



Memory of Earth and Ocean: Territories of Shakespeare's Islands

Mémoire de la terre et de la mer : îles et territoires chez Shakespeare

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Memory of Earth and Ocean: Territories of Shakespeare's Islands

MONICA MATEI-CHESNOIU ♦

Perhaps it is not too much to say that Shakespeare has taught us geography. It is not only finding out that Bohemia has a seacoast, or that there may be a magic island in the Mediterranean, placed somewhere between Tunis and Naples. Nor is it excessive to say that these territories of geo-literary imagination may have been even remotely related to what we call the past and present reality of those places. Rather, I will canvass the spatial intersection of geography, cartography, and history as dramatized in Shakespeare's plays by looking diagonally at the galaxy of islands in the Mediterranean, the Aegean, or the Atlantic, which form the settings, or are alluded to, in some of Shakespeare's plays. In the introduction to *The Birth of Territory* (2013), political geographer Stuart Elden observes that "territory is a word, a concept and a practice and the relation between these can only be grasped historically" (7). As Denis Cosgrove observes in the introduction to *Mappings* (1999), "Evolution of a global spatiality with its implications of boundlessness, uninterrupted movement and communication works dialectically across the evolution of modern consciousness with a discourse of localism, rootedness and bounded territoriality" (20). In this line of thought, I am looking at the Shakespearean metaphoric island territories as forms of spatial literary practice, including an area of knowledge, activity and experience. While involving human agency, but also symbolic jurisdiction ruled by Shakespeare's name and intellectual fame, the metaphoric territories of Shakespeare's islands are, at once, inclusive and divisive, utopian and dystopian, as they can produce different associations in the minds of those who pay attention to their dynamic meanings.

The inner space of the ancient Roman *Mare nostrum* (or the Mediterranean Sea) was at the centre of geographic and cartographic cultures in late-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Moreover, islands possessed a unique position within the cartographic discourse of the early modern period, as newly discovered

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territories were frequently represented as islands.¹ These new territories—arrived at via the western islands in the Atlantic—were often perceived as fictional islands because information about them was compiled from a variety of travel narratives. According to Gilles Deleuze, the movement embodied in the geographic imagination of desert islands is “the consciousness of the earth and ocean” (2004: 11), a place where the dual elements of the earth’s surface are in sharp relief. Oceanic islands would be mountains if not for water; water and land cannot be separated, but the unstableness of this condition is often on display—as in the theatre. This is constructed space—a space dreamt of and mythologized. Dramatic island territories expose a meta-theatrical condition that speaks about the changing sense of self shaped by space. Shakespeare exploits and dramatizes the intricate interplay of the island’s material and metaphorical meanings, and the possible implications in suggesting territorial nationalism, but also interiority.

Islands may be well-defined territories, but also vague spaces of encounter and self-definition in the early modern English imagination. As David McInnis has noted, commenting on Joseph Hall’s *Quo Vadis: A Just Censure for Travel* (1617), “The fact of England being an island (and therefore autonomous) had contributed to England becoming a nation state” (2012: 131). However, dramatic island settings or allusions elicit multiple inversions of the traditional notions of territoriality, demonstrating the permeability of island borders through sliding temporality and spatiality. Geographically and geologically, islands may have drifted as pieces of land separated from the main continent. Oceanic islands may have moved from the ocean floor to emerge above sea level or, through the organic growth of coral, an island may have been transformed, suffering a sea-change into something rich and strange. The volatility and permanent change of island landscapes, as well as the place’s relative isolation, but also its multicultural environment, have made islands suitable spaces to allegorize selfhood, mainly in the unstable theatre mode.

Within the interplay of local–regional and global interactions, representations, and identities, islands are metonymic substitutions that permit the performance of geography, anchored in its representation of theatrical specificity. Shakespeare construes island worlds as split among geographic, historical, ethnographic, or mythological parameters. Their coordinates are permeated with the metaphorical meanings attached to them by century-old narratives about those territories. Just as one cannot separate earth and ocean in the geological island perimeter,

¹ This tradition partly emerged from the *isolario*, a genre promoted by the Renaissance government of Venice, consisting of collections of maps of islands, established by Cristoforo Buondelmonti in his manuscript *Liber Insularum Archipelagi* (1420) and by Benedetto Bordone in his *Isolario* (1534). Alternatively, classical discourse placed certain islands at the margins of the known territories. Writing about Alexandrian cartography as described by Strabo, Christian Jacob (1999) mentions “the island of Thule, at the northern extremity of the inhabited world” (44), which was described enigmatically by ancient writers.

