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The Female Body Map and Anxiety Over Disorder in *The Comedy of Errors*

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Abstract: As an important research paradigm in spatial studies of literature, literary cartography offers a powerful lens to explore the ideological and cultural connotations hidden in cartographic representations of literary texts. The body map of the maid Luce in Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* ranks among the most representative female body maps in Renaissance English literature. In Dromio's humorous yet grotesque narration, Luce's body is imagined as a distorted geographical metaphor for early modern Europe. With shadowed tones and fluid national borders, this body map serves as an alienated reworking of the prevalent *Europa Regina* iconography. By transplanting this conventional visual symbol onto a humble black female servant, Shakespeare subverts the established iconographic tradition and dismantles the gendered and hierarchical social order consolidated by the original map. Rooted in the historical backdrop of Elizabethan England, this peculiar body map articulates widespread male anxieties about reversed gender relations and the decline of masculine authority amid the reign of a female sovereign. Meanwhile, set against the late-sixteenth-century European geopolitical landscape, the map also mirrors England's mounting worries about its peripheral status within the European imperial system, as well as its ambition to pursue global influence. Ultimately, this female body map acts as a concise yet compelling cultural symbol, encapsulating layered reflections on gender, race, class and national expansion within a single literary imagination.

Keywords: *The Comedy of Errors*; Female Body Map; Anxiety over Disorder

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of the spatial turn within literary scholarship, literary cartography has evolved into an important research paradigm. Conventionally, literary cartography is generally defined as the academic inquiry into literary maps embedded in literary texts. Yet, the definition of the term "literary map" was not given until 1993. The curators at the exhibition devoted to literary maps at the Library of Congress in America provided such a definition: "A literary map records the location of places, associated with authors and their literary works or serves as a guide to their imaginative worlds."¹ This broadly framed definition encapsulates the conceptual implications of conventional Anglo-American literary cartography research, serving as a fundamental reference for relevant studies. In recent years, scholars have further developed this term. Guo argues that the definition provided by the Library of Congress is inadequate in terms of appropriateness, completeness and applicability. Accordingly, he defines literary maps from both broad and narrow perspectives. In the broad sense, a literary map refers to graphic representation or verbal depiction of spatial information within the literary world. In the narrow sense, it is defined as the graphical visualization of spatial information contained in literary works.² Another scholar in literary spatial studies Robert T. Tally Jr. regards literary writing as a form of mapping,³ focuses on the logical similarities in narration shared by literary creators and cartographers, highlighting the cartographic nature of writers' creative activities

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and thus brings the idea of literary map to a much broader sense. Whether literary maps are generally regarded as a refined, exclusive spatial representation constructed consciously or subconsciously by authors within complete literary works, or alternatively treated as a vivid narrative analogy widely applied to sort out plot clues and character trajectories, the core purpose of specialized academic studies focusing on literary maps lies in supplying innovative spatial reading methodologies, thereby greatly facilitating comprehensive excavation and in-depth interpretation of the abundant ideological connotations and profound meanings embodied in diverse literary texts.

The interdisciplinary nature and inclusiveness of literary cartography invite various perspectives into this research paradigm. The feminist perspective constitutes a vital dimension in the study of literary cartography. Space has long been gendered as something feminine or even maternal in western philosophy and in the history of western cartography, the use of female bodies as metaphors of lands and territories was already prevalent in Renaissance maps, with *Europa Regina* being the most representative example, and accordingly, this feature can also be found in many literary works of the period. In view of this, the present study attempts to reexamine the female body maps in English Renaissance literature, focusing on one such body map in Shakespeare's drama *The Comedy of Errors*.

The term "female body map" refers to a specific form of literary cartography in which the female body is imaginatively constructed as a geographical space or map through verbal description or visual representation. Unlike the general tradition of placing female allegorical figures on atlas covers or using female personifications to represent abstract concepts, a female body map involves the cartographic imagination of the body itself and the body is constituted as a map, with specific geographical features, territories, and spatial relationships projected onto specific body parts. As a representational and ideological device, the female body map encodes power relations, social hierarchies, and cultural anxieties within a spatialized framework, rendering abstract political and social concerns concrete. In the Renaissance context, where the mapping of the female body often served to consolidate patriarchal and imperial authority, the female body map operates simultaneously as an instrument of control and as a site of subversion.²

