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**'Why are we changing maps?': Teaching Transnational Encounter with
Edward Terry's *A Voyage to East India***

By Nedda Mehdizadeh

In an undergraduate survey of English literature I have named “When East Meets West,” students read material written before 1800 under a transnational framework. During the medieval and early modern periods, increased sea and land travel into new regions created a desire for the exotic, and travelers who embarked upon journeys to foreign lands not only wrote about their experiences abroad but also inspired writers who never left their native England to imagine the world beyond their country’s borders in poetry and drama. In this course, my students begin to engage in a more critical discussion about transnational contact through an exploration of this literature. Their approach is not only historically situated but also theoretically and culturally motivated. The questions about race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, temporality and spatiality, and genre and narrative that arise encourage my students to re-consider the borders that seemed to divide peoples and spaces so concretely; these seemingly fixed boundaries between self and other in fact become sites of fluidity and instability, and traveling across these real and imagined borders reveals the ebb and flow of the traveler’s own sense of self as (s)he faces what is foreign.

The required reading for the course includes a range of texts that span varying times, spaces, and genres; students are encouraged, then, to encounter diverse voices from canonical as well as little known texts, such as Chretien de Troyes' "Cligés," Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, Richard Hakluyt's *Pricipall Navigations*, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*, as well as excerpts from non-Anglophone texts like Abolqasem Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* and Pseudo-Callisthenes' *Alexander Romance* that I pair with the primary readings. Using a critical vocabulary we gain early in the semester based on Edward Said's introduction to *Orientalism*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's introduction to *Monster Theory*, and Andre Gunder Frank's introduction to *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*, my students discuss the ways in which people, objects, spaces, and ideas reshape the seemingly fixed boundaries between here and there and, as a result, bring not only the dangers and anxieties of travel to the surface but more profoundly alert us to the often overlooked moments of pleasure and potential associated with cross-cultural contact.

The first reading I assign to my students is an excerpt from Edward Terry's *A Voyage to East-India*, a travelogue composed by the chaplain to English ambassador, Sir Thomas Roe. Though Terry's journey through India was limited, he spent more than two years touring selected areas of India once he joined Roe's embassy in 1616.^[1] Upon his return to England, Terry documented his experiences and observations in a manuscript that would later appear in Samuel Purchas' *Pilgrimes* (1625). Eventually,

Terry's *Voyage* would be published as its own volume in 1655 and would be reprinted in 1665 under its current title.^[2] Terry's account addresses an array of considerations that arose out of transnational encounter, such as those I have listed above about contact with the other, not least because Roe's expedition was the first embassy to India under the English East India Company, an agency that would exert its mercantile and political might for the next two centuries. By reading excerpts from Terry's travelogue, students develop a framework – a set of guiding questions – that shapes the entirety of the semester's course of study; the text gives a concrete basis for and a dissenting voice to Said's work in the subsequent unit, it provides a point of connection to other primary materials in the course, and it immerses students within the practice of close reading skills for the benefit of a more critical approach early in the semester.^[3]

These early discussions about Terry's observations tend to be the most crucial of the course; it is here that we develop the critical apparatus that will guide our discussions for the remainder of the term. To that end, I begin the course by bringing Terry's work into immediate conversation with a more modern perspective in order to draw out connections that transcend time. On the first day of class, I play a short three-minute clip ("Why are we changing maps?") from the NBC drama *The West Wing*, which ended its seven season run in 2006.^[4] A fictional group called the Organization of Cartographers for Social Equality petition President Bartlett's representatives to support legislation that would replace the Mercator Projection (a map of the world created by

the German cartographer, Gerardus Mercator, in 1569) with the Gall-Peters Projection (a more modern version).^[5] Their argument centers on the fact that the Mercator Projection inaccurately depicts the size and position of the countries it is meant to represent: Africa and Greenland, for example, seem to be equal in size when Africa is in fact fourteen times larger than Greenland, and Germany is depicted in the center of the map when it is actually located further north.