the division perceived in the dramatic reconstruction of Shakespeare's islands is traversed by imaginatively being on all sides, as the dramatic movement grows into something of great constancy. The theatre has the ability to transfer belief in objective spatial manipulation from the technological field of geography into the literary sphere of dramatic imagery by means of language, action, movement, and costume. The widespread confidence in the objectivity of cartographic and geographic imagery—extant at a time when the early modern conquest of geographic space resulted in incredibly flexible metaphoric meanings about place²—served to empower Shakespeare's manipulation of island spaces. I will expose the myths and interrogate the fictions by means of which the territories of Shakespeare's islands can be traced. I suggest that Shakespeare's islands are metonymic and liminal spaces of transition and memory, both sea and earth, resulting from confluences of real and imaginary places, meaningfully located within the stage's amphitheatre.

Postcolonial studies of literature have explored the ways in which islands have been used, imagined, and theorized, exposing the dynamic and synoptic relation between the whole and parts and explaining the fascination that islands have long held in the European imagination. Matthew Boyd Goldie, in "Island Theory: The Antipodies," has defined "island theory" as "a set of ways to approach literature" by means of the island paradigm (2011: 29). The island space is interpreted as a microcosm where varied social and political anxieties are being played out—from the idealized settings for harmonious mercantile communities to the spaces of corruption and dissension. In a postcolonial analysis of the ways in which the castaway genre worked as a tool of European imperial culture, in *Empire Islands: Castaways, Cannibals, and Fantasies of Conquest*, Rebecca Weaver-Hightower demonstrates "how the literary island setting provides a space where European imperial cultures could play out fantasies and process anxieties of empire through fantasies and anxieties of the body" (2007: xiv). What about the performative corporeality of the body on stage? I would ask. England is part of an island, if we are to believe the elderly John of Gaunt, in *Richard II*, who reminds his audience about the imaginative and physical geographies of the "British" Isles, or England, passionately described as "this sceptre isle" and "this precious stone set in the silver sea" (2.1.40; 46).³ Even if we are tempted to doubt the objective judgment of a dying old man grieving for his son's enforced absence, it is a fact that the physical separation of the island of Britain (including England)

² I refer to the concept of "mythical space and place" (85) as advanced by Y. Fu Tuan in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, and the distinctions among "space, place and mapping in literary studies" (Tally 1), as demonstrated by Robert T. Tally Jr. in the introduction to *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies* (2011).

³ All references to Shakespeare's plays are keyed to *The Complete Works*, The Oxford Shakespeare, 4th ed. (1992); references to acts and scenes will be mentioned parenthetically in the text.

from the neighbouring Continent provides a refuge from continental geopolitical intrigue. England's anamorphic "island"—in early modern times—was the actual setting that staged life's contradictory social and political events. This was an additional factor for highlighting meta-theatricality in Shakespeare's plays set on islands or dramatizing island traffic.

The example most frequently invoked when referring to enclosed insularity versus the power of imagination and theatrical space is Prospero's magic island. Frank W. Bervik challenges the—by now—hegemonic views in *The Tempest* criticism according to which the play's island has a dominant New World dimension, disproving the premise that *The Tempest* simply addresses a uniquely Western colonial history and post-colonial predicament (2012: 3). Bervik's close reading suggests that "the play's setting is not so much a Caribbean colony but a 'floating' island, a 'hovering' Laputa of sorts that has no consistent geographical coordinates, thus rendering the island perpetually unstable and literally utopian—that is, *nowhere*" (2012: 7). Indeed, by extension, Shakespeare's islands are shaped by early modern geography, cultural contexts, and, I would-say, meta-theatrical constructions into the volatile spaces that we have struggled so earnestly to define. In a postcolonial study of Shakespeare and geography, Ghee-Seng Lim notes: "The uncertain geography of *The Tempest* and other romances such as *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* does not matter as much as we might think in an age of increasing geographical accuracy. Shakespeare is of the here and everywhere, like Othello" (2011: 257). I will show, however, that geographic inconsistencies do matter in theatrical action, as do anachronisms and spatial shifts. The non-place of theatrical islands' settings and the allusions to metaphorical islands allegorize a multicultural space defined by lucrative commercial practices, but essentially integrated in the theatre's spatial relationality and dynamism.