The concept of "anxiety" in this study operates on two interrelated levels, each addressing a distinct dimension of early modern English cultural unease. The first is gender anxiety: the psychological disturbance experienced by men in a patriarchal society when the established hierarchy of male dominance over women is perceived to be threatened or inverted, a condition that acquired particular urgency in Elizabethan England given the fact of a female sovereign on the throne. The second is imperial anxiety: England's apprehension about its peripheral and marginalized status within the European imperial order of the late sixteenth century, coupled with the ambition to overcome this status and claim a more prominent position on the global stage. These two forms of anxiety, though operating in different registers, are not isolated phenomena; rather, they are mutually constitutive, both rooted in a shared sense of dislocation and a longing for stable, legible hierarchies. In this study, the female body map serves as the primary symbolic medium through which these otherwise diffuse and intangible anxieties find concrete, navigable, and ideologically charged expression. By mapping anxiety onto the female body, the playwright renders the invisible visible and the unmanageable manageable, transforming cultural fears into cartographic form. Theoretically, this study situates the concept of anxiety within the framework of cultural symptomology as developed in early modern studies, treating anxiety not as a merely psychological state but as a historically specific cultural formation that registers structural contradictions within the social order. As a critical category, anxiety occupies a productive middle ground between individual psychology and ideological critique: it captures the diffuse, often inchoate sense of unease that accompanies perceived threats to established hierarchies, while remaining grounded in the specific historical

conditions of Elizabethan England. This conceptualization allows the present study to demonstrate how the female body map functions as a cultural symptom that both reveals and manages structural anxieties, thereby making a distinct contribution to the understanding of how literary cartography participates in the negotiation of cultural tensions.

The existing scholarship on *The Comedy of Errors* and on female body maps in Renaissance literature has not yet fully explored the intersection of gender anxiety and imperial anxiety within the cartographic framework. Studies of literary cartography in the early modern period, notably the work of Guo,² Tally³ and Turner,⁴ have established the theoretical apparatus for reading literary texts as spatial representations, yet they tend to treat the body as a passive surface for cartographic projection rather than as an active cognitive device that generates specific forms of spatial knowledge; the distinct mechanisms by which the female body operates as a map and how these mechanisms differ from those of visual cartography remain undertheorized. Feminist scholarship on gender and space in Renaissance literature, including the influential work of Montrose,⁵ Dusiinberre,⁶ and Cartwright,⁷ has illuminated the gendered dimensions of spatial representation and the treatment of the female body in early modern drama, yet this line of inquiry has not systematically engaged with cartographic theory as a distinct analytical lens, thereby missing the specific epistemological work that the body-map metaphor performs. Meanwhile, studies of imperial ideology and geographical imagination in early modern England have richly documented the intersection of cartography and imperial ambition, yet have not systematically connected these imperial concerns to the gendered body maps found in literary texts. Guo has explored the gender-political dimensions of Luce's body map through the lens of gender poetics, demonstrating how the body map satirizes Queen Elizabeth I,² yet the implications of this body map extend beyond courtly gender politics to encompass a broader engagement with imperial identity and national anxiety. Against these limitations, this study seeks to fill this gap by integrating feminist cartographic analysis with imperial studies, offering a dual-layered interpretation that reads the female body map as a site where gender anxiety and imperial anxiety converge, are negotiated, and find imaginative resolution. This study advances beyond existing scholarship by demonstrating how the female body functions as a map through mechanisms different from visual cartography, connecting gender anxiety and imperial anxiety through a single cartographic device rather than treating them as separate concerns, and revealing the subversive potential of literary mapping when the body in question is that of a racially marked, lower class woman.

2. Female Body Maps in Renaissance Literature

The long-standing tradition of close integration between female bodily imagery and cartography stretches far back in the history of Western cartography. The "female body map" in Western cartographic tradition refers not to mere allegorical decoration but to a cognitive and epistemological device through which space is gendered, named, and hierarchically ordered. In this representational regime, the female body is positioned as a legible surface onto which geographical knowledge is projected, rendering abstract territories intelligible through the familiar grammar of the feminine, and authorizing colonial and patriarchal claims over them. This logic is vividly exemplified in Stradanus's *Allegory of America* (c. 1587–1589),⁸ where the Florentine explorer Amerigo Vespucci with astrolabe in one hand and a cross-staff in the other, bestows upon a nearly nude female figure reclining in a hammock before him the name "America", the feminine derivative of his own given name. The act of naming here is a cartographic, sexual, and imperial gesture as the female body becomes both the territory to be known and the territory to be possessed. A similar hierarchical ordering operates in the title page of Abraham Ortelius's *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1570),⁹ where four female figures of distinct complexions and costumes personify the four continents, with a European queen in resplendent robes, scepter and orb in hand, occupying the central and sovereign position. As a

discursive practice, the female body map does far more than represent geographical space. It enacts a colonial-patriarchal logic by which feminized territories are rendered available to masculine knowing, naming, and possession.

