Syracuse Antipholus Where stood Belgia, the Netherlands?
Syracuse Dromio O, sir, I did not look so low. (3.2.94-144)

Such a comic enumeration of the parts of the female anatomy, along with the correspondences established with different European countries, belongs to the misogynous genre of the 'female grotesque'⁷ traditionally providing an anti-Petrarchan version of the blazoning and counter-blazoning vogue of the period. These geographic blazons, visibly inspired by the anatomic blazons of Clément Marot and other French Renaissance sonneteers, probably anticipate Hamlet's obscene double entendre when he mentions to Ophelia what he calls 'country matters' (*Hamlet*, 3.2.110). Such a cynical cue in which the Prince establishes an equivalence between the female vulva and the 'Low Countries' is somewhat similar to these exchanges. According to Michael Neill, who sees in this an 'unashamed erotic blazoning of the map of Ireland', the association of Ireland with the buttocks is supposed to be a parody of the cartography of the female body

⁷ Nevertheless, as Sophie Chiari writes in the 'globe' entry of her dictionary, this also applies to a character like Falstaff whose fat body feminises him: '... in *2 H4*, Hal punningly depicts Falstaff as "a globe of sinful continents" (2.4.288), that is as a fat carnivalesque body' (2022, 145-146).

(1994, 23-24). The source of these parallels may be found in a woodcut of Sebastian Münster's *Cosmography* which, according to the traditional tripartite division of the world into Europe, Africa and Asia, represents Europe in an upside down image as a strongly built woman holding a globe (in Shakespeare's text, the word 'globe' appears on line 116) in her right hand and a sceptre in her left one, while Africa may be seen on the upper left-hand corner, Asia at her feet and Scandinavia on the right-hand corner at the level of her belt.⁸ Spain corresponds to her head and face, France to the upper part of her breast, Germany to her breasts, while Greece and Tartary are aligned at the level of her feet under her long dress. In *The Comedy of Errors*, such gendered cosmography makes this description both amusing and rather odd since Nell's body is mainly being described in terms of European analogies while she is supposed to dwell in the town of Ephesus, in Asia Minor.

This Europe-centred cosmography is part of this strategy of the double-sided space used by the playwright, which combines closeness and distance, familiarity and strangeness. This type of grotesque humour turns the human body into a map where macro-and microcosm meet on several levels. It is the most ancient and systematic use of the technique of spatial anamorphosis in which body and landscape are presented as interchangeable. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the image of the 'brow of Egypt' (5.1.11) connotes a black skin comparable to an 'Ethiophe' (3.2.257), or to a 'tawny Tartar' (3.2.263), geographic references which serve Helena to qualify her rival, the dark-haired Hermia. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Falstaff makes Mrs Page 'a region in Guiana' (1.3.66) while the two wives he is courting are respectively turned into his 'East and West Indies' (1.3.68). In spite of Guyana's reputation as an 'eroticized land' (Hall 1995, 187), it is soon clear that the down-at-the-heels knight is not so much trying to gratify his libido than to fill his purse. The two wives are indeed a real Eldorado for Falstaff who has always made his living out of women's generosity or gullibility. Further, Titania describes her pregnant 'votaress' as an intimate friend of hers 'in the spiced Indian air by night' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2.1.124), then describing her as a sail made 'big-bellied with the wanton wind' returning 'as from a voyage, rich with merchandise' (2.1.129-134). Like in Spenser's *Amoretti*, Shakespeare joins here what Jane Grogan calls 'trade, travel and desire'.⁹ Fairyland geography is marked by a nostalgia for a golden age as well as by a mercantile appetite (that of the colonizing expeditions which gradually replaced the traditional cosmography by a more exact, empirically verified cartography) according to which fertility is being measured in terms of financial, rhetorical and maternal exchanges (Hendricks 1996). The little 'changeling boy' (51) is the signifier allowing the spectator/reader to bring and bind together commercial, linguistic and female rules. Femininity and fairydom merge in these dense and suggestive image clusters in which the principles of imagination and reality harmoniously combine.