The island's bifurcated geographic and metaphoric projections in Shakespeare's plays develop along two lines: the Ottoman-Venice competition, which brings into focus islands formerly under the Venetocracy—and later conquered by the Ottomans (Crete, Cyprus, Rhodes, and other islands in the Mediterranean and the Aegean); and the islands of imagination, both fictional and real, such as the "Bermoothes" (Bermudas) in *The Tempest* (1.2.229) or the Fortunate Isles (the Happy Isles or the Hesperides) in the Atlantic. Islands of the Mediterranean are places of lucrative commercial traffic and competition, while Atlantic islands appear as quasi-utopian locations of an imaginary elsewhere, but also places that illustrate Elizabethan and Jacobean London. The particular dramatic interaction involving an island setting or allusion displays the capacity to hold contradictions in a way that neutralizes both terms of the binary oppositions. The simultaneity of the "here" and "now" typified by the island space—as in the theatre—allows audiences to figure out a place that is both there and not there. Shakespeare's islands are neither utopian fictions nor dystopias. Audiences constantly shift between possibilities, none of which is acceptable,

but which cannot be discarded either. They may be directed to assess the merits or defects of each possibility against their own historical circumstances, and this is suggested in the plays by means of anachronism, inversion, or overstatement. The paradox distorts and reassembles existing realities and systems of history, geography, and society.

The island of Crete, for example, is simultaneously the place where Greek mythology is being played out for illustrative reasons (Jupiter's birth, the labyrinth and the Minotaur, Dedalus and Icarus, the myth of Europa) and the kingdom of Candia (or Candy), which was the capital's name in the sixteenth century, as the island was an overseas colony of the Republic of Venice. Candia was accurately the capital of Crete, but the name was commonly applied to the whole island by foreigners, though the natives themselves always call it Kriti or Crete. As most Greek islands, Crete is fantasized as the origin of good wines, such as in Mosca's praise of "the rich Candian wines" in Ben Jonson's *Volpone* (I.i.58). However, none of these cultural assumptions appear in Shakespeare's allusion to the island in *Twelfth Night*, when an officer introduces the captain (allegedly a pirate), Antonio, as the person who "took the Phoenix and her freight from Candy" (5.1.57). Apparently, the name is used correctly for the town, not the island, suggesting commercial traffic in the Mediterranean under the protectorate of Venice, but verisimilitude stops at this point. Antonio's ship is named after the mythical bird, the Phoenix, the sole of its kind, about which the legend says that it can be regenerated out of its own ashes. Violence transpires when the officer notes that the captain boarded the Illyrian ship—suggestively named the *Tiger*—in a combat during which Orsino's younger nephew, Titus, lost his leg (5.1. 58–9). Duke Orsino recognizes Antonio as the hostile victor in the sea fight and compares the warrior's burnt face with that of Vulcan, the Roman god of fire and the supreme artist in metals, but also the unfortunate husband of Venus. Juxtapositions of violence and peaceful commerce, romantic love and enmity in war, as well as unrequited and often problematic love affairs, shape a dramatic geography constituted of infinitesimal fragments of experiential place. The spatio-temporal ambiguity in *Twelfth Night* sets in opposition the mercantile world of Mediterranean traffic (Candy), the semi-mythical space of Illyria, and the commercial London of Shakespeare's time. All these places are shaped as islands or groups of islands: Crete, in the South of the Aegean Archipelago, at the time under Venetian jurisdiction, but threatened by the Ottomans; the coast of Illyria, dotted with myriads of island; and the mercantile island of the city of London, sheltered in the niche of the Thames.

Shakespeare's theatrical islands may propagate the traditional meanings of isolation, finiteness, territoriality and vulnerability, but they can also bring to mind resistance in the face of adversity and people's capacity to reinvent themselves. In the translation of Gasparo Contarini's *De magistribus et republica venetorum*, translated by Lewes Lewkenor as *The commonwealth and government*

of *Venice* (1599), Sebastian Münster is quoted with his description of the city of Venice. The story goes that the Venetians originally inhabited a province on the firm land on the Adriatic coast, but retreated into the sea, seating themselves on little islands as a result of the Huns' invasions. The "barbarous people" coming out of Scythia raided with exceeding terror and cruelty Thracia, Moesia, Illyria, and finally Italy. Pushed further into the sea, the Venetians began to build in an area called *Rivo alto*, and a note in the margin says that this is why the commercial area is called the Rialto (Contarini 1599: 171–72). In neither play set in Venice (*Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*) does Shakespeare show much knowledge of the actual topography of the city, except of the most general kind; but his island geography is too meaningful to be neglected. The island of the Rialto—a smaller island within the Venetian archipelago—is placed at the hub of commercial traffic, as in historical Venice.⁴ It is the centre of the city, the focal point of exchange, where commercial transactions are conducted and fortunes are made and lost. Just as, in the two plays, the court room provides a dramatic model to test Venice's reputation for justice and equality before the law, in the early modern topography of Venice, the Rialto bridges the commercial part of the city and its political head.