The OCSE explains, however, that the Gall-Peters' projection offers a more faithful representation of relative size and location. Indeed both James Gall and Arno Peters, each of whom created the map about a century apart, hoped to combat certain geographical discrepancies with the construction of what would later be known as the Gall-Peters' projection (a synthesis of both cartographic projections). Following the cartographers' lead, the representatives of the OCSE expand their argument to the president's representatives CJ Cregg and Josh Lyman (played by Allison Janney and Bradley Whitford respectively) by explaining that these misunderstandings of space have had tangible effects on how we see the world – that size and position actually affect the ways in which certain countries are perceived on a global scale. By misrepresenting the world in this way, they explain, we become complacent and run the risk of actually considering these countries as less powerful, less autonomous, less significant. Understandably, this news is very alarming to both CJ Cregg and Josh Lyman, and the scene continues with a lively discussion that brings attention to the

OCSE's petition and offers evidence for their claims. What finally ends the scene, however, is when the OCSE flip the map, placing the northern hemisphere at the bottom of the screen and the southern hemisphere at the top. It is at this point that CJ Cregg exclaims "But you can't do that!" and when she is asked why she replies "Because you're freaking me out!"

The clip ends, and nervous laughter permeates the classroom. My students, just like the characters in *The West Wing*, are completely disoriented, and as a result of that disorientation, are completely uncomfortable. After fielding various questions about the veracity of the OCSE's claim – a set of questions that I tell my students resonate with the materials about travel we will read during the semester – I ask the students to offer their reactions. What has this video clip done to our understanding of space, and our perspective about our place in the world? How does knowing about the infidelities of Mercator's projection – a projection upon which most modern maps are based – change our approach to mapping space, if it does at all? Their comments indicate that the clip raises important questions not just about cartography, contact, race, and identity, but also about where our knowledge comes from and how we interpret that knowledge. The last moment when CJ exclaims that we can't change maps "Because you're freaking me out!" points to the very importance of this line of questioning: her humorous reaction reveals the disorientation of one's physicality and perception. All of a sudden, the world we thought we knew is disrupted, and by flipping the map upside-

down, we literally change our perspective of the world, and, as a result, we are forced to renegotiate, to reposition, to reconsider.

To underscore this lesson, and to set my students up for what is to come with Terry's travelogue, I end this first class period by sharing a variety of medieval and early modern maps, from the Hereford Mappa Mundi to Günther Zainer's T-and-O map to various portolan charts from the early modern period. Each of these maps, we learn, were created for a particular purpose, whether to chart space based on biblical narrative or to create a diagram that replicates ascension to paradise or to specify particular sea routes to different ports in the world. The manner in which these cartographers map space tell a story in much the same way that the textual narratives from the course will. I end this discussion by projecting an image of a map of the world by Arab cartographer Muhammad al-Idrisi whose *Tabula Rogeriana* (1154) depicts the known world, the southern hemisphere at the top of the page and the northern hemisphere at the bottom in the traditional manner of Arabic cartography. I don't tell my students what they are looking at, but instead, ask them to locate themselves on the map. Of course, they are unable to, as the United States is not only absent from the image, it has not yet been "discovered" by Europeans or old world cartographers. In their search for themselves within this foreign land, my students experience the spatial disorientation the video clip attempts to convey. When I reveal what they are looking at, they mentally "correct" the alignment of the image, explaining where everything

should be located. But as we continue the discussion about the tendency to orient the self within unfamiliar territory, we also highlight the importance of understanding where the text comes from and of asking a different set of questions about what they are exploring. Most importantly, we discuss the benefits of genuinely considering other perspectives – not as “upside-down” or “incorrect” but simply as a different way of looking at the world.

The next time we meet, the students come to class having read the assigned excerpts from Terry’s *Voyage*. The issues centering on veracity, contact, perspective, borders, space, and temporality that emerged in the previous conversation all arise in our discussion of the primary text. Students are intrigued by the description of India Terry offers – his simultaneous admiration and resentment for the abundance of materials available within the country emerge from the text.

