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Abstract
That 1492 marks a double event and a watershed in European civilization and world history, is inescapable to all serious recent commentators and interpreters of that year and the subsequent half millennium. One witness to the events of 1492 later in a letter to his employers remembered how 'on the second day of January, I saw the royal banner of your Highnesses raised, by force of arms, on the towers of the Alhambra ... and, thereafter, in that same month ... your Highnesses, as Catholic Christians and ... foes of the sect of Muhammed and of all idolatries and heresies, thought of sending me, Christopher Columbus, to the regions of India ... and your Highnesses ordered that I should not travel overland to the east, as is customary, but rather by way of the west, whither to this day, as far as we can know for certain, no man has ever gone before'.1 Felipe Fernandez Armesto in his recent biography of Columbus tells this 'irresistible and incredible' part of 'the Columbus romance' in a rather more ironical way: how for instance 'Columbus made the first leg of his Atlantic journey by mule to Granada' (the mule in fact a great privilege in those times of war).2 But even Fernandez-Armesto sees the siege of Granada a little more than a theatrical backdrop to the decision, long deliberated, about sending Columbus out on to the Western ocean.
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I wish in this paper to disentangle background and foreground in that picture: to put the conquest of Granada and the subsequent expulsion of the Jews and the Moors from Spain on the same conceptual level as the voyage of ‘discovery’ to and conquest of ‘the New World’, the genocides and deportations and the destruction of the Aztec and Inca empires, which were to follow within a generation. However, I am not directly going to address the moral implications connecting the discovery and conquest of ‘an exterior Other’ in the New World with the expulsion of ‘an interior Other’ from the organism of Spain and Western Europe – nor so much the semiotics of cultural encounters in which the moral deliberations of Tzvetan Todorov in La conquête de l’Amérique or Stephen Greenblatt in Marvelous Possessions have been couched. Rather I would like to examine some of the spatial and temporal paradoxes that have arisen from the
great coincidences of 1492 within what I call the conceptual geography and historical cosmology of European and American and World civilization. These paradoxes, I believe, are even inscribed on the world map we inhabit in our minds, a map which is still a record of the European imperial expansion that really burgeoned after 1492. They are paradoxes which not only leave us with silly and supercilious misnomers for a whole world from ‘turkeys’ to ‘Indians’, but which invade for instance Greenblatt’s analysis of the problem of ‘seeing the face of’ and ‘reading the signs of’ the Other, so that the confrontation of colonizing Europeans and ‘Indians’ is turned round in space and time and becomes that of Zionist Israel and Palestinians.

In other words one might say that this is an attempt to come to terms with the conceptual roundness of the earth, which leaves the realm of mathematical speculation and becomes practical fact after 1492. My argument is that conceptual geography and historical cosmology have never come to terms with this globality or sphericity, at least not in Europe. And I am not just thinking of that two-dimensional Mercator’s Projection we see in our minds when we think of the world, and which may be our most insistent imperial/colonial preconception. Far more radically, I do not think we have really followed scientific cartography out of the traditional flat-earth image of a ‘cosmos’ surrounded by ‘chaos’, ‘civilized people’ surrounded by ‘barbarians’, which Europe inherited from Greece and Rome, though it is essentially a traditional tribal habitat cosmology shared by, as far as I know, all ‘primitive’ and ‘high’ cultures. When we think of history in relation to geography, when the earth becomes a conceptual cosmos, we still think in terms of a modified form of the old Roman four-continental world order centred on the Mediterranean. ‘Europe’ sets itself off from two ‘others’: the ‘New World’ and ‘the Orient’, which is the old Roman province of ‘Asia’ extended eastward all the way to Japan, and ‘Africa’ hovers strangely in between the two ‘others’. Even the ‘New World Order’ of the Global Market emerging in the 1990s is most often thought of as consolidated into four blocks: ‘America’, ‘Europe’, ‘Japan and East Asia’ and ‘The Third World’ (that sometimes both patronizing and dismissive term for ‘all the rest’).

