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978-0-521-16943-1 - Literature, Mapping, and the Politics of Space in Early Modern Britain

Edited by Andrew Gordon and Bernhard Klein

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## *Introduction*

*Andrew Gordon and Bernhard Klein*

‘It was always one of the dubious geographical facts locked away in every schoolboy’s [sic] head’, the catalogue of a recent art exhibition on ‘mapping’ informs us, ‘that the entire population of the world could stand on the Isle of Wight.’<sup>1</sup> A bold claim, surely, and one imagines some puzzled youths unwilling to lend it much credence without more tangible evidence. But it is not to dispute the mathematics of the equation that we draw attention to this didactic wisecrack. Clearly the insight that the whole may easily, if only hypothetically, fit into one of its tinier parts is principally the result of a mental exercise that feeds on the surprise of the unexpected. The immediate pedagogical point may have been to create an affective link between the abstract and global on the one hand, and the intimate and local on the other – two spatial paradigms traditionally kept apart in geographical thought, under the Ptolemaic rubrics of cosmography and chorography. What interests us most about this odd equation, though, is how behind its presumed mathematical impartiality lurks the image of a fantastic cultural congress that is no less suggestive for being the unintended consequence of simply taking the idea too literally.

To be sure, the Babylonian image of a common humanity gathered in a British offshore island is probably not what the early modern map lover Thomas Blundeville had in mind when he praised cartography for making visually accessible ‘the whole world at one view’.<sup>2</sup> But to dismiss it too swiftly as the absurd metaphorical excess of a clever school-teacher’s trick that aimed merely to raise awareness of the sheer immensity of space is to make the opposite mistake of assuming, against the historical evidence, that geography deals only in surfaces and numbers, not in cultural issues. Comparison with another ruthlessly arbitrary conflation of the spatial and the social reminds us of the losses

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incurred in holding that view. In his *Histories*, Herodotus records the following method employed in the reckoning of the vast army assembled by the Persian leader Xerxes:

A body of ten thousand men was brought to a certain place, and the men were made to stand as close together as possible; after which a circle was drawn around them, and the men were then let go: then where the circle had been, a fence was built about the height of a man's middle; and the enclosure was filled continually with fresh troops, till the whole army had in this way been numbered. When the numbering was over, the troops were drawn up according to their several nations.<sup>3</sup>

Carving out 'a certain place' – a featureless, unnamed Isle of Wight – from its surrounding physical space purely to produce a pragmatic vehicle for the quantification of people is an operation strikingly at odds with any notion of territorial and cultural belonging, and the subsequent need to regroup the soldiers in 'national' units seems almost like an embarrassed attempt to make up for this harsh disjunction.

It is, of course, a general feature of cartographic representation that it severs the ties between people and land – for all their historical significance as records of human settlement, modern maps are generally depopulated, often void of human traces, visually 'empty'. But if maps have been instrumental in giving rise to a purely functional conception of space largely divested of its broader social implications,<sup>4</sup> their impact on how we make sense of the physical world, and thus of our social environment, has been immense. To return to the opening image, it is precisely the conceptual hold over our geographical imagination of the *cartographic* construction of the Isle of Wight – rather than the body memory of any direct spatial experience – that enables the mathematical abstraction and which renders it, for our purposes, such a strikingly imaginative exercise. In this operation the enforced silencing of cultural difference in computing the army of Xerxes is compounded in a universal confusion of citizenry which at the same time obliterates all traces of the cultural investment that lent significance to the cartographic inscription in the first place. The image of the Isle of Wight, its conceptual territory saturated by this imaginative influx, raises questions crucial to the central concern of the present volume, the relation of the cartographic paradigm to the politics of spatial representation: if space, through its visualisation in maps, could be redefined, re-imagined, and appropriated for radically new purposes, what effects did the cultural work of cartography – both the mental and material 'acts of mapping'<sup>5</sup> –

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have on the shaping of social and political identities in early modern Britain?