In the darker context of *Twelfth Night*, the infatuated Malvolio keeps smiling in the presence of Olivia after reading his 'mistress's' letter ('"If thou entertain'st my love, let it appear in thy smiling / Thy smiles become thee well. Therefore in my presence still smile, dear my sweet, I prithee"', 2.5.164-167). He is thus forcing his severe mien into a smirk, which will allow Maria to describe his transformation in terms of cartographic novelty: 'He does smile his face into more lines than is in the new map with the augmentation of the Indies' (3.2.73-74). This image, probably inspired by the new maps of Edward Wright's *Hydrographiae descriptio* (1599) with their clusters of rhumb-lines, reminds us of the then incessant changes to which cosmographic works were submitted in

⁸ See the website: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Europe_As_A_Queen_Sebastian_Munster_1570.jpg>, accessed 1 February 2023.

⁹ See Jane Grogan's article in this volume.

order to include the latest discoveries made by the navigations and voyages of exploration around the globe. At the same time, such books suggest something of the mixture of curiosity and anxiety which must then have permeated early modern people in a Europe confronted with the numerous facelifts of the other parts of the 'known' world.

In its chorographic and ethnographic discourse, Shakespeare's cosmography traditionally described and inventoried such humours as rage, choler or unbridled passion. Inverting the process, Shakespeare also regularly describes humours in terms of natural, geographically localised phenomena. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Katharina is as violent as the 'swelling Adriatic seas' (1.2.71), while after having sworn to Iago that his decision to blow away to heaven 'all his fond love' for Desdemona (*Othello*, 3.3.448) is from then on irreversible, Othello resorts to an imagery borrowed from Turkey's geography and thus to a liminal space at the borders of Europe and Asia:

Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic sea
Whose icy current and compulsive course
Ne'er keeps retiring ebb but keeps due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont:
Even so my bloody thoughts with violent pace
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up. (3.3.456-463)

This passage metaphorically describes the flow of the Black Sea into the Sea of Marmara and then into the strait of the Dardanelles, according to the description found in Philemon Holland's translation of Pliny the Elder (1601, Book V, Ch. 30, 154). Othello's habitual use of polysyllabic proper names such as 'Pontic', 'Propontic', and 'Hellespont', is not accidental. They all have a geographic source and they are connected with remarkable forms of the exotic as well as with the marvellous of Mandevillian travels. Othello thus indirectly associates himself with the proverbial cruelty of the Turks, something which will find a confirmation in his final suicide when he tells the story of this 'malignant and turban'd Turk', whose throat he allegedly cut in Aleppo, in Syria (*Othello*, 5.2.350-354). By killing himself in the same manner, he kills the Turk in him.

Shakespeare's cosmographic imagination, however, does not always have to go thus far, since England is also described as an ideal, almost mythical country, or like an eroticized body on the maps which were circulating at the time. He uses the geographic imaginary through an interplay and a tension between proximity and distance, exoticism and homeliness.

4. *Imagining the World: Maps and Empty Spaces*

In *Richard II*, before his death, John of Gaunt delivers a long topographic poem, to celebrate the bygone days of Old England and to stigmatize Richard II's arbitrary rule:

This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise
...
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall

Or as a moat defensive to a house
 Against the envy of less happier lands,
 This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
 This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
 Feared by their breed and famous by their birth,
 Renowned for their deeds as far from home,
 For Christian service and true chivalry,
 As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry
 ...
 England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
 Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
 Of wat'ry Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
 With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds. (2.1.40-64)

These patriotic lines, imbued with 'cartographic lyricism' (Neill 1994, 14), also serve as a criticism of Richard II's rule. The syncretic vision which they put together is built on a mixed bag of Pagan and Christian elements: Mars and Neptune are indeed here cheek by jowl with the Garden of Eden and the crusades against the Infidels. It also introduces a parallel between East and West in terms of martial glory and reputation. At the end of the monologue, the image of England's 'rocky shore' set inside a 'triumphant sea' progressively reveals the 'rotten parchment bonds' evocative of shame and stains ('inky blots').