All would have been well if people on the island of the Rialto had lived happily between the immediate security of what they had already gained, and the optimistic hyper-reality of what they hoped to acquire in the future. However, all security is undermined by the hazardous nature of economic enterprise. This view of vulnerability depicts the wealth of trade as chronically exposed, open to the arbitrary aggression of wind and tide, reef and rock, just as an island is, as Salerio demonstrates to Antonio (1.1.22–26). Moreover, the threatening image is enhanced in Bassanio's description of Portia blonde hair, ominously associated with the distant land of Colchis, in the Argonauts' story (through the figure of Jason), and, implicitly, Medea's legend:

Her sunny locks
 Hang on her temples like a golden fleece,
 Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchis' strand,
 And many Jasons come in quest of her.
 (*The Merchant of Venice* 1.1.171–73)

Colchis and Belmont are treated as disparate imaginary and real islands set across an East-West divide. Sir Thomas Elyot's *Dictionary* (1538) describes Colchis as "an Ile in Asia, where Medea was borne" (XXI^v), while John Foxe, in the dedicatory epistle to his sister, appended to his *Actes and Monuments* (1583) is even more straightforward when he states: "The Poets write in fables,

⁴ For a critical study on Shakespeare's Venice see Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare and Venice* (2010), especially 24 and 29–30.

that Jason when he fought with the Dragon in the Ile of Colchis, was preserved by the medicines of Medea, and so wan the golden fleese" (1516^v). Not heeding geographic accuracy, ancient Colchis was dangerous territory set in unfavourable seas, as were the islands under the protectorate of early modern Venice, which reached as far as the Black Sea, or *Pontus Euxinus*. Ancient Colchis is the land of fabulous wealth and sorcery, and is set in grim opposition to Portia's idyllic Belmont. Boika Sokolova associates the references to Colchis and the Golden Fleece to "mysterious power" (2009: 43). As I see it, the interpretation of Colchis, in association with Portia's golden locks, reiterates the vulnerability of the island space, exposed to multiple perils, similar to the potential defencelessness of the female body or the susceptibility of commercial fortunes. Moreover, reference to a faraway barbaric mythical island, set in a sea with a strange ancient name (*Pontus Euxinus*) enhances the danger and exposure to commercial or amorous pursuits. This is a space where there lurk dragons.

No less threatening is the island of Cyprus in *Othello*, set in the middle of military as well as domestic conflict. Cyprus and Rhodes were formerly under Venetian protectorate, but constantly exposed to the hazard of Ottoman aggression. In point of mythological undertones, at Paphos in Cyprus was one of the most celebrated temples of the goddess of love (Aphrodite, or Venus), so she was constantly called the Cyprian Goddess. Othello is sent by the Venetian Council to defend Cyprus against the Turk, who, according to the Duke, "with a most mighty preparation makes for Cyprus" (1.3.220–21). Iago had already seen service there, as he reminds Roderigo: "At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds" (1.1. 29). In Act 2, the Venetian party arrives in Cyprus, undoubtedly in Famagusta, the strongly fortified capital of the island, attacked by Selim II in 1569 and taken in 1571. As the venue shifts from the commercial islands of Venice to the tempest-tossed island of Cyprus, audiences learn that the storm has destroyed the Turkish galleys and separated the Venetian ships. As Cassio announces, Othello is on the way "here for Cyprus" (2.1.30). "Here" is the place where the rest of the action progresses, and the adverbial location intimates the space of performance. Apparently, the tempest that has split the Venetian party has produced nothing more serious than a pause in the action, with no severe consequences. However, this event is critical because, with the destruction of the Turkish fleet, the balance of dramatic power shifts from war to love, from Mars to Venus. The end of the storm leaves the military men stranded on Venus's Island, with nothing more to do than celebrate victory, make trouble, feel jealous, and murder their wives. Cassio sees Cyprus as "This warlike isle" (2.2.44), and so does Iago (2.3.53); the metaphor foreshadows the menacing atmosphere of deferred war and impending tragedy to take place on the enclosed space of the disputed island.