This is demonstrably not just a feature of the conceptual maps of ignorant economists or politicians. Nor do I believe such conceptual maps are spatial expressions of a dominant ideology or prejudice in quite the way that Edward Said sees them in Orientalism or Mary Louise Pratt in Imperial Eyes, a recent study of the genre of travel writing which is also a critique of what Pratt posits as the overarching ideology of ‘Euroexpansionism’ correlating imperialism, racism and sexism, slavery, Linnean botany and the growth of the modern state. Without doubting the historical connection between all these kinds of European hegemony-thinking, I see the conceptual map exercising an even more fundamental shaping influence on the ideologies than the other way round. Among
other things, the conceptual map allows us to see the continuum and the gradual distinctions between what may be properly termed ‘ideology’ and simple ignorance and stupidity.

The map I am talking about shows the conceptual dimensions of a European social space of exactly the same kind as the ones analyzed by the Vietnamese-French anthropologist Georges Condonimas among hilltribes in Indochina and the inhabitants of Madagascar. Condonimas argues that the notion of social space should replace our notion of culture, because it is our notions of space and time which correlate our conception of the world from the smallest to the largest (Condonimas gives an almost Whorfian example of a Malgasy pointing him to ‘a small crumb at the southern corner of your moustache’). There is, Condonimas shows, a basic spatio-temporal correlation between notions of religious transcendence and architecture, between ideology and the conception of economics and material survival.

What I am dealing with here is really very simple in that context: the position of history in regard to geography, of time in regard to space on the European conceptual map of the world after 1492. This is the map of European imperial expansion – but even more profoundly, I would argue in both conceptual and ideological terms, it is the map of Progress, the underlying temporal impetus to expansion. Progress is claimed by all factions in European social space which in this respect may have become nearly global – but we may have reached a point where it is unsustainable ecologically and geopolitically, and progress shows itself to have been based on expansion. And not just the relationships of power within European-Imperial social space, but the contours of that social space itself cope better with spatial and social contraction than with the possible death of the idea of Progress. It is hard to judge the limits of the spatio-temporal continuum from within which we are addressing each other. It is hard to question the basic dimensions of the map; moreover, our questions are determined by – or rather the possibilities of our questioning are limited by – our position on the map.

But we can easily discern the way Progress, or a historical development conceived as Progress, has been inscribed on geography, on the conceptual map. As the arch-theoretician of progressive history, Hegel himself put it: ‘The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning.’ Africa in this view is ‘unhistorical’, but what of America, to many the embodiment of Progress, of the westward movement of manifest destiny? That is one of the many questions raised in the following, as I probe the conceptual map a little from two opposed perspectives: that of Europe moving into an Other, European travel writing on the Middle East – and that of a social space partly in partly outside of the European, contemporary Caribbean literature.

Around 1492 Europe began a project of defining itself and the rest of the world through travel. The cosmology of Western European civilization
became geographical to an unprecedented extent, though civilizations have perhaps always had a higher degree of geographical consciousness (as distinct from other 'cosmological' levels such as the relationship of earth to stars, or local topography) in phases of imperial expansion: of Greeks, Romans, Arabs or Chinese. Not only did European travellers and explorers provide several waves of culture heroes from Columbus and da Gama through Raleigh and Drake to Cook, Livingstone, Amundsen/Scott — and even the cosmonauts and astronauts in recent times; it was also the expansion of knowledge by travel that gave rise to the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Romanticism and the Space Age.

It is only after 1492 that we can begin to speak of 'travel writing' as a genre — growing out of medieval 'books of marvels', 'topographies' and accounts of pilgrimages to the Holy Land. European 'travel writing' from the Renaissance onwards has precedents in the 'chorography' of the ancient Greeks, where 'tourists' such as Herodotus or Pausanias expressed their experience of different places in a 'theoria' or overview, and like all other civilized features this was passed on to the European Renaissances by the Arabs, particularly the work of Ibn Battuta. But perhaps neither Greek nor Arab 'travel writing' came to enjoy the same popularity or centrality in their culture as European tourist theory, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, fading into the 20th.

Travel writing is the most tied to Empire of European literary genres. It has provided both a major part of the justification and some of the critique of European imperialism. So it is striking that travel writing about the Middle East has often been found to present the largest interesting and readable body of work. For the Middle East is also one of the places where Western European imperialism met with the least success, except at the very end. But of course, it is where it was all heading, from before Columbus. Both the 'books of marvels' — Mandeville's and Marco Polo's — which Columbus brought with him and modelled himself on in his literary endeavours were works about Oriental travel.