This directly leads to the theme of the division of the realm. In *1 Henry IV*, Mortimer, Glendower and Percy (also known as Hotspur) hold a meeting to divide between them the land on the map:

Glendower Come, here is the map, shall we divide our right
 According to our threefold order ta'en?
Mortimer The Archdeacon hath divided it
 Into three limits very equally
 ...
Hotspur I do not care, I'll give thrice so much land
 To any well-deserving friend:
 But in the way of bargain, mark ye me,
 I'll cavill on the ninth part of a hair.
 Are the indentures drawn? Shall we be gone? (3.1.68-137)

The word 'indentures' refers both to the meanders of the river Trent and to the apprentice's contract of seven years: Shakespeare thus uses again place as a metaphor of the written piece of parchment. The toponyms are equated with a manuscript which may be corrected according to individual caprices or demands, just as a playtext could be revised to include the actors' (mainly the clown's) improvisations.

In *King Lear*, a map is again produced on stage when the old king decides to divide his kingdom. The three daughters of the king are supposed to flatter him in their public declaration of love. In fact, this more than awkward ceremony has serious subconscious and symbolic implications which will gradually crop up as the play progresses. Even if we are not in the barbaric world of *Titus Andronicus*, this forced ritual amounts to an act of dismembering, to a form of cannibalistic banquet in the course of which Lear feeds the carnivorous appetite of his daughters in an analogy with the 'barbarous Scythian':

The barbarous Scythian,
 Or he that makes his generation messes
 To gorge his appetite, shall 'to my bosom'
 Be as well neighboured, pitied and relieved,
 As thou my sometime daughter. (*King Lear*, 1.1.117-21)

Here, Shakespeare's cosmography takes us back to an archaic period when the maps were simple vignettes illustrating the different *topoi* of the world upside down (the world of the antipodes) of which early modern maps offer examples in the lower margins of their cartographic representations.¹⁰ Shakespeare thus periodically takes us back to a sort of nebulous mythical horizon which becomes a metaphor for the haunting, repetitive theme of chaos in English history.

At the end of *1 Henry VI* Suffolk, who has seduced Margaret in France, introduces her to the king to make her the future queen of England. He then seems to dream aloud:

Thus Suffolk hath prevailed, and thus he goes,
 As did the youthful Paris once to Greece,
 With hope to find the like event in love –
 But prosper better than the Trojan did.
 Margaret shall now be queen, and rule the King:
 But I will rule both her, the King, and realm. (5.4.103-108)

At the beginning of *2 Henry VI*, Suffolk reappears to tell the king how he vicariously married Margaret in the king's name and place:

So in the famous ancient city, Tours,
 In presence of the Kings of France and Sicil,
 The Dukes of Orleans, Calaber, Bretagne and Alençon,
 Seven earls, twelve barons, and twenty reverend bishops,
 I have performed my task and was espous'd. (1.1.5-9)

3 Henry VI completes the picture, when Edward of York declares to Margaret:

Helen of Greece was fairer far than thou,
 Although thy husband may be Menelaus. (2.2.146-147)

The legendary city of Troy thus gradually superimposes itself on the modern city of Tours, the phonetic analogy between the two toponyms having probably led Shakespeare to modify the historical reality (the marriage had actually been celebrated in Nancy). Suffolk becomes the modern embodiment of Paris, Margaret of Helen and King Henry of Menelaus, the cuckolded husband. In the same historical tetralogy, Alexander Iden, the Kentish gentleman who defeats the rebel Jack Cade, whom he encountered totally famished in his garden, bears a name which is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden in the Book of Genesis (*2 Henry VI* 4.10).

¹⁰ See <<https://hyperallergic.com/249898/why-cannibals-were-on-every-16th-century-map-of-the-new-world/>>, accessed 1 February 2023. The map of Petrus Plancius' 'Orbis Terrarum Typus de Integro Multis in Locis Emendatus' (1594) shows details of cannibalism.

Similar echoes of Biblical and classical geographical sources are found in the comedies. In *The Merchant of Venice*, for instance, Gratiano's triumphal ejaculation, 'We are the Jasons, we have won the fleece', gives Salanio an opportunity for making a quibble which is just as ironical as it is pathetic: 'I would you had won the fleece that he hath lost' (3.2.240-241). Such a pun on the words 'fleets' and 'fleece' works as an allusion to the Greek myth of the Argonauts and to the Golden Fleece which, in the play, corresponds to the golden hair of Portia who has inherited a fabulous fortune. If Bassanio and Gratiano have conquered Belmont's golden fleece, Antonio, for his part, has lost his fleet at sea and now definitely seems bankrupt. He finds himself at the mercy of Shylock, the modern and phonetic counterpart of the classical monster Scylla, as Launcelot suggests: 'Truly then I fear you are damn'd both by father and mother: thus when I shun Scylla (your father), I fall into Charybdis (your mother)' (3.5.13-15). The imaginary cosmography of Shakespeare's comedy allows the roads of contemporary maritime trade to coincide with the legendary sites of the Homeric odyssey.