The haziness of emotion displayed by means of the island of Cyprus in *Othello* is linked to the island's enclosed territoriality—denoting subjectivity—

and controversial political allegiance. Cyprus is not only the place of war and threatening Ottoman conquest, but also a place projecting positive expectations and fulfilled desire. Cassio sees Desdemona's presence on the island as soothing for Othello's intense personality; once the fire is spent in Desdemona's arms, Cassio innocently believes, Othello might "Give renewed fire to our extincted spirits, / And bring all Cyprus comfort" (2.1.83). In the same exalted vein, Othello predicts that his beloved wife "shall be well desired in Cyprus" (2.1.205) and "well met at Cyprus" (2.1.213), thus extrapolating his own desire to the island territory that would be their grave. Othello's rhetorical fluctuations dramatize the problems that confront him on Venus's isle: to contain his joy and preserve his importance as a figure of military and marital authority to the Venetians. To close the series of inflated eulogies referring to the island of Cyprus, like a litany conjuring the island setting to the audiences, the herald announces the start of the festivities in celebration of the victory over the Turkish fleet, and Othello and Desdemona's nuptials, with the final words "Heaven bless the isle of Cyprus and our noble general, Othello" (2.2.321–22). The island of Cyprus, therefore, is a symbolic location conflating contradictory meanings: love and war, confusing emotions, imminent tragedy, conquest and meritocracy, but also confident expectations and potentially (un)fulfilled desire. Different readings of the island's imagined territory depend on how the "here" of action develops on the stage space.

Across early modern English texts and translations, the double spaces of the island of Cyprus in *Othello* and the archipelago of Venice appear as multivalent, sometimes contradictory, even mystifying sites of cultural geography; their representations are constituted into what some scholars have catalogued as myth.⁵ In calling up the fight for supremacy between the Venetians and the Turks, the play also points to—even if it simultaneously eclipses—a history of conflicts, which had come to a head in 1571 at the battle of Lepanto, with the victory of the Holy League, a coalition of Catholic maritime states, against the Ottomans. The French military treatise by François de la Noue, entitled *Discours politiques et militaires du Seigneur de la Noue*, translated into English by Edward Aggas as *The politicke and militarie discourses of the Lord de La Nouue* (1588), is designed to spread fear among the Christians concerning the Ottomans. Although the victory of Don John of Austria and the Christian coalition at Lepanto is duly mentioned, La Noue demonstrates that the Turks, despite this defeat, "yet do they hold the Ile of *Ciprus* as a glorious monument of their triumph" (1588: 246). Cyprus was a military bastion for both Venice and the Ottomans, inscribing notions of territorial supremacy and martial aggression. In another military treatise by John Polemon, *The second part of the booke of battailes, fought in our age* (1587), the

⁵ On the myth of Venice see David C. McPherson, *Shakespeare, Jonson, and the Myth of Venice* (1990); Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Othello: A Contextual History* (1994: 13–34); Emma Smith's critical study entitled *William Shakespeare: Othello* (2004: 22–23), and Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1958: 82–95).

author quotes Contarini concerning the conquest of Famagusta by the Turks. He announces that Mehmet Bey “brought newes that *Famagosta* the chiefe citie and kaye of *Cyprus*, was taken, & that good tidings gaue them a stomacke to attempt some new enterprise” (1587: sig Kiiii^v). One cannot help noticing the large number of military texts and maps concerned with famous naval battles published in England on the eve of the Spanish Armada conflict (1588). These texts allegorize Cyprus as a military citadel, the realm of Mars rather than Venus, with captains, soldiers, and ensigns marching all over the place.