This kind of gendered spatial representations in map culture was also manifested in the cartographic depictions of the female bodies in Renaissance literature. It was quite commonplace to regard the female body as a type of spatial representation in Renaissance poetry and drama, especially in geographical narratives of the Age of Discovery. Michael Drayton's topographical epic *Poly-Olbion* stands as a typical example. In this poem, female bodies are viewed as lands and natural landscapes, and waterways are often embodied as maids and nymphs.¹⁰ Another example is Philip Sidney's Sonnet 91 of *Astrophel and Stella*, in which the poet compares Stella's hands, face and lips to "wood globes of glistening skyes."¹¹ John Donne uses similar metaphors as well in his elegy "To His Mistress Going to Bed" where he erotically depicts the newly discovered American continent as a female body.¹² This artistic treatment echoes Ortelius' practice of representing America through semi-nude female figures on the cover of *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* and Vespucci's naming of the newly found land. Other examples can also be found in Renaissance plays. In Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, England is rendered as a feminized landscape waiting to be surveyed and charted by potential invaders.¹³ Just like the female figures representing continents or lands in Renaissance atlases, women and their bodies in literary works have become a metaphor for territories and spaces in many Renaissance works. As Louis Montrose observes, English Renaissance literature is permeated with the narrative discourse of "land as body," whereby territories and newly discovered lands are figuratively framed as female bodies.⁵ Indeed, in many literary works of the time, female bodies are depicted in a cartographic manner, some even directly being compared to maps or globes.

The body map of Luce in Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* belongs to this tradition and is commonly regarded as one of the most representative female body maps in English Renaissance literature. Many scholars view it as a detail moderating dramatic tension, considering the insulting and demonizing treatment of the female body as reflecting male fear of female power.⁷ Few have conducted in-depth research from the perspective of gendered literary cartography. In fact, the concrete female body map easily allows readers/audiences to connect it with the popular maps of the time. It also facilitates readers in directly analyzing this body map to unearth its hidden significance. From a feminist perspective, this body map involves three major elements: gender, body, and map, and it thereby alludes to elements such as territory, nation, power relations, and social trends of thought, offering rich interpretive space. Guo has provided a novel interpretation of this female body map from the perspective of gender poetics. He argues that the maid's body map contradicts the spatial conventions of the Elizabethan era, where the queen's body was the subject of depiction in European cartography. He therefore concludes that Dromio of Ephesus uses Luce's body map to satirize Queen Elizabeth I. He further argues that through two discriminatory cartographic imaginative strategies, demonization and eroticization, the playwright destroys the sanctity of the queen's political body and her supreme ruling authority, representing a covert expression of early modern England's misogynistic culture. Therefore, literary cartography in *The Comedy of Errors* is also a special form of male desire; the analogy between body, land, and map becomes an incarnation of desire in early modern European sexual politics.²

This research inspires further interpretation of this body map, opening up new avenues for understanding how Shakespeare's comic invention engages with the deeper anxieties of his time. While earlier scholarship has tended to read Luce's cartographic body primarily as a vehicle for satirical commentary on Queen Elizabeth I and her regime, a closer examination reveals that the implications of this peculiar map extend far beyond the courtly politics of female sovereignty. Considering the play's overarching theme of identity loss and identity

restoration, a motif that structures the entire plot through mistaken identities and eventual reconciliations, this body map reveals more than just the play's implied satire against the female monarch and the queenly regime. In fact, it also alludes to early modern English society's pervasive anxiety regarding the disorder of identities on multiple levels. On the domestic front, it registers the profound unease caused by inverted gender roles, a concern that resonated deeply in a culture where the natural order was believed to require male authority over women. On the external front, it reflects a broader imperial disorder, wherein England, in its burgeoning national consciousness, found itself marginalized within the European power structure, not yet seated in its due place in the international order. These two dimensions, the internal and the external, are not separate but mutually reinforcing, as both stem from a shared sense of dislocation and a longing for stable hierarchies. The following analysis will reexamine Dromio of Syracuse's cartographic depiction of maid Luce's body from a feminist cartographic perspective, aiming to explore more deeply the complex layers of implied identity anxiety embedded within this seemingly comic passage, and to demonstrate how literary cartography can serve as a powerful lens for interrogating the intersections of gender, nation, and empire in early modern drama.