The Earth there yields good Minerals of Lead, Iron, Copper, Brass, and (they say) they have Silver-Mines too; which (if true) they need not open, being so enriched from other Nations of *Europe*, and other parts, who yearly bring thither great quantities of Silver to purchase their Commodities...And this is the way to make any Nation of the world rich, to bring, and leave Silver in it, and to take away Commodities. (Singh 188)

Terry’s tone demonstrates a clear sense of desire: Terry, and consequently his readers, have stumbled upon the land of plenty, the paradise so many searched for using the T-and-O maps I shared with my students on the first day of class. Indeed, the sheer abundance of goods the country produces yields so much currency in silver that “they

need not open" their own mines to acquire silver. India, therefore, is defined by excess, by the plentitude of an earthly paradise that will yield its resources to (supposedly) better-equipped European travelers. The desire for success and excess that drives the journey into foreign lands, results in a rhetorical output: writers translate what they have seen into a fulfillment of that desire.

Students, however, rightfully gravitate toward Terry's voice as a chronicler, in some cases taking his words at face value and in many others wondering whether his account can be trusted. Jyotsna Singh discusses the circumstances of eyewitness accounts in the early modern period in her remarks about Terry's travelogue, where she argues that the eyewitness account lends itself to the "objectify[ing] and "claim[ing of] the world [travelers] encountered" (Singh 198). "His descriptive taxonomies of the landscape, the people and their customs, among other things, illustrate the discursive shaping power of travel writing, even while the narrator stresses the authenticity of his experience" (Singh 198). These discussions of foreign lands, according to Singh's reading, often led to the proto-colonial ideology that would result in later empire-building in the region. With *The West Wing* clip fresh on their minds, students are skeptical about the manner in which Terry frames India. Why does Terry spend so much time speaking in great detail about India's resources? Who is the audience he directs these comments to? Future travelers? Future imperialists? Or is he simply, *truthfully*, relaying what he sees? Their comments about Terry's tone alert them to the

ways in which travelers would shape the foreign landscape through the act of writing into a fantasy meant to be consumed by voracious readers in their native countries.

But to enforce his reading of India as a place of desire, a place of abundance, and a place of willing hospitality, Terry must also position his native England as far superior to his foreign counterpart. Doing so justifies the extended presence of the embassy in India, and rewrites England's marginal position within global trading markets into one that is more powerful than it really is. In an episode that outlines the skills of the natives, for example, Terry describes an encounter between Roe and Jehangir, the Mogul Emperor, where the former presents the latter with a gift of a "small oval Picture [of Jehangir] done to the life in *England*" (189). Jehangir responds by "offer[ing] a wager;" he would have his own artists replicate the image and Roe must decide which image is the original and which the copy, something Roe cannot accurately decipher at the appointed time. Terry's narration of this scene points to a larger lesson, one that positions the Indian artists as excellent imitators:

The truth is, that the Natives of that Monarchy are the best Apes for imitation in the world, so full of ingenuity that they will make any new thing by pattern, how hard soever it seem to be done; and therefore it is no marvel, if the Natives there make Shooes, and Boots, and Clothes, and Linen, and Bands and Cuffs of our English Fashion, which are all of them very much different from their Fashions and Habits, and yet make them all exceeding neatly. (Singh 190)

The description of the scene suggests a binary distinction between the natives and the visitors: the English artist represents the original, true source of art while the Indian artists are excellent at “Ap[ing]” the original portrait. Having a claim on such a position – the position as the “original” – implies greater authority; the original is responsible for an object’s existence – without the English painter’s portrait of Jehangir, the copy would never have come to fruition. The Indian native, Terry seems to be suggesting, is incapable of innovation; he can only extend the accomplishments of others through mimicry in order to gain praise. This privileging of English art and practice over Indian artistic expression extends to the overall encounter; readers are less likely to consider the natives as authoritative, innovative subjects.