None of these inflammatory martial allusions—mapping shifts of power and allegiance—are obvious in the representation of Cyprus in *Othello*. As the play is about mind bogging and manipulation, about the circulation of false rumours and innuendos across the Mediterranean divide, among islands at war, or in the apparently stable government of Venice, the focus is rather on showing what lies behind historical and geographic facts. The action of *Othello* may be placed around 1570, before the battle of Lepanto, when Cyprus was still under Venetian jurisdiction. However, the exchange in the Venetian Senate concerning the movement of Ottoman warships between Cyprus and Rhodes is disconcerting, to say the least. In the council scene, the Duke of Venice complains about the contradictory nature of military news (1.3.1). For once, the number of Turkish galleys differs, based on intelligence gleaned from letters received by three senators, ranging from 107 to 140 and even 200 galleys. The plain fact is, however, that there is a Turkish fleet, “bearing up to Cyprus” (1.3.8). A Sailor from the galleys reports that “The Turkish preparation makes for Rhodes” (1.3.14) but the Duke questions this point. The Venetian rulers hesitate between possibility, error, or false judgement, and suspect foul play (or fake news) based on “the importancy of Cyprus to the Turk” (1.3.21)—a fact stated in the military treatises of the time. No sooner have they decided that the Ottomans are not headed for Rhodes than a further messenger announces, “The Ottomites, reverend and gracious / Steering with due course towards the isle of Rhodes, / Have there injoined them with an after fleet” and are now making for Cyprus (1.3.34–36). Not heeding the Christian epithets “reverend” and “gracious” attributed to the Turks (probably in sheer irony), the Council moves on to certainty and concludes that the Ottomans are making for Cyprus, which triggers the plot on the island (because Othello is immediately sent to Cyprus). Indeed, it was Rhodes, not Cyprus, that was, at that time, in the possession of the Turks, but historical fact does not help our understanding of Shakespeare’s overlapping island territoriality. An archipelago (Venice) figures fragmentation of thought and action, while Mediterranean islands under divergent authority (Cyprus and Rhodes) suggest vulnerability and split allegiances, where intelligence is constantly manipulated by power(s).

Moving laterally and westward in space to the Atlantic islands, Shakespeare’s imaginary geography is more diffuse but also down-to-earth and pragmatic. The Canary Islands are a Spanish archipelago of volcanic origin located just

off the southern coast of Morocco. During the times of the Spanish Empire, the Canaries were the main stopover for Spanish galleons on their way to the Americas because of the prevailing winds from the northeast. The cities of Santa Cruz de Tenerife and Las Palmas de Gran Canaria became a stopping point for the Spanish conquerors, traders, and missionaries on their way to the New World. The Canaries' wealth invited attacks by pirates and privateers. Ottoman Turkish admiral and privateer Kemal Reis ventured into the Canaries in 1501, while Murat Reis the Elder captured Lanzarote in 1585. None of these tensions emerging from New World adventures and Ottoman conflicts for supremacy are visible in Shakespeare's allusions to these islands in the comedies. Only canary wine and dance are suitable for the merry world of comedy. The canary is a lively dance, believed to have been copied by the Spaniards from the natives of these islands: it looks like an English country dance. This energetic dance features jumps, stamping of the feet and violent movement, accompanied by music with syncopated rhythms. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, Mote describes a French brawl, inviting Don Armado "to jig off a tune at the tongue's end, canary to it with your feet" (3.1.12). In Shakespeare's comedies, dancing is a sign of mutual harmony and suitability. In a scene so much concerned with sensory impressions, initiated by Armado's invitation to Mote to "warble" and "make passionate" his sense of hearing (3.1.1–2), Mote's instructions on how to win a girl with words involve all the senses in the process: "sigh a note and sing a note, sometimes through the throat as if you swallowed love with singing love, sometime through the nose as if you snuffed up love by smelling love" (3.1.11–14). Rich sensory impressions and dynamic movement are associated with tropical islands, just as singing love through the throat is similar to the notes of the canary bird. The Canary Islands, therefore, suggest luxuriant soundscapes in Shakespeare's comedy.

The reputation of the Canaries as exotic locations was constructed through centuries of geographic and travel narratives about the islands. Since this was a starting place for adventurous exploits towards the West Indies, cosmographers described the islands as the initial point for calculating longitude, based on ancient geographers. English mathematician William Bourne, in his *Treasure for Travaillers* (1578), states that the largest island of the archipelago, Gran Canaria, has no longitude because it has been assigned as the place to begin longitude (Bourne 16). In the rules of geography set out by D. P. (1573), the Canaries lie beyond Hercules Pillars and define the Western line of longitude (sig. Aiy^v–Aiiy^v). Spanish and Portuguese navigators describe how they passed beyond the symbolic gates of the Canary Islands in order to reach unknown seas and lands, such as, for example, in the English translation by Nicholas Lichfield of the book by Portuguese historian Fernão Lopes de Castanheda concerning the travels to the East Indies, entitled *The first booke of the historie of the discoverie and conquest of the East Indias, enterprised by the Portingales* (1582: 5^v); or the account by Dominican Friar Bartolomé de las Casas of the Spanish exploits in

the West Indies, entitled *The Spanish colonie* (1583: K4^r), translated into English by M. M. S. Similarly, in his report of Martin Frobisher's voyage in search of a North-western passage to India, entitled *A prayse, and reporte of Maister Martyne Forboishers voyage to Meta Incognita*, Thomas Churchyard does not spare epithets to encourage "this ioyful pilgrimage" made to obtain "the garlande of gain and glorie" (1578: 3). As in other English narratives of grand exploratory exploits, the Canaries lie at the margin of *Meta Incognita*, the place of departure for foreign seas.