3. The Female Body Map and Anxiety over the Inverted Gender Order

During the Renaissance period, geographic knowledge was widely spreading in European countries and cartographic descriptions were not difficult to find in literary works. In *The Comedy of Errors*, the servant Dromio could easily map out the world on the body of the kitchen maid:

Dromio of Syracuse: No longer from head to foot than from hip to hip. She is spherical, like a globe. I could find out out countries in her.

Antipholus of Syracuse: In what part of her body stands Ireland?

Dromio of Syracuse: Marry, sir, in her buttocks. I found it out by the bogs.

Antipholus of Syracuse: Where Scotland?

Dromio of Syracuse: I found it by the barrenness, hard in the palm of her hand.

Antipholus of Syracuse: Where France?

Dromio of Syracuse: In her forehead, armed and reverted, making war against her heir.

Antipholus of Syracuse: Where England?

Dromio of Syracuse: I looked for the chalky cliffs, but I could find no whiteness in them. But I guess it stood in her chin, by the salt rheum that ran between France and it.

Antipholus of Syracuse: Where Spain?

Dromio of Syracuse: Faith, I saw it not, but I felt it hot in her breath.

Antipholus of Syracuse: Where America, the Indies?

Dromio of Syracuse: O, sir, upon her nose, all o'er embellished with rubies, carbuncles, sapphires, declining their rich aspect to the hot breath of Spain, who sent whole armadas of carracks to be ballast at her nose.

Antipholus of Syracuse: Where stood Belgia, the Netherlands?

Dromio of Syracuse: Oh, sir, I did not look so low...¹³

The cartographic treatment of the female body was not an unfamiliar artistic presentation for Renaissance European audiences, and its specific depiction deserves particular attention. "Her body's like a globe; I can find countries in her."¹³ Luce's body map is an exaggerated cartographic depiction under the male gaze. The kitchen maid's fat and round body is compared to a then-popular geographical object—the globe. Historical research finds that this early Shakespearean comedy premiered at Gray's Inn during Christmas 1594, with the audience primarily consisting of upper-class males.¹⁴ The globe must have been a familiar object to the audience present because "as of 1600, maps, globes, and atlases had become commonplace;

geographical knowledge occupied a central place in the intellectual life of the gentleman, statesman, or man of letters.”¹⁴ Indeed, as we can learn from historical materials as well as literary works, maps, atlases and globes were becoming common objects in Renaissance life as the industry of cartography was burgeoning in western Europe during the Age of Discoveries. Maps were widely used in Renaissance literary works. Marlowe’s Tamburlaine shouts “Give me a map, then let me see how much /Is left for me to conquer all the world”¹⁵ and King Lear orders his followers to give him the map when he decides to divide his kingdom into three parts for his daughters, both examples show that maps are not only symbols of territory in literary writing but may also appear as real props on stage, fully demonstrating the popularity and artistic value of maps. Cartography became an important part of literary imagination. In the monograph *Self-Made Maps: Cartographic Writing in Early Modern France*, pioneering literary scholar Tom Conley explicitly puts forward the core concept of the “cartographic impulse” embedded in literary creation. He convincingly states that this pervasive cartographic impulse running through diverse literary works profoundly structured, guided and reshaped the collective aesthetic and cognitive imagination of ordinary readers, writers and intellectuals across early modern Europe.¹⁶ Conley’s proposed “cartographic impulse” is clearly detectable across Shakespeare’s oeuvre, with its spatial metaphorical traits particularly salient in the play in question. The analogy between female physique and terrestrial globe caters to elite contemporary taste, from which one may deduce that geographically educated upper-class male law students would readily find this figurative comparison entertaining. Even so, the symbolic weight of this body-globe metaphor transcends mere vulgar amusement. In stark contrast to orthodox geographic globes familiar to general Elizabethan spectators, Luce’s bodily globe is constructed as an unconventional, distorted spatial representation laden with insulting undertones, revealing deeper textual intentions beneath surface humor.

A close examination of Dromio’s description reveals that Luce’s body map is extremely bizarre, with two aspects particularly noteworthy. For one, Antipholus’s first inquiry is about Luce’s complexion: “What complexion is she of?” “Swart like my shoe.”¹³ Dromio’s reply sets the most fundamental dark backdrop for this spherical map, requiring the audience to engage in cartographic imagination upon a dark female body. According to available materials, early modern geographical objects, whether globes or spherical maps, were not normally rendered on a dark background, which is the most prominent yet often overlooked feature of this imagined body map. Also, the map drawn on Luce’s body encompasses European and American regions, but the major European countries and related geographical information about America and the West Indies are haphazardly jumbled together, with their positional relationships misplaced: Ireland on the buttocks, Scotland in the palm, France on the forehead, and England almost unmarked on a black body, only surmised to be on the chin based on its relation to France. As early as the 1940s, American scholar George B. Parks argued that Shakespeare referenced Ortelius’ atlas, believing the geographical information in this play was accurate.¹⁷ During Shakespeare’s time, atlases by Mercator and Ortelius were already quite popular, and people had acquired relatively accurate geographical knowledge of these regions through maps. Yet, Parks was referring to the accurate geographical information of regions like Syracuse and Ephesus mentioned in the play. The geographical information on Luce’s body map was not specifically examined, and the point about its inaccurate geographical positions is thus often overlooked. The black background and the distorted geographical positions became the defining characteristics of this body map and thus deserve further examination. So was Shakespeare’s “inaccurate” drawing of the European and American countries and regions on the body of a black woman simply a careless mistake, or was it intentional?