To the Middle Ages the only serious travel destination was Jerusalem, the centre of Biblical cosmology. The Holy Land and Holy City were the object of Western European religious and geo-political aspirations; their names provided the geographical ground-note for the auditory imagination and eschatological nostalgia of Christian liturgical culture from the 9th to the 19th century. Fernández-Armesto points out how the thought of Jerusalem always came into Columbus' mind 'when his conscience was uneasy and his confidence low'; it conjured at once penance and reward. Jerusalem was the *fons et origo* and the *orien*, the beginning and orientation of the world in time and space. The Earthly Paradise was known to lie somewhere beyond (to the east of?) Jerusalem. And really all European travel writing begins as a prolongation of the journey towards this point of origin and fulfillment.
The whole development of European travel writing about the Orient, moreover, could be seen as variations on the theme of 'lost origins'. Every journey is a retracing of past routes, a rediscovery of places once known, of forgotten wisdom or error. Oriental travel is the exploration of history; the Orient is represented as continuous with the past, but a past from which the West may often see itself as discontinuous, in both positive and negative ways. In fact, I would argue that most of the best travel writing tends to emphasize the positive sides of this 'pastness', which is often used directly or indirectly as part of a cultural pessimist critique of the West. Many of the most interesting travel writers are outsiders from their own culture: ideologically, sexually, experientially. And this is part of what makes their writing a sensitive register of the demarcation of self and other. The double strings of the personal and the cultural often set up strange reverberations: one need only mention T.E.Lawrence.

The search for lost origins is also a search for a lost self, or part of the self. And the most popular quest of a certain age reflects, I suspect, invariably the most fundamental level of conceptualization of the prevailing cultural self-image. A perfect example would be the way the old search for Prester John, the Christian prophet king whose lands (variously situated in Asia and Africa) had been dissevered from the rest of Christendom, was replaced in the late nineteenth century by a search for lost Aryan tribes. No thrill was greater for the Western traveller, nothing more mysterious than the meeting with fair-haired, blue-eyed Asians speaking Indo-Aryan languages. Nuristan, rather than Jerusalem, became the heart of longing. And after Nuristan, in our own time in fact, Ladakh, heart of spiritual wisdom – and the other few places more or less untouched by Western civilization; the search turns towards the lands beyond Coca-Cola signs, where people are more genuinely 'themselves' than in the West, whether this authenticity has socialist or primitivist overtones. The heart of mystery in the quest comes to look conspicuously like the core of ideological beliefs – and on the other hand may be dismissed as escapism. But that is of course too easy: the reflexivity and reciprocity is inevitable, tied up with thinking and language – and with Western historical consciousness.

Though the idea of an Orient is nonsensical on a round earth, it has remained a cardinal direction of Occidental historical cosmology, the journey to the source of civilization: Jerusalem, Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, China, the Central Eurasian homelands of the Indo-Aryans. Indeed every source, every tracing of origins, becomes in some way Oriental, orientalizing, or assimilated to Orientalist fantasies: the search for the sources of the Nile, the Niger, or even the Orinoco or the Amazon somehow or other gives rise to imaginings about lost civilizations, which the European imagination always tends to connect with Egypt or Mesopotamia, whether by theories of diffusion or simply by comparison. Or such quests are orientated towards myths of El Dorado, which begin where the myths of
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Cipangu end. ‘True East’ remains a magnetic force on the travelling Western imagination, even as its position on the globe changes through the annals of travel writing from the era of pilgrimages and crusades through fantastic and scientific accounts to the nineteenth century’s ‘personal narratives’ by practically-minded explorers, picaresque adventurers and Byronic heroes – and the increasingly aestheticizing historicist, primitivist and naturalist writings of the twentieth century. The basic orientation is sustained even in contemporary ‘meta-travel writing’ like Philip Glazebrook’s Journey to Kars and Charles Glass’s Tribes with Flags, both heavily intertextual with previous travel writing; let alone in the nomadic-evolutionary metaphysics of human existence as a journey presented by the work of Bruce Chatwin, which takes its point of departure in Oriental travel, both in fact and in literary models. For Oriental travel has always been serious about its learning: from A.W. Kinglake’s journey into classical allusions in Eothen and Sir Richard Burton’s into long footnotes on sexology to Robert Byron’s pioneering appreciations of Islamic architecture, Freya Stark’s collages of descriptive travelogue and popular history, and Paul Bowles’ musicological exploration of Morocco, as well as the many travel books written by archeologists as popular accounts of their findings.