‘Mapping’, the inscriptive practice of the cartographer, has become a key theoretical term in current critical discourse, describing a particular cognitive mode of gaining control over the world, of synthesising cultural and geographical information, and of successfully navigating both physical and mental space. The often inflationary usage of this suggestive semiotic concept in recent critical work tends to ignore perhaps too easily the boundaries between the metaphorical and the material. Yet both realms mutually determine each other, and the intention of *Literature, Mapping, and the Politics of Space* may be best described as the attempt to relate models of cognitive mapping back to a specific historical moment – the early modern period – which saw an unprecedented rise in the use, availability, and conceptual sophistication of the material artefact at the centre of this analytic terrain, the topographical map. As has frequently been noted, its phenomenal career from the fifteenth century onwards points to significant changes in European spatial consciousness.<sup>6</sup> A spatial model that required a geographical *centre*, an *omphalos*, in order to describe, in degrees of civilisation, its difference from a diffuse *periphery*, was slowly replaced by a framed geometric image fully available for European inscription: ‘The point of view was elevated, to the point of grasping in a single instant the convexity of the terraqueous globe . . . [showing] the plenitude of a universe revealed at last in its totality.’<sup>7</sup> In thus providing a conceptual paradigm for the mental organisation of human experience, the cartographic image is revealed as more than a mere functional tool, or neutral scientific record, emerging instead as a crucial representational site of cultural and historical change.

The statement that all maps are political no longer results in many raised eyebrows.<sup>8</sup> Nor are studies considered unusual that argue at length for the cultural, social and epistemological changes in which early modern cartography was implicated, or in which it was even the central agent.<sup>9</sup> The present collection aims to expand the current research in this field by placing maps and related cartographic products firmly within the many cultural contexts of which they formed a part, and by probing their often troubled (and troubling) relationships to these contexts. The realisation that ‘maps excited, moved, informed and remade everyone who had contact with them, and [that] through the social, political, economic and intellectual remakings they prompted, they changed the lives even of those who didn’t’, as Richard Helgersen

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puts it in this book, seems perhaps more obvious to us than it did to contemporaries. But even in early modern times maps could be seen as having a socially and politically disruptive influence. Consider, for instance, this view voiced by a fictional farmer in John Norden's *Surveyor's Dialogue* (1607), an early modern treatise on land surveying. '[W]e poore Country-men', the farmer complains,

doe not thinke it good to haue our Lands plotted out, and me thinks in deede it is to very small purpose: for is not the Field it selfe a goodly Map for the Lord to look vpon, better then a painted paper? And what is he the better to see if laid out in colours? He can adde nothing to his land, nor diminish ours: and therefore that labour aboute all may be sau'd, in mine opinion.<sup>10</sup>

Reminiscent as the 'goodly Map' is of the more recent literary maps at a scale of one-to-one devised by Lewis Carroll and Jorge Luis Borges,<sup>11</sup> the farmer is clearly less intent on ridiculing the mimetic pretension of maps than on giving voice to a genuinely felt anxiety: with the assistance of the map the intimate and closed social microcosm of the estate is in danger of turning into the quantifiable, anonymous and inherently desocialised object of commercial speculation. The estate map, that is, might change the nature of the agrarian space it puts on open display and, more significantly even, it might change the landlord's attitude towards that space, transforming a formerly paternal figure into a ruthless speculator.

Norden was himself a practising surveyor when he wrote that dialogue, and such views are included in his promotional text only to be convincingly refuted. But the farmer's anti-mapping attitude is surely not wholly unfounded. Depending on context and genre, maps could serve many functions, and in each specific instance their objectives were rarely impartial: the individual map could be a facilitator of economic 'improvement', a political or military tool of government, the fetish of an emerging nationalism, or the agent of some other currently little appreciated ideological purpose. Nevertheless, maps in general are not inherently predisposed towards one side or another, and the farmer's fears were generated less by their inevitable complicity with structures of power than by the uses to which they were historically put. The economic context in which Norden's text is implicated – and with it the whole practice of land surveying – is only one of the many areas of cultural experience affected by new mapping techniques. By examining map-driven changes in gender identities, body conceptions, military practices, political structures, national imaginings, civic culture, and imperial aspirations, the essays in this book explore a wide range of contexts influenced by the spatial re-visions that maps both initiated and

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recorded. In doing so, the essays all share common ground in emphasising the conceptual and semiotic interplay between cartographic discourse and related forms of spatial representation.