A careful revisiting and reexamination of the major thematic connotations and spatial logic woven throughout *The Comedy of Errors* is likely to yield fresh, insightful discoveries overlooked in conventional readings. Central among the layered core themes anchoring the

dramatic structure of *The Comedy of Errors* is the pervasive chaos and social disarray spawned relentlessly by constant mistaken identities and misplaced interpersonal recognition, and the subverted, inverted gender order constitutes a conspicuous and pivotal branch of such disorder. Regarded as one of Shakespeare's earliest extant dramatic creations, *The Comedy of Errors* largely articulates and consolidates mainstream orthodox ideologies prevalent during the English Renaissance rather than proposing radical subversive thoughts. Many scholars have explicitly elaborated on this conservative ideological tendency of the play. Peter Holbrook delivers a representative viewpoint in his research: "*The Comedy of Errors*, for instance, is more committed to traditional notions of social hierarchy than later plays."¹⁴ Indeed, the whole text explicitly endorses mainstream Renaissance social ethics that prioritize male dominance and marginalize female voices, firmly upholding the patriarchal ideology of male superiority and female inferiority, as well as the rigidly gender-divided spatial norms that delineate separate male public spheres and female private domestic spheres in Renaissance society. Luciana, a typical female figure thoroughly disciplined and constrained by patriarchal traditional ethics and gender norms throughout the play, precisely voices the universal hierarchical order governing all living creatures in nature and human society:

"Why, headstrong liberty is lashed with woe.
There's nothing situate under heaven's eye
But hath his bound in earth, in sea, in sky.
The beasts, the fishes, and the winged fowls
Are their males' subjects and at their controls.
Man, more divine, the master of all these,
Lord of the wide world and wild wat'ry seas,
Indued with intellectual sense and souls,
Of more pre-eminence than fish and fowls,
Are masters to their females, and their lords.
Then let your will attend on their accords."¹³

The canonical lines spoken by Luciana, "Man...are masters to their females, and their lords./Then let your will attend on their accords," serve as a miniature textual reflection of mainstream Elizabethan gender ideology. In the social context of late sixteenth-century England, the notion that men stood as innate masters and lords of women, together with the mandatory submission of females to male authority, was not merely a secular moral norm, but was elevated to an inviolable natural order sanctioned by religion, philosophy and royal governance. Driven by religious dogma and classical philosophical theories, the whole of English society rigorously upheld a stratified patriarchal hierarchy that separated gender rights and living spaces explicitly. On the one hand, men possessed absolute dominance and discourse power in all vital public spheres including national politics, judicial legislation, commercial operation, religious preaching and military leadership. On the other hand, women were strictly bounded within the private domestic sphere, whose social value was largely defined by household management, childbearing and spousal obedience, leaving them with no access to public social activities and only allowed to retain submissive, passive identities under male guardianship.

Even though the general social ideas were such, this did not mean men possessed absolute power over women, and we may find examples of powerful women as gender relations cannot exist independently of other concrete social relations like class and race. The most important counter-example of the time was the fact that England was then under a female monarch. As the sovereign, Queen Elizabeth I required absolute obedience to her authority from her subjects. As Dusiemberre points out, "Luciana describes to Adriana what the queen wished every subject to know, that subjection to authority is part of the divinely appointed order of Nature."¹⁶ Political ideologies like the divine right of the monarch and the king's (queen's) two bodies provided

the political and philosophical foundation that ensures the queen's rule. However, a sovereign queen was not without controversy or even objection. The monarch's female identity meant that societal obedience to authority was simultaneously accompanied by a pseudo image of submission to a female monarch. Furthermore, to view the society as a whole, upper-class women of the time held relatively high social status, and female consciousness started to show signs of emerging at the time, displaying an illusion of women's power over men. For instance, Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* dramatizes two resourceful female protagonists who outmaneuver their male counterparts. In this play, Adriana also questions: "Why should their liberty than ours be more?"¹³ Therefore, although women generally occupied a subordinate position, openly mocking and belittling aristocratic or middle-class women on the stage during the queen's reign would have been incongruous within the cultural context of the queen's reign.