The route east, as befits a learned, consciously ‘counter-historical’ journey back to the source, involves several kinds of almost antipodean reversal. Greenblatt has pointed out how these are imagined into a complete system of opposed culturo-geographical form and meaning centring on Jerusalem in the work of Sir John Mandeville, who in all likelihood never went anywhere. But also much later writers, who performed feats like Burton’s penetration into Mecca during the Haj, T.E. Lawrence’s coordination of the Arab Revolt, or Wilfred Thesiger’s crossing of the Rub’ al Khali, rely on, delight in and even seem to need such reversals of narrative, psychology and conceptualization when they enter the mysterious, escapist space which is the Orient to Western eyes. Adversity seems to be a condition of travel writing. But in European-Oriental travel, an almost equally recurrent feature is disguise. Lady Mary Montagu praises the anonymity and camouflage of C18 Oriental women’s dress for the freedom of movement it allows; Burton uses disguise so matter-of-factly and with such Romantic glee that it is a tribute to the culture he has energetically assimilated so that he can penetrate it en masque; and in T.E. Lawrence the dressing-up assumes mythic and psychological proportions quite out of his and subsequent commentators’ control.

The travellers assume ‘the other’ as self in order to see and penetrate the other culture. Seeing becomes spying: a constant accusation against European travellers from Marco Polo to the most recent journalistic travellers in the Middle East like Charles Glass or Robert Fisk. Disguise paradoxically confirms the ownership of the inhabitants to the lands they live in, which the traveller can no more than probe. The Orient is a space on the other side of a gateway metaphorically visible in the name of the Sublime
Porte and in the gateways and doors which become important motifs in the 'Orientalist' paintings of the nineteenth century either as elaborate forms in their own right (especially in the work of David Roberts) – or as something we look beyond into the forbidden space, the Hareem. Or even into Paradise itself, that 'enclosure' ('pairidaeza' in Avestan Persian) which is the fundamental metaphysical spatial orientation of European civilization, but which also has a physical manifestation in the form of the garden, whose history in Europe is directly traceable to the Orient and Granada, and which is perhaps the fundamental idea round which New World space came to be structured.

'On the other side' of the gateway, which the traveller moves through on his camel against the perceived movement of time, are other rules defined by another social space in everything from manners to language and physical measurements. A secret or treasure from this other space motivates the travel, orients the narrative and defines the mask which the traveller must wear, and which becomes essential because much literary travel is really self-exploration. The confrontation with the Oriental 'Other' is translated into a discovery or confirmation of the self – whether personal or cultural – within the time-space of the travelling probe. Generally, of course, one is never more oneself than when travelling; detachment from normal 'social time' leading to renewed powers of spatial observation, but also to a contraction of identity to one's own body, which seems to confirm the time-frame of self. And because the Orient, which is here the perceived outside environment as well as a conceptual point of origin, is conceived as a spatialized past, the travelling self becomes an experiencing consciousness and experiencing present floating free in what is both a museum of archaic structures and a timeless world, where one day is like the other, and dates often have to be consciously separated in diary form, to keep track of journey and identity. Thus there is really no end to the mirror effects in Oriental travel: whether it is Mandeville imagining a reversal of the Christian Mass set in Tibet; Doughty constructing his peculiar puristic English out of the ambience of half-translated Arabic; Robert Byron finding his 'alternative Renaissance' and 'Orient without an inferiority complex' in Afghanistan. Let alone the mighty mirror myth of Seven Pillars of Wisdom, where a Romantic scholar of the crusades and agent of the British Empire loses himself in a resurgence of Muslim prophesy and Arab nationalism, which propels him into an irresoluble personal identity crisis at the same time as it promotes him to the stature of imperial legend.

The Orient is a reflecting Other to the European imagination because of its present-pastness, but also because it is always seen as inhabited. Doughty in his Travels in Arabia Deserta is never alone for a minute, every danger he faces is human, practically every page of the book contains dialogue. But when Reyner Banham alludes to Doughty in his Scenes in
America Deserta, it is to point up just this contrast: Banham’s book is about ‘natural architecture’; it is uninhabited except by its author.