But what Terry neglects to acknowledge as he develops an infantilizing image of the natives of India is the agency they adopt within this interaction – an agency that can be overlooked easily if the material is read too closely along orientalist lines. The ability of the Indian natives to replicate foreign materials reveals an additional effect: the natives of India have the potential of not only replicating the products of the English visitors, they also have the potential of improving upon the skills needed to create the artwork. If England is invested in advancing a narrative in which they are more progressive than their Indian counterparts, a tone Terry carries through his storytelling, the re-creation of this image indicates that perhaps they themselves will be superseded by a more talented and artistic successor. Indeed, as the passage continues, we learn

that the natives are also skilled at “Ap[ing]” English fashion objects that are then incorporated into Indian consciousness. With their superb ability to replicate, and possibly improve upon, what has come before, the English merchant slowly becomes irrelevant; why negotiate trading terms with a visitor when your own people can create the products just as well? The text betrays an anxiety about the implications of such “Ap[ing]” even as it attempts to diminish the natives’ skill.

The complicated engagement in *Voyage* with early modern contact – the simultaneous implications that position England as authoritative, progressive, and justified and the disclosures that undermine that proto-colonial message – prepare the students for a lively discussion about another gift-giving ceremony, this time the bestowal of Roe’s personal copy of Mercator’s projection to the Mogul Emperor. Roe, who “having at that time nothing left, which he thought fit to give [Jehangir]” (Singh 193) offers this map to the ruler as a token of respect. Jehangir takes the map and asks to be shown the boundaries of his kingdom. When he looks closely at the image and sees that his realm does not extend a large geographical area, he is offended. As the preceding discussion of maps had indicated, the Mercator projection does not offer a faithful representation of space and orientation; indeed, the Mogul Empire extended far beyond what Mercator’s projection indicates. Despite feeling offended, “yet [Jehangir] civilly told the Ambassador [Roe], that neither himself, nor any of his People did

understand the Language in which that Book was written; and because so, he further told him, that he would not rob him of such a Jewel” (Singh 193).

Because my students read this wonderful moment after they have already seen *The West Wing* clip, they are poised to notice the reference to Mercator, and the issues it raises about space and orientation. By rejecting the gift, Jehangir really rejects the theory represented by the gift – the implication that his realm is limited, and therefore his sense of authority is limited. In fact, Terry himself questions the suggestion of Mercator’s projection in the next paragraph, indicating that “The *Mogol’s* Territories are more apparent, large, and visible, as one may take notice, who strictly views this affixed Map” (Singh 193). In the seemingly simple act of returning the gift to Roe, Jehangir reassumes power and demonstrates an instance in which the “eastern” voice in fact rises above by articulating authority – a voice that Terry cannot ignore. His acknowledgement of Jehangir’s power in this moment resonates with other moments in the text that similarly reveal the complicated interplay between travelers and natives during this time. Reading this or any other material under strict binaries of us versus them, the foreign versus the familiar, seriously limits our knowledge of the more dynamic system of exchange prevalent in not only the early modern period but across time. This initial unit to my course draws my students’ attention to the importance of thinking more critically about what we encounter day-to-day, that our encounter with

the past can certainly be disorienting, but it undoubtedly leads us to new possibilities that open up the world around us.

Endnotes

[1] The first chaplain to Roe's embassy, John Hall, died in 1616, the same year Terry first arrived in India and about one year after the start of the embassy to India. Terry joined the embassy shortly after Hall's death. For more information, see O'Conner 65.

[2] For more information about the text's publication history, see Singh 185-186.

[3] For an accessible edition of Terry's travelogue, I use Singh, 185-207.

[4] The edited three-minute clip can be found on Youtube. See SaltLakeUserGroups.

[5] The Gall projection, completed in 1885 by James Gall aimed to "[avoid] some of the scale exaggerations of the Mercator projection" (Snyder 108), and was "reincarnat[ed]" by Arno Peters, who "apparently had not deliberately copied Gall when in 1967 he devised a projection essentially identical to the Gall orthographic and in 1973 presented it at a press conference" (Snyder 165). For more information about the creation and effects of the Gall-Peters projection, see Snyder.

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