In *As You Like It*, the forest of Arden obviously recalls the Garden of Eden:

Oliver Where will the Old Duke live?

Charles They say he is already in the Forest of Arden and a many merry men with him, and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England. They say many young gentlemen flock to him every day and fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world. (1.1.108-113)

The medieval legend of Robin Hood is here associated with the Morris dance through links which combine the biblical echo with the maiden name of the playwright's mother, born Mary Arden. But elsewhere Shakespeare's work, especially his comedies, is marked by an undeniable cosmopolitanism, something of an originality at the time, thus turning playwright and audiences into what Janet Clare, in this volume of *JEMS*, calls 'armchair travellers'.

5. *The 'Infinite Variety' of Shakespeare's Cosmography*

In an English context, the question of exile naturally contributes to making cosmography and travel negative elements unless they are linked to a return to the native country. The motherland becomes a nourishing breast, an enclosed garden protected by high walls. But if two of the four great tragedies are still situated on the soil of the British isles (England and Scotland), all the comedies, except *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, are situated on foreign land, mostly in Italy, France, Austria, or in imaginary sites such as the forest of Arden or Illyria.

Illyria, mentioned in *2 Henry VI* with its allusion to 'Bargulus, the strong Illyrian pirate' (4.1.108), mainly appears in *Twelfth Night*. Shakespeare found that name in Cicero's *Offices* and in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and it seems to correspond to the Adriatic coast of present-day Croatia. According to Harry Levin, 'This Illyrian seaport – it could well be Dubrovnick, formerly Ragusa in its more Italian days – seems to suit these Italian visitors who came from Messaline, wherever that may have been' (1989, 22). Illyria is also another imaginary and utopian country whose name combines the idea of illusion and lyricism, two elements which are very much present in the play, in particular in Duke Orsino's interventions (Riemer 1980, 97-98). According to Roger Warren and Stanley Wells, Illyria does not correspond to any identifiable place on a map: 'Each of these aspects of Illyria – the geographical or Mediterranean, the specifically English, the magical, and the sense of a country of the mind – can be illustrated by the prominence each has been given in notable stagings' (Warren and Wells 2008, 9). Leah Marcus agrees when she writes

that 'Illyria was scarcely familiar territory, more significant, perhaps, for its evocation of like-sounding exotica – Elysium, delirium – than for concrete geopolitical associations' (1988, 161).

What's more, the simultaneously vague and ambivalent space of the play is divided into two different sites, Orsino's palace and Olivia's house as often happens in Shakespeare's Italian plays. This double-sided geography is careful to provide no specific localization and it avoids giving references or quoting the clichés of the time linked to such and such well-known place except when a character like Iago, for example, keeps citing a number of local stereotypes.¹¹ Such a descriptive uncertainty corresponds to the dramatist's cosmographic strategy of not identifying the exact nature of the geographical decor in order to make indirect allusions to England:

Shakespeare's city settings are vague on specific geography. The Arno in Florence or the Adige in Verona ... are never mentioned ... When the Rialto in Venice or St Gregory's Well near Milan is alluded to, it comes as a surprise ... One might conclude from the consistency that this vagueness is purposeful ... Most importantly Italy serves in part as metaphor for Shakespeare's England ... (Levith 1989, 11)¹²

As far as Italy is concerned, the Shakespearian canon is not free from material errors. According to Manfred Pfister, it is perfectly useless to ask for an exact reconstruction of the place or places since Shakespeare creates imaginary places with known toponyms:

... the Americas, bearing an Italian name, intuited by Florentine cosmographers, and first 'discovered' by an Italian in Spanish services, were to English adventurers and colonists not only a place of encounter with savage aborigines, but also with Mediterranean Catholicism. Prospero's island is at one and the same time Mediterranean and Transatlantic, an island between Naples and Tripolis and one of the far Bermudas. (1997, 301)

In *The Tempest*, the conflict between Prospero and Antonio is also one that opposes city states such as Naples and Milan, both under Spanish rule. According to other critics, the island of *The Tempest* contains other possible allusions to Ireland and to the Irish situation (Callaghan 2000). Situated at the crossroads between Europe and Africa and/or between Europe and America, the romance play is a sort of cosmographic palimpsest which provides much grist to the mill of post-colonial studies.