This is a basic notion about ‘the New World’ which Mary Louise Pratt in Imperial Eyes traces to its most influential statement in Alexander von Humboldt, whose ‘planetary consciousness’ in many ways still underlies both the scientific and popular conceptualization of geography:

In the Old World, nations and the distinctions of their civilization form the principal points in the picture; in the New World, man and his productions almost disappear amidst the stupendous display of wild and gigantic nature. The human race in the New World presents only a few remnants of indigenous hordes, slightly advanced in civilization; or it exhibits merely the uniformity of manners and institutions transplanted by European colonists to foreign shores.4

Where the Orient is always historicized, if not sunk into a static, degenerate backwardness (in comparison with European contemporaneity), the New World of America is naturalized, denied a history and a culture of its own (in comparison to the Old World). When it is allowed a history it is ‘natural history’ both in the normal sense, and in the sense of providing a touchstone as to how history arises out of its natural environment, both in the Humboldtian theories of geographical determinism applied to the Aztec and Inca monuments, which Pratt analyzes, and such American theories of history as the ‘Frontier Thesis’. Almost inevitably the ‘New World’ is seen as a space in which history arrives or has only partially inscribed itself – and this is often perceived as hopeful, at the same time as it seems to carry an inevitable rawness in the confrontation of culture and nature, self and other. It is perhaps telling in this connection that Claude Lévi-Strauss’s theories are based on American field-work.

Even the most recent (1990s) explanations of the Orient turn towards the past: thus Charles Glass, before he sets out on his journey into the background to the contemporary Middle Eastern conflict, seeks the advice of Albert Hourani, the Lebanese historian, and Stephen Runciman, the historian of the Crusades, who both advise him to follow the old crusaders’ routes. And his contemporary journalistic explicator Robert Fisk similarly, though more unwillingly, is forced back into old patterns of travel in a baffling, ‘Orientally’ inverted world as he negotiates his way between barricades and militias in war-torn Beirut, where the mighty ‘otherworld’ of Asia has contracted to a city, the experience of danger in crossing a street has expanded in space and time to match the crossing of a desert, and the explanations similarly have to turn to painstaking detail to unveil ‘the historical truth’. But the journey towards the truth, strikingly, begins in Auschwitz – and in the terra nullius5 argument for establishing a Jewish state Palestine was largely uninhabited, undeveloped and historically ‘unclaimed’ until it became Israel – according to a great deal of Zionist propaganda.
Now the *terra nullius* idea is a New World myth, largely an American conception, at least in its modern implications. It grows from the absurd scene, analyzed by Greenblatt, where Columbus plants a flag, and since nobody ‘contradicts’ him, claims the New World for the Catholic kings of Castille and Aragon. Modern Israel, conceptually, is part of the New World. But it is also the original *orien* of the double movement of travel and conceptualization through which Europe has traditionally justified and explained itself: the ‘pilgrimage’ whose other side is ‘the history of civilization’. And it was the stated ultimate destination of that voyage where Columbus, to everyone’s consternation, turned up in the Caribbean.

A central ambivalence has been here from the beginning in the conceptual geography of history. History is inscribed in New World space as an absence, yet implied as a presence: the ‘New World’ implies the ‘Old’; the ‘West Indies’ imply the East. But there is no simple line of passage along these lines of implication, as centuries of exploration have made clear; there is no simple backward historical probe towards a spatial axis which coordinates the past in the present, whether centred in Jerusalem, ‘the Orient’ generally, or in Europe. The ‘New World’ blocks the European-defined geographical passage to the back door of the Orient, which was to replace the Oriental-defined historical routes like the Great Silk Road.

As a consequence, America and the other parts of the New World are perceived as beaches on which the driftwood of history turns up to create a kind of collage of time-capsules, a new pattern of simultaneity, a multiple perspective of spatially disconnected anachronisms, multi-historical as much as it is multi-cultural. This is the concomitant side to denying the aboriginal inhabitants of ‘the New World’ a history. A fault-line has emerged in cultural conception, which can perhaps only be comprehended through metaphor. Between a Native American ‘Old World’ and an Immigrant American ‘New World’ is a continuity in physical space, which is not a continuity in social space. The ‘New World’ sense of history tends not towards the longue durée but towards patterns of wave diffusion, towards Whitman’s sense of all historical epochs and loci as contemporary with himself, towards the ‘Hartz thesis’, meta-history or even science fiction (which is really spatially projected history).