Some voyagers identify the Canaries as the Fortunate Isles, a mythical land of the West predicting promised reaches and great expectations. The Spanish navigator Martín Cortés, in his *Breve compendio de la sphaera y del arte de navegar*, translated by Richard Eden as *The arte of nauigation* (1589), writes of the Canaries as the Fortunate Isles in the dedicatory epistle to Charles V (sig. Aij^v). So does the French Huguenot explorer René Goulaine de Laudonnière, in his account of the expedition to Florida, in the English translation by R. H. (Richard Hakluyt), entitled *A notable historie containing foure voyages made by certayne French captaynes vnto Florida* (1587: 18^r–18^v). Similarly, in the dedicatory epistle to the Countess of Bedford, Richard Willes, who finished the translation of Petro Martire d'Anghiera's *The history of trauayle in the West and East Indies* (1577), begun by Richard Eden, points out the commendable exploits of Don Henrico, son of John I of Portugal and nephew of Henry IV of England, who made a voyage to the Canaries and encouraged the Portuguese to search the coasts of Africa and seek new lands there, and beyond (Willes sig. Ciii^r). In many of these texts, the Canaries lie at the margins of the civilized world, occupying a liminal space which opens the possibility of conquest. By far the most detailed first-hand description of the Canary Islands is by Thomas Nichols,⁶ a sugar merchant, who calls the archipelago "the fortunate ilandes" (1583: sig. Bij^v), in his book *A pleasant description of the fortunate ilandes, called the Ilands of Canaria* (1583), although his years of imprisonment on those islands gave him little reason to call them so. In the chapter describing the Atlantic islands, Bishop George Abbot writes about the Canarie, or the "fortunate Ilandes," which are famous for the Canary wines and birds (1599: G3^v). Positive prospects of territorial conquest and riches associated to the New World blend with overtones of good fortune and timely voyages of adventure and discovery in sixteenth-century accounts of the Canary Islands.

The liminal space of the Canary Islands—at once the beginning point of measuring longitude and of travel to the West, and the place of exotic expectations and sensations—fits like a dream in the illusory and pragmatic

⁶ For an account of Thomas Nichols and his description of the Canary Islands, see Francisco Javier Castillo, "The English Renaissance and the Canary Islands: Thomas Nichols and Edmund Scory" (1992: 57–70). See also Nichols' biography in Alejandro Cioranescu, *Thomas Nichols, mercader de azúcar, hispanista y hereje* (1963: 9–59).

world of Shakespeare's comedies. A page (Mote in *Love's Labour's Lost*, 3.1.12), a wise elderly gentleman (the old lord Lafeu in *All's Well that Ends Well*, 2.1.73) and an innkeeper (the Host of the Garter Inn in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* 3.2.80) talk about canary wine and dance. It is as if the ambivalent world of Shakespearean comedy needs the exotic island territory to sustain a mood of make-believe by alluding to the small things that make life cheerful. Travellers refer to distant Western islands as glamorous places of adventurous beginnings and great mercantile prospects, while Shakespeare's commoners seem to prefer just plain drinking and merriment. Who are we to question this position, triggered by suggestions of the Canaries' location? These people see the world as it is, and they tell the audience so. While for early modern travellers to the West Indies, the Canary Islands mean a starting point for new adventures, the male culture in Shakespeare's comedies is defined by drinking sweet canary wine and dancing canary on merry tunes. Rather than seeing it as a limitation of masculine culture—these days it would be drinking beer and football—we should look at these inconsistencies as fleeting reminders of the futility of it all.