For, as a textually and visually highly articulate ‘paper landscape’, the modern scale-map is not an isolated phenomenon but located within a complex cultural network of spatial signifying practices. Thus, although maps of various genres – national and regional maps, world maps, city views, etc. – feature strongly throughout the pages that follow, they are discussed alongside many other cultural artefacts: paintings, geographical frontispieces, anatomical illustrations, and a wide range of textual genres, covering drama, the military manual, historiography, poetry, civic pageantry, juridical, political and constitutional writings, chorography and biblical texts. The interdisciplinary range and thematic diversity of the essays collected here thus demonstrate, we hope, that the contemporary preoccupation with the epistemological category *space*, most clearly visible in the ideological investments inscribed on the surface of early modern maps, affected the production of cultural artefacts on a variety of mental and material levels. If among the discursive terrains investigated here, literature claims pride of place, this is not simply because most contributors work in literature departments but also a result of the productive tension between the visual and the verbal, between word and image, which most immediately and suggestively evokes the conceptual struggle over the cultural meaning of place and space.

The early modern ‘politics of space’ attendant on this conceptual struggle, the collection as a whole argues, centres on the deeply felt clash between the various physical and imaginary investments, often contradictory or mutually exclusive, in the shifting landscapes of modernity. One obvious instance of this clash is the contemporary use of the last term in our title, ‘Britain’. The stability of geopolitical reference implied by this term can hardly be taken for granted. Cartographically, ‘Britain’ received its first sustained description in the work of John Speed whose atlas *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain* (1611) was expressly devoted to celebrating the political aspirations of the Scottish king new to the English throne, James, ‘the Inlarger and Vniter of the British Empire’.<sup>12</sup> There were, of course, earlier maps of ‘Britain’ but not until Speed’s atlas did the word (as a label on a map) take on fully the imperial meaning it had in the *Theatre* where it defined, or claimed to define, the political and spatial cohesion of an archipelago, not just some geographical or political subsection of the ‘British Isles’. Saxton’s atlas of 1579, for instance, covered only England and Wales. But the nomencla-

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ture was still blurred even in Speed who called his map of England and Wales simply ‘the Kingdome of England’. Like Speed, many of his contemporaries often made no consistent distinction between ‘England’ and ‘Britain’, although the example of the Welsh nationalist Humphrey Llwyd – evocatively discussed in this volume by Philip Schwyzer – is an obvious exception.

Even before James propounded the Union of Crowns, Wales officially ‘joined’ England in 1536, and Ireland was made a kingdom under the rule of the English monarch in 1541. The island trope, so frequent in historical writing about Britain since medieval times, further blurred geographical boundaries, famously leading John of Gaunt in Shakespeare’s *Richard II* to consider England a ‘sceptred isle’,<sup>13</sup> or William Cuninghame to declare that ‘vnder the name of Englande, I comprehend the whole Ilande conteyning also Schotlande, & Irelande’.<sup>14</sup> Such spatial and political idiosyncracies are too often recorded in writing not to have had an effect on the contemporary geographical – and hence national – imagination. In the period under consideration here, the nation that maps helped to construct was still in the process of defining itself, both socially and culturally – in its internal configuration – and territorially – in its external shape. Stable political referents were often the stuff of cartographic dreamwork, and throughout the sixteenth century, the nation that contemporaries imagined spatially with the aid of maps was largely provisional and experimental, just as it was still, in many ways, no nation at all but a dynastic realm.

The essays that follow are arranged in two sections. The first is more generally problem oriented, combining five essays on the spatial implications of political representation, historiography, geography, civic ceremony and anatomy. The second section focuses on links between literature and landscape, grouping three essays on drama with three on poetry. The aim of this two-part structure is not to establish mutually exclusive categories but to foreground the internal links and overlaps between diverse cultural contexts. Taken as a whole, the essays consider a range of mutually dependent spatial paradigms, progressively pushing further their metaphorical and/or physical boundaries. Thus, while some essays deal with the human *body* as the most intimately experienced spatial unit, others move on to focus on the *stage*, the *city*, the *nation*, and the *imperial* vision, to arrive, finally, at the *epistemological* frameworks surrounding specific spatial constructs. In this way, body, stage, city, nation, empire, and – in a sense – epistemology, circumscribe