Yet, the treatment of women from the lowest social strata, especially those of other ethnicity, could be a different matter. Within the specific historical context of sixteenth-century England, the black kitchen maid Luce was at the lowest end of the hierarchical order in terms of gender, race, and class. This almost all-encompassing "otherness" granted any man the right to arbitrarily fabricate and defile her. Precisely because of this, Dromio of Ephesus, also a servant, can spare no effort in mocking and demonizing her. Also, analyzing the specific context of the 1594 performance, it was highly likely that Dromio's denigration of Luce was not merely his personal act, nor simply discrimination and belittlement of a lower-class woman by a man of the same social stratum. With the expansion of overseas colonization and the slave trade, many black people had appeared in sixteenth-century England. The most famous black woman in London at the time was a brothel owner named Lucy Negro or Black Luce. Her clients included contemporary nobles, courtiers, and wealthy city merchants. She might have been the prototype for the play's Luce and was likely invited to watch the performance.¹⁸ If this was indeed the case, then during the performance, Dromio was not merely telling a sexually suggestive joke to amuse the male audience but was leading all male spectators in a collective cartographic carnival against the female body and was indulging in unrestrained imagining of an extremely ugly body and an distorted map, thereby exercising absolute male power over women.

Luce's black skin symbolizes her humble racial status. Coupled with widespread misogyny in Elizabethan England, she becomes an easy target for male ridicule and cartographic objectification. Yet Luce is not simply a passive victim of the male gaze and mockery. Remarkably, the dialogue between Antipholus and Dromio reveals a feminist counter-gaze directed at men. Frightened by Luce's pursuit, Dromio hurries to report the incident to his master:

This drudge or diviner laid claim to me, called me Dromio, swore I was assured to her, told me what privy marks I had about me—as the mark of my shoulder, the mole in my neck, the great wart on my left arm—that I, amazed, ran from her as a witch.¹³

While men could freely gaze upon the female body, engaging in unrestrained imagination and mockery, women's gaze at the male body provoked great fear and fierce retaliation. The male gaze is far more than an aesthetic viewing mode but an ideological instrument of patriarchal domination. By establishing men as active ruling subjects and women as passive ornamental objects, it legitimizes male monopoly and trivializes female political appeals. In a similar vein the counter-gaze from the female and the mapping of the male body carry extraordinary political significance. If the male gaze signifies male's power over women, then the female gaze upon the male announces a subversion of traditional gender power relations, thereby triggering great male fear and anxiety. Consequently, men had to demonize the woman, distort her into a fearsome, ugly monster, calling her a "witch," only thus could they dissipate

the legitimacy of the inverted gender order and reclaim male control.

This male's fear of women in power does not happen only in the lower class males such as the servant, higher class males in the play also display similar fear and anxiety. Antipholus of Syracuse also experiences fear over the inverted power relations. When the identities of the two sets of twins in the play got mixed up, the original gender order was disrupted and women were granted more freedom, which caused great anxiety and fear to the men. This fear is fundamentally rooted in fear of losing control over women. When Antipholus of Syracuse is locked out by his own wife, he decides to take the necklace meant for her to a courtesan instead: "I'll knock elsewhere, to see if they'll disdain me."¹³ In a patriarchal society, a man being disdained by a woman is a profound disgrace. This societal subversion constitutes an error for Antipholus of Syracuse as a male representative, hence he must seek the old order elsewhere so as to regain a sense of control. In this process of seeking order restoration, the necklace (chain) in the play is a significant symbolic object. Interestingly, when Shakespeare wrote this play, the English word "necklace" referring to a piece of jewelry was already in use. For instance, Marlowe used it in *Faustus* (1590): "Next, like a necklace, I hang about her neck."¹⁹ As a master of language, Shakespeare is skilled in puns, so it is likely that he intentionally choose "chain" rather than "necklace" here because "chain" in English refers to literal chains and has the clear connotative meaning of binding someone and restricting their freedom. More importantly, the Christian concept of "The Great Chain of Being" emphasized the inviolability of the divine order, where every being had a specific position on this chain, not to be misplaced or transgressed. Analyzing from this perspective, the gender-political significance of this detail where Antipholus of Syracuse initially commissions a goldsmith to make a necklace for his wife Adriana should not be overlooked. As a piece of jewelry, the necklace is both a love token and a display of wealth. But from a gender perspective, the chain crafted by the husband for the wife was undoubtedly also a kind of shackle placed upon the woman, a symbol of male control and even enslavement. After a series of unfortunate coincidences, the husband ultimately places the highly symbolic chain on Adriana, and the traditional gender order is finally restored. Thus, the temporary state of disorder is restored, men remain in control over women and the restraints and oppression women suffer under the patriarchy society continue.