Ancient writers, such as Caius Julius Solinus, in *The excellent and pleasant worke of Iulius Solinus Polyhistor* (1587: sig. Ggiv), translated by Arthur Golding, or Pomponius Mela (1585: 91), in *The vvorke of Pomponius Mela. the cosmographer, concerninge the situation of the world*, also translated by Arthur Golding, identified the Canaries with the Fortunate Isles, fabulous islands supposed to lie somewhere in the Western Ocean, maybe the Hesperides. In Greek mythology, the Hesperides were the daughters of Hesperus, who had charge of the fabulous golden apples, guarded by a dragon. The gardens' location was fixed by different poets in different parts of North Africa, or further West in the Islands of the Blessed in the Atlantic Ocean, as confirmed by the Portuguese explorer António Galvão in *The discoveries of the world* (1601: 4), translated into English by Richard Hakluyt. The eleventh labour of Heracles was to get the golden apples from the garden of the Hesperides, which he accomplished with the aid of Atlas.

In Shakespeare's comedies, fabulous islands of western promise are mentioned in jest, to warn against the impossibility of reaching too high and being blinded by pointless expectations. In his speech in *Love's Labour's Lost*, in which he argues that to look at a woman is the best way to learn beauty, Biron asks rhetorically, "For valour, is not Love a Hercules, / Still climbing trees in the Hesperides?" (4. 3.316–17). Biron likes to show off his linguistic brilliance and uses high-minded words and high-sounding alliterative rhymes in a play so much concerned with language. Yet the image of the Hesperides, in Biron's rhetoric, is that of a mythical land frozen in time, where great actions of valour and fame dwell in the perpetual realm of possibility, not in real life—just as love written in sonnet books is preferred by men in the play. Yet such forbidden pleasures are guarded by dragons, and audiences learn that it is dangerous to exceed the limits

of intellectual competence or emotional amplitude. Biron cannot help himself and plays with the connotations of the Hesperides as a garden of immortality of poetry, but this is also about transgressive misrule. Warnings concerning excess and adventure come from the direction of the incestuous king Antiochus in *Pericles*, who refers to his nameless daughter as “this fair Hesperides, / With golden fruit, but dangerous to be touched” (1.1. 70–71). Indeed, while the Canary Islands—in early modern travellers’ imagination—invited to new ways of exploration and pushing the limits to further risky exploits, Shakespeare’s use of the mythical island territory warns against the dangers of poetic creativity and excess.

Eighteenth-century reports indicate that the wooden signboard of the Globe Playhouse was a painting of Hercules with the world on his shoulders.⁷ This sign indicates more than global theatre, or the equation of stage with world. It is the sign of deception, of momentary transgression, of displacement, and a spatial metaphor pointing to the mythical islands of the Hesperides. Hercules first tricked Atlas into gathering the golden apples of the Hesperides, and then tricked him again into resuming his inescapable burden of the world. This signifies an essential aspect of the dramatic representations of Shakespeare’s imaginary islands (the Hesperides or others): the author/playwright as appropriator and supporter of fictional space. Literary islands often act in meta-fictional ways; isolated landmasses, microcosmic worlds, they offer a particular territory on which authors are allowed to create fictional worlds. These may be new geographic worlds, enhanced worlds, antagonistic worlds, or worlds where dreams are temporarily inseparable from reality. During the voyage into the no man’s land of metaphorical islands’ territories, it becomes impossible to distinguish real from imaginary, visible from invisible. Yet these worlds of make-believe are not without worldly ties, as so many early modern narratives favoured island spaces on the way to the New World. Early modern texts offer island-shaped territories in order to anchor fictional actions that take place simultaneously on a local and a transatlantic scale. Maybe Shakespeare warns us against the constructed spaces of imagination—fortunate islands, magic islands, or terrestrial paradise—reminding us that this place is all there is. Who knows? Who cares? He would not know that we are here, four centuries after he may have reached the Fortunate Isles, to read his meanings. Yet, who knows? Maybe there is such a place as the Fortunate Isles, after all, or at least Prospero, Miranda, Caliban, Sycorax and Ariel’s Isle.

⁷ Edmond Malone is commonly credited with having first stated that the sign of the Globe theatre “was a figure of Hercules supporting the globe, under which was written, *Totus mundus agit histrionem*” (1790: i. 54). “I do not know where he got this information,” remarks E. K. Chambers (1923: ii. 434). The answer is that he got it from George Steevens; in his gloss on “Hercules and his load” (*Hamlet*, 2.2.356) Steevens comments: “The allusion may be to the *Globe* playhouse, on the Bankside, the sign of which was Hercules carrying the globe” (1778 edition, x. 256, n9).

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