Another localisation, that of the city of Vienna in *Measure for Measure*, has been questioned by Gary Taylor, who argues that the Italian town of Ferrara should be preferred to it. Similarly, in *Hamlet*, the murder of Gonzago, which is supposed to take place in Vienna, was actually that of the Duke of Urbino which happened in 1538: 'The Murder of Gonzago ... is based on an actual murder, that of the Duke of Urbino in 1538. Gonzago, however, was not the name of the Duke, but of his alleged murderer, Luigi Gonzaga, a kinsman of the Duke's wife, Leonora Gonzaga' (Taylor 2004, 257). In this dark comedy, Poland is also placed in a rather decentred position since it is situated somewhere between Norway and Denmark. The play's European geography is thus just as confused from North to South as it is from East to West, in spite of the Prince's statement that he is 'but mad north-northwest' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.315-316). Hamlet here refers to the notion of geographical orientation as indicated on maps to suggest that he is not

¹¹ See for example: 'Your Dane, your German, and your swag-bellied Hollander ... are nothing to your English' (*Othello* 2.3.72-75).

¹² See also Riemer, who analyses the landscape of Shakespearean comedies in terms of 'ideal landscapes': 'The distortions and the rearrangement of everyday reality in most of the comedies represent artistic necessity – the discovery of an ideal landscape in which playfully ambivalent concerns find a proper and comfortable environment' (1980, 65).

a victim of spatial disorientation and knows full well where he is. Earlier on, he had referred to 'this goodly frame the earth ... this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire' (2.2.264-267) showing that spatial images of the terrestrial globe and of the overhanging heavens indirectly serve him as a figurative discourse to describe his predicament.

In *Othello*, the characters come from two different parts of Italy (Venice and Florence) while the Moor's origins remain fairly mysterious:

Be he a black or a north African Moor ... Othello's otherness remains. He is more than a stranger, he comes from a mysteriously 'other' world, a world that lies beyond our reach, hinted at rather than defined. Despite his self-identification with Venice and Christianity the Moor cannot shake off this mystery, a by-product of his dark skin and of the associations this had in European minds. (Honigmann 1997, 27)

When we pass from Venice to Cyprus, in act 2, the play transforms what still looked like a variant of city comedy, in which the Old Father is traditionally outwitted by his daughter who imposes on him her own matrimonial choice, into a domestic tragedy where passionate love, jealousy and betrayal prevail:

In Venice they do let God see the pranks
They dare not show their husbands. (*Othello*, 3.3.205-206)

The name Venice is coupled with that of Venus, not only through the paronomasia but also because Cyprus was known as the goddess' island, the place where she was allegedly born, where she was celebrated as the goddess of love and where there was a cult of Venus in her temple at Paphos. After sailing from Venice to Cyprus, *Desdemona* is demonized (the word 'demon' at the heart of her name is thus emphasized) by Iago's perverse insinuations. The geographic imaginary, so intimately associated with the iconography of Venus and with classical mythology is thus reactivated on this island recently reclaimed from the Turks after the battle of Lepanto in 1571. Venus was the wife of Vulcan, a cripple whose skin was blackened by his work in an underground smithy, and the mistress of Mars, the god of war. Their love story, which had aroused Vulcan's ire and then the giggles and guffaws of all the gods on Mount Olympus, was abundantly represented in Renaissance Venetian painting and especially by Titian.

So, beyond the confines of Europe, the exoticism of distant lands had often taken on an erotic and phantasmatic dimension, belonging to a mental cartography situated half-way between pleasure and terror. In *Othello*, this space is situated closer to hell than to paradise since the Pontic and Propontic seas serve as images to render the irreversible flow of fury and hysteria (3.3.456-459).