From the above comprehensive textual and contextual analysis, it can be clearly seen that this kind of deep-rooted male anxiety arising from inverted gender power relations was extremely prevalent and typical in the social context of Elizabethan England. This psychological turmoil was not confined to a specific social stratum, but spread across nearly all social classes in that era. Whether it was people from the humble lower class represented by the servant Dromio or well-educated figures from the middle and upper gentry class like Antipholus, all men shared the same psychological tendency. Once women displayed even the slightest trace of dominance, initiative or authoritative power over men in daily interactions, men would instantly perceive a severe disruption to the established social norms and feel enormous psychological threat and inner anxiety. To eliminate this sense of unease, they would spare no effort to take various retaliatory measures and resort to all possible means to reverse the abnormal power state and restore the traditional patriarchal social and gender order. In this classic play, the ugly and distorted cartographic imagination imposed on the ordinary maid Luce essentially serves the same disciplinary and regulatory purpose as the act of placing the golden chain on Adriana. Both behaviors fully reveal men's fear and intense anxiety towards the disorder of conventional gender power relations. Such male psychological distress is ultimately alleviated and eliminated through the intensified suppression and control over women. Specifically, men achieve this goal either by constructing biased and restrictive cartographic discourse to frame and define female identities, or by directly imposing physical restraint and control on the female body. Through these two complementary means, male dominant power is fully demonstrated and consolidated, and the long-standing patriarchal

gender order is firmly maintained and defended in the end.

4. The Female Body Map and Anxiety over The Imperial Order

If Luce's body map is placed within a broader historical context, this distorted body map not merely reflects male anxiety over inverted gender powers but as a complex cultural response to a more specific and historically grounded form of anxiety: the widening gap between Elizabethan England's burgeoning imperial consciousness and its actual marginality within the emerging global order. This section demonstrates how the play's verbally constructed body map operates on two levels. First, it renders England's imperial inadequacy visible by mapping the nation's marginal position onto a black female body; and second, through the very fluidity and imaginative freedom of verbal representation, it offers a symbolic subversion of the fixed cartographic hierarchy dominated by Habsburg Spain, and thereby momentarily alleviates the deep-seated national insecurities of an English audience caught between imperial aspiration and imperial reality.

Imperial consciousness was gradually forming in Elizabethan England, and external expansion became a nation-wide aspiration. Elizabethan writer Richard Hakluyt was one of most important advocates for English colonization. Through works like *Divers Voyages Touching the Discoverie of America* and *The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, he vigorously promoted English colonization of North America. Another key figure of the time was John Dee, Queen Elizabeth I's personal advisor, who was considered the coiner of the term "British Empire." He wrote extensively to promote England's claim to the New World and constantly advocated for England's territorial expansion. Dee compiled and published *General and Rare Memorials Pertayning to the Perfect Arte of Navigation*, a manual on navigation and piloting covering various aspects of contemporary nautical technology and knowledge, including measuring latitude and longitude and using astronomical instruments and navigation charts. This book was "the first authoritative statement of the idea of the British Empire, and was presented to Elizabeth just as that empire was about to make its geopolitical debut."²⁰ The imperial ambitions of the country was obvious by the title page of the book featured an allegorical image of the ship of empire steered by Queen Elizabeth I. In *The Limits of the British Empire*, Dee argued that Britain's claim to foreign lands extended far beyond the British Isles; most of the American coast, then also called Atlantis, north of Florida and the northern islands large and small, were rights of the crown and supreme government.²⁰ Dee even provided an "imperial formula" for the queen and courtly readers: domestic and international security + territorial expansion = an incomparable British Empire.²¹ Thus, imperial consciousness during Elizabeth I's reign had not only sprouted but had also been conceptualized and theorized, becoming part of the trend of thought in England.