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and define lived cultural spaces in a series of imaginative enclosures, but in so doing they also assume a metaphorical currency in cultural discourse that transcends the immediacy of any direct spatial experience. Contemporary rhetorical usage instrumentalises these spaces for a wide variety of purposes: for the description of socio-political analogies, for instance (the *discordia concors* trope of the body serving as an image of nationhood), the definition of cultural opposites (the dissonance between city vice and proclaimed national virtues), or the exploration of imagined affinities between different topological constructions (such as the conceptual overlap of stage and empire – best illustrated, perhaps, by the generic links in the early modern period between *atlas* and *theatre*). Connections of this kind are central issues of debate throughout the present volume and make appropriate a brief presentation of the individual essays, not in the sequence in which they appear in the book, but in the order established by their discussion of progressively widening spatial paradigms.

In cosmographical thought the world has always been imagined in terms of the human body, and the conceptual identity between cartographers and anatomists is one of the founding tropes of mapping. ‘And here first we will’, explained John Speed in the preface to his *Theatre*, ‘(by Example of the best Anatomists) propose to view the *whole Body* and *Monarchy* intire . . . and after will dissect and lay open the particular Members, Veynes and Ioynts (I meane the Shires, Riuers, Cities and Townes)’.<sup>15</sup> According to such views, which were frequent in cartographic texts, the internal organisation of spatial entities – cities, nations, empires – resembled that of the body. In the early modern period, as Caterina Albano’s analysis of the conceptual links between anatomy and cartography reveals, the mutually enabling strategies of spatialising the body and humanising the cartographic image gave the ‘archetypal’ land-body analogy a new allegorical twist; a twist that emerges most clearly in the gendering of exotic, ‘virginal’ lands as female, where the representational techniques that rendered both bodies and spaces culturally visible were governed by a ‘politics of specialisation’, a desire to penetrate ever further into virtual interiors. The body-space nexus is analysed from a different angle by John Gillies. The map brought on stage in the opening scene of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, Gillies shows, is only fully understood when read against the theatre’s own deeply somatic language of space. In contrast to other examples of cartographic props on the early modern stage, *Lear*’s map clearly retains the semiotic power and theatrical rhetoric of cartography



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as a productive site of suggestive ‘nation-scapes’. Yet this national icon not only fosters an uninhibited geographic voyeurism, it also brings into focus the principal spatial contrast of the play – the phenomenological distinction between inside and outside – obliquely aligned to the opposition between the material, even amoral, geography of Lear’s map, and the intimate, body-bound chorography of the Dover cliff scene. In *Lear*, the stage might be initially appropriated as the ‘scene of cartography’, but only to challenge this new master discourse of spatiality with the more theatrically responsive idiom of the naked, unaccommodated, and ridiculed human body.

Nina Taunton further explores the staging of space by focusing on the deeply gendered context of the military camp, ambivalently addressed in Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* plays through a dramatic *tour de force* rich in cartographic allusions. Analysing Marlowe’s female characters with a view to the presence (or absence) of women in Elizabethan theories of warfare, as well as to their representation in sixteenth-century German genre painting, Taunton shows how male subjectivity, in a military context, was predicated on the simultaneous denial and absorption of the disturbingly transgressive cultural spaces defined by women. Bodies and stages are brought into implicit contrast in Andrew Gordon’s examination of the construction of early modern London in both map and ritual. While the city served as the stage where a model of social order was imprinted onto urban space in formal procession, the performance of the ceremonial city on ground level increasingly yielded to the cartographic vantage point on high. But despite the infiltration of the representational strategies of ceremony by the geometric space of mapping, Gordon shows, the performative spatiality of civic ritual nevertheless continues to permeate and even determine the cartographic description of the city. Quite a different conception of the city emerges when it is imagined not from outside or above, as on a map, but from within and below. London, as it is produced in the everyday spatialisation of its ‘users’, not as it is encoded in geometric construction or ceremonial procession, is discussed by Andrew McRae. Drawing on theories of postmodern geography, McRae considers Ben Jonson’s neglected poem ‘On the Famous Voyage’ – a narrative journey through the filthy and grotesque urban body of London – as a text deeply and disruptively engaged in the transformation of an early modern sense of civic space. The ‘vitaly alternative spatiality’ McRae discovers is one that aligns space – the city – again with the human body; not, however, as a trope of hierarchical order but as a continuous cycle of excretion and consumption.