It is characteristic that when travel writing about America, quite recently, develops a mode akin to the ‘historical pilgrimages’ of Oriental travel – along with the two classic modes Mary-Louise Pratt describes: the post-Humboldtian books of natural marvels and the ‘capitalist vanguard’ writings which see only blank space waiting to be improved – they become books which stress the multi-layered and the discontinuous in their perception of history, and the personal quixotic element becomes almost a kind of ‘egotistical sublime’. This happens whether they are books by Englishmen like Bruce Chatwin’s *In Patagonia* or Jonathan Raban’s *Old Glory* or by North Americans travelling South like Paul Theroux’s *Old Patagonian Express* – or even the great criollo pilgrimage of Alejo Carpentier’s *The Lost
Steps. The axis of orientation in these books is geographical; the journeys are not retracings of a historical route to a point in space where the past has continued into the present, but cruises through a space where various points of the past have become isolated, encapsulated and contemporaneous. The 'truth' found is first and foremost one of place and personal identity, not of 'European civilization', even when the object of the pilgrimage is an audience with Jorge Luis Borges (Theroux), the place of discovery of the pelt of a giant sloth (Chatwin), or the most primitive musical instrument (Carpentier); the steps are irretraceable, discontinuous.

Geography, space and place, intercedes as a barrier to the wished-for historical reconnection — as did the unpredictable reality of the Americas to Columbus. But to some people the 'New World' is history, and not a spatially projected future — as it still appears, deep down, for most Europeans. And it is probably no coincidence that some of the most profound questionings and reformulations of the conceptual geography of European historical cosmology have come from the oldest part of the New World: the Caribbean. Such revisioning has arisen not so much from a clash between conflicting social spaces (like Europe vs. the Arab world, or India, or Africa), but rather from a unique position both inside and outside European conceptions of social space and historical cosmology.

This is mainly, of course, a matter of race and slavery. But not exclusively: one of the first 'revisionaries' came from a line of former slaveowners and took the pen-name, which is not so odd in the perspective of historico-geographical cosmology, of 'Prester John', St. John Perse. His work attempted — 'in a single breath, without caesura' — to encompass the history of the human spirit as it unfolded across the continents and oceans. From a curious position both inside and outside, at the beginning and the end of this great movement, in the highest of high modernist idioms, Perse saw the great migrations of birds and of peoples from Central Asia, snowstorms, ocean currents, political exile and language itself in the image of some kind of cosmic wind, through which movement and stasis, time and space become oddly inverted. Whether the geographical setting is the great centrifugal Asian plains or the Atlantic coming up against the great barrier of the Americas, the whole space of history seems to move round a conceptual, temporal island — or 'ex-isle' as J. Michael Dash has termed the state of consciousness, the double movement which also Wilfred Cartey has found characteristic of Caribbean literature: 'I Going Away, I Going Home' (Cartey 1991).

Certainly Perse's movement of inversion — and his extraordinary scope — seem equally characteristic not only of his later critic-follower Édouard Glissant, who very consciously embraces the whole project of reconceptualizing 'history' and 'geography', but also of the three great poetic reconceptualizers of the English-speaking Caribbean: Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott. 'The Sea is History', proclaims one of Walcott's poems, in which the waves of European
colonization in the Caribbean are seen as the books of Biblical history 'locked up' in a 'grey vault' of submarine memory:

First there was the heaving oil,
heavy as chaos;
then like a light at the end of a tunnel,

the lantern of a caravel,
and that was Genesis.
Then there were the packed cries,
the shit, the moaning:

Exodus ...

Geography encapsulates moments of history which, isolated from their historical connections, acquire mythic or legendary stature—like the bottle encrusted with fool’s gold described early in Walcott’s *Omeros*. That bottle becomes an image for the ‘sea-change’ of history into myth, which the book enact and celebrates as the post-colonial Caribbean poet’s reappropriation of his own history. Walcott is famously uneasy about history as concept and poetic inspiration. History must be repatterned as mythic formulae or geographically reconceptualized: ‘my own prayer is to write/lines as mindless as the ocean’s of linear time,/since time is the first province of Caesar’s jurisdiction’ (*Midsummer* XLIII ii ‘Tropic Zone’).