In *As You Like It*, Touchstone hints at Ovid's exile on the shores of the Black Sea and political exile to the land of the Goths (3.3.6). But in *Richard II*, exile is hardly felt as Bolingbroke says to his father John of Gaunt:

O, who can hold a fire in his hand
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?
Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite
By bare imagination of a feast?
Or wallow naked in December snow
By thinking on fantastic summer's heat? (1.3.294-299)

The Caucasus, the mountain chain dividing Europe from Asia, is indeed situated within the confines of the civilised world and it represents the antipodes, or the negative of England. Here, the geographic image, reinforced by the contrast between fire and frost, serves to enhance the biting pain of an exile to a distant country. In a similar way, the allusions to Russia in *The Winter's Tale* (Hermione claiming at her trial that she is the daughter of the emperor of Russia, 3.2.117) create an atmosphere of suspicion and despotism close to the paranoid fears that Ivan the Terrible introduced in the Jacobean's imagination:

The king [Leontes] inhabits a world of secrecy, suspicion, and spying that has no proper name until the playwright asks his audience to think on the emperor of Russia ... The Sicilian king is trapped in a Muscovite bind, struggling to control his wife's talk in ... a precarious court while attempting to be hospitable. (Palmer 1995, 335)

Thus, one sees how the map of Europe, from Syracuse to Russia, from Ephesus to the forest of Arden, from Ireland to the Mediterranean, also served to draw an inner map so as to figure a topography of humours in which the local or national idiosyncrasies are being subverted and attached to other signifiers. This type of stylistic freedom enabled the playwright to work on a very varied range of sounds and images, which he then separates from their specific geographic context, in order to allow them to circulate freely inside his drama.

6. Conclusion: Maps, Memory and the 'Distracted Globe'

Shakespeare's cosmography is often vague and rooted in the world of imagination. The placenames which the playwright quotes in the canon, the allusions to cities, nations, traditions, customs as well as costumes remain as so many *trompe l'œil* that allow all these double-sided places to make any specific localisation impossible and which favour the creation of some sort of never-never land. This is part of an effect of anamorphosis and perspective which also looks ahead to the quick decor changes of the court masque.

Shakespeare's maps blend real and imaginary names while suggesting underground itineraries whose material traces have been erased and which only survive in the memories of men:

the quaint mazes in the wanton green,
For lack of tread, are undistinguishable. (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2.1.99-100).

In comedy, spatial confusion and disorientation reign because of the distempered weather, something which may be regarded as the equivalent of a spatial imaging of the loss of memory and oblivion. In *Hamlet*, written some seven or eight years later, after the erection of the Globe, the image of the head and of the theatre serve as a figuration of memory when, after listening to his father's narrative, Hamlet exclaims:

Remember thee?
Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe. (1.5.95-97)

The word 'globe' indeed clearly refers here both to Hamlet's head and to Shakespeare's brand-new playhouse. As in the small-scale cosmography of Holbein's *Ambassadors*, where one sees an earthly and a celestial globe, as in the customary marriage of heaven and earth of contemporary

cosmographic representations and discourses, the globe is both the worldly map and the distorted skull at the feet of the two sitters. This speaking picture delivers a coded message while, in Shakespeare, indeterminacy is used as a rhetorical trick to multiply possible interpretations without giving the text or the word any definite or fixed meaning. His dramatic cosmography was thus made compatible with the dream of spatial expansion.

As the articles of this volume demonstrate, cosmography in diverse European countries and through multiple genres, combined science, arts and ideology, mostly of a religious nature (even if many cosmographies openly or secretly leaned towards Protestantism). Thanks to the technology of the printing press, those books circulated widely throughout Europe among humanists, universities as well as among explorers and professional travellers. In 'Renaissance Cosmographical Knowledge and Religious Discourse: A "Disenchantment of the World"?', Étienne Bourdon rightfully argues that the passage from cosmography to geography entailed a progressive disenchantment of the world. In this perspective, it would seem that Shakespeare's plays had an exactly contrary effect and did contribute, albeit briefly, to a re-enchantment of the world. So, if the influence of cosmography on the world of the theatre and on Shakespeare in particular, may be considered as effective, then this moment should be regarded as a short-lived, enchanted parenthesis, turning its back to the new empiricism recording the latest discoveries of navigators which would progressively become the science of geography in the course of the seventeenth century.

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