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Strategies of absorption are fundamental to maps where people are drawn into landscapes, cities into nations, countries into empires. In the political realm, Oliver Arnold exposes the concept of absorption as central to the ideology of parliamentary representation inherent in the configuration of the House of Commons as both a representative *body* and itself a representation of the realm. The frequent juxtaposition of maps depicting England's physical space with pictorial representations of parliament thus reflect the Commons' rhetorical claims to represent England's inhabitants even as they help to enact the MPs' radical absorption and displacement of the realm and its people. Two further essays demonstrate that the space of the nation could be appropriated from many ideological perspectives. Philip Schwyzer explores a fascinating historical instance of a consciously political usage of the patriotic potential endemic in cartographic representation. His 'Map of Greater Cambria' is an inspiring study of Humphrey Llwyd's map of Wales (1573) which argues, with reference to contemporary historical and poetic works, that Llwyd's early modern Welsh nationalism implicitly draws on a notion of 'essential geography' that still informs present-day political debates – as the more recent political maps of 'Greater Serbia' or 'Greater Bulgaria' amply testify. Competing narrative conceptions of national space in written chorography and epic poetry are examined by Bernhard Klein who argues that the early modern poetics of national space oscillated between the conceptual opposites of plan and itinerary which informed, respectively, the static textual topography of Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* and the dynamic space 'performed' in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.

Wider spatial frameworks are explored in two essays on empire. As Lesley Cormack shows, imperial aspirations were already implicit in contemporary geographical thought. Her sensitive analysis of the frontispieces gracing a series of geographically inspired historical works shows how an imperial imagination had already begun to take root in Elizabethan England, even if the vision of English superiority – still only a dream on paper – could not yet claim much iconographic or ideological coherence. Bradin Cormack then turns to the theme of imperial expansion as imagined in the interplay between international law and maritime cartography. Contextualising Shakespeare's *Pericles* with an analysis of the legal definition of marine boundaries in English and Welsh coastal waters and a detailed semiotic reading of the compass roses on John Speed's maps of Britain, Bradin Cormack exposes the full range of Shakespeare's dramatic strategies to realise a spatialised reimagining of kingship within the context of the emergent international law. In the concluding essay of the last section, Joanne Woolway

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Grenfell turns to the epistemological assumptions of spatial representation by examining the impact of the New World on European spatial consciousness. Focusing on Edmund Spenser's rich poetic exploration of place and culture in *The Faerie Queene*, Woolway Grenfell's discussion of biblical maps and texts, and of the hermeneutic implications of New World geographies, demonstrates that physical space, for Spenser, cannot be subjected to its cartographic rationalisation until it has been fully tested, both morally and politically, for its cultural integrity and Christian value.

In the final contribution to the volume, intended as both a kind of epilogue and a timely reminder that too often we find only ourselves in everything we study, Richard Helgersen considers the moment when maps as widely celebrated icons of modernity were made to serve quite another, distinctly anti-modern purpose. For maps both promoted and ridiculed the newly acquired geographical knowledge that cartographic images proudly flaunted to the world, a knowledge that had made their production technically possible in the first place. This tension, poignantly captured in the Fool's Cap Map now gracing the cover of *The Norton Shakespeare*, generates the ambivalent meanings of maps in Dutch genre painting where items of cartographic wall decoration signal both a recently acquired sense of national pride, and the danger and folly of the worldliness attendant on all profane earthly pursuits, including the vain contemplation of maps. Yet even the traditional message of *contemptus mundi* couched in the midst of radically new images of the world eventually metamorphosed, as Helgersen shows, into quite another configuration of the modern – the new primacy of the domestic which mid-seventeenth-century Dutch genre paintings so self-consciously celebrated. Such spatial transformations fostered by the art of mapping, and their impact on changing notions of cultural identity, are the theme of this book. While critical approaches vary across the collection, it is one of our principal intentions throughout to offer a new assessment of why, in the words of Elyot and Dee, contemporaries suddenly waxed lyrical about the 'inexplicable delectation'<sup>16</sup> generated by 'Mappes, Chartes, & Geographicall Globes',<sup>17</sup> and thus to reclaim the lost landscapes of meaning hidden beneath the paper 'wherin all the world is painted'.<sup>18</sup>