The sense of self is geographical and mythical, history is an intruding other not only in Walcott’s poetic world, which *Midsummer* conceptualizes as the tropisms of South and North, Black and White, poles of consciousness and imagery—and *Omeros* develops into an almost systematic ‘reversible world’ along the meridian which bisects the triangle of the Caribbean, Africa and Europe. Also the poetic worlds of Brathwaite and Harris share this sense of *exile through history* rather than *exile in geography*, though Brathwaite’s world is modelled not as a magnetic cartography of memory, myth and metaphor, but is conceptualized as a rather more ‘conventional’ historical fabric stretched out between diaspora and creolization—and Harris’s geography of the world is psychologized as a cultural memory theatre of all races, a ‘Theatre of Dream’ which balances psychosocial tensions in a Jungian parallel universe.

In Harris’ most recent book *The Four Banks of the River of Space* he returns to the mythic river journey, which has sustained his own work since *The Palace of the Peacock* as well as European exploration, travel writing and imperial and post-colonial legend-making ever since sea-borne explorers turned inland in the wake of Columbus’ discovery of the continental nature of America. But the river journey, which has almost become an image of European civilization itself, of history’s geographical trajectory, is reconceived as quantum mechanical rhythms in space-time—or as Anselm, the narrator of *Four Banks* puts it: ‘a displacement of time-frames
to break a one-track commitment to history. The key to the reformation of the heart breaks the door of blind consciousness into shared dimensions’ (59), where ‘conversation floated in space and time, present space and time, past space and time, re-voiced spaces, retraced echoes’ in a Ulyssean ‘confessional fabric of a universal home-coming’ (85) enunciated by ‘a Voice that was attached to no absolute beginning, no absolute end, within alternative parallel spaces, sculptures of myth and history’ (94). Here, ‘in the quantum humour of paradox’, Anselm continues,

My mind was inhabited by questions of the architecture of birth and extinction, the locality and non-locality of ideas, questions of the origins of space (somethingness in nothingness) that I could not frame.

Yet an answer began to unfold on the third bank of the river of space through the memory of concrete Shadows that had visited me, or I them, on the first and second banks of the tilted rivers of the epic Guyanas, epic cosmos ... (94-95)

In my attempt to trace (or retrace) the cosmological developments which have ensued from the European attempt to encompass the globe by a westward passage from the meridian of Granada (and Greenwich) to the meridian of Jerusalem, it would seem that I have struck (in the work of Wilson Harris) the parallel latitude of El Dorado. But the oblique of that projection uncovers the many levels of shadows and echoes in Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s historical reading of the map of the Caribbean. In this palimpsest recomposed as a collage, the Roman and British empires are overlaid, the African diaspora is Orientalized, the river journey into the Heart of Darkness is inverted, and a creolized New World comes into Sisyphean reality where Columbus’ trajectory from Europe and the Middle Passage intersect in ‘X/Self’s Letter from the Thirteen Provinces’:

a cyaan get nutten really
rite
while a stannin up here in me years like i inside a me shadow
like de man still mekkin i walk up de slope dat e slide
in black down de whole long curve a de arch
i
pell
ago
long
long
ago
like a
tread
like a
tread
mill
or mile
stone
or pet
like a pet
like a perpet.
ual plant
or
plantation ...

The moral shadow of history enters our conceptual geography, as indeed it must. But I hope to have shown how the conceptual map also provides a continuum which turns incompatibilities into complementary dimensions. The historicized space of the Orient and the 'geographized' time of the New World have stayed remarkably intact in conceptualization since that year in Granada when the Spaniards dispatched the Moors off to the East — and Columbus off to the West. After 500 years of European attempts to impose our own social space (our sense of history and geography, our religion and economy) on other realities of time and place, the time is ripe for a reconceptualization. It must however take the form of a reconsideration, and a recognition of historical associations firmly planted in mental geography, rather than a simple replacement of imperialist concepts like 'Orient' and 'New World' by another set of polarities in the self-boosting discursive formations of European-Imperial ideologies. That would be to enter another circle of televised virtual reality; we need to get back to earth. Both the history of travel writing and Caribbean literary geography urge us towards a complex contextualism which sees the passing historical shadows in the constant presence of geography. That space has its own time provides both orientation and hope for Walcott's Achille at the end of Omeros: 'When he left the beach, the sea was still going on'.

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