However, by the late sixteenth century when Shakespeare wrote *The Comedy of Errors*, England's position in overseas trade and colonial expansion did not quite match its imperial ambitions, which can be glimpsed in the cartographic depiction of Luce's body map. Dromio disparages Ireland, Scotland, and France to marginal spaces. As for England, it is almost untraceable: "I looked for the chalky cliffs, but I could find no whiteness in her. But I guess it stood in her chin, by the salt rheum that ran between France and it."¹³ England lacked a definite position on this map, almost unseen, merely estimated to be on the chin based on its relation to neighboring France. On this map, another country almost unseen is Spain: "Faith, I saw it not, but I felt it hot in her breath."¹³ However, unlike England's lack of presence due to being peripheral and weak, Spain's "invisibility" precisely reflects its omnipresent powerful influence within Europe, as Spain exists in Luce's breath. If Luce's body represents all of Europe, then Spain, existing like breath itself, is the soul and the core power of Europe. To some extent, the distorted positional relationships of European countries on Luce's body map implicitly reflect the power dynamics among European nations and indeed form a clever artistic

echo with the famous *Europa Regina* maps.

In sixteenth-century Europe, the most famous female body maps were undoubtedly the series of maps known as *Europa Regina*. The original map of this series was published in Paris in 1537 by the Austrian cartographer Johannes Putsch. Although details varied among different versions, the maps generally depict a standing queen's body coinciding with the outline of Europe, with Spain forming the head adorned with an elaborate crown topped by a cross; the European continent forming the queen's limbs and torso; Italy as the strong right hand holding the orb; Denmark as the bent left hand holding a scepter; and the British Isles only a small area above her left shoulder. It is found that Putsch also composed a poem called "Europa" alongside this map. Peter Meurer, after analyzing both the map and the poem, points out that both were panegyrics to the powerful Hapsburg dynasty. On the map, the image of the British Isles is exceptionally crude, depicted merely as an unstructured mass lying on the queen's shoulder, seemingly threatening her head; study also finds that the poem Europa also contains lines like "her head being disturbed by England."²² Thus, the *Europa Regina* map was not merely a representation of European nations' geographical locations but an artistic presentation of their complex political and religious relationships. The power disparity between Catholic Spain as Europe's head and Protestant England in its corner were clearly presented in *Europa Regina*.

In 1587, German Protestant pastor Heinrich Bünting's version of the *Europa Regina* map followed Putsch's but with an interesting change: the proportion of the queen's head decreased, while the area of the British Isles increased considerably with a clearer outline. Meurer believes that Bünting, as a Protestant, had no intention of praising the Habsburg dynasty, and Protestant England no longer appeared insignificant in his eyes.²² Therefore, Bünting may have intentionally weakened Spain and highlighted England in his *Europa Regina* map out of religious considerations. The 16th century witnessed dramatic swings between alliance, rivalry, open warfare, ideological confrontation, and dynastic entanglement between England and Spain. Religion became the core fault line reshaping traditional political interests, while colonial competition, dynastic marriage, and European hegemony struggles constantly complicated bilateral ties. In the second half of the century, the relationship between the two countries underwent gradual deterioration under Elizabeth I and finally ended in a full-scale Anglo-Spanish War. The intentional augment of England on the map might have revealed the cartographer's hidden wish for a stronger England but at the same time it also reveals the reality that Spain was much more powerful and protestants were worried. Likewise, the playwright's anxiety over England's imperial identity and his desire to redraw the European map can be detected from the cartographic depiction of Luce's body.

In early modern atlases such like *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, naked or semi-naked dark-skinned female bodies representing Africa and America were counterparts to the fair-skinned, elaborately dressed Europa. Luce's black, round body represents a territory transcending Europe, pointing directly to the newly discovered Americas, as Dromio places America and the West Indies on Luce's nose: "upon her nose, all o'er embellished with rubies... Spain... sent whole armadoes of carracks to be ballast at her nose."¹³ Spain, as the breath of Luce's body, lavishly seizes treasures on this body, the primary beneficiary of contemporary colonial plunder and overseas trade. This simple depiction reenacts Spain's leading position in overseas colonization and trade, forming a strong contrast with England, which was "possibly" located on the chin. As a matter of fact, in all of Shakespeare's plays, the name America appears only once here in this play. The emphasis on Spain's lucrative gains from America and the West Indies implies that overseas expansions were also on the mind of the Elizabethans, including the playwright. Louis Montrose points out that "many writers of the Elizabethan period, expresses a persistent worry that militarily, commercially, and artistically, England was a backward, marginal country."⁵

Historical facts may well explain that their worries reasonable. Although the 1588 defeat of the Spanish Armada greatly boosted English national confidence, the fact often overlooked in many narratives is that England achieved only temporary victory. Wars between the two nations continued until 1604, and for England, the external threat from Spain was never truly removed. On the other hand, besides various internal conflicts, Ireland was in constant rebellion and the Nine Years' War broke out in 1594, the year of the play's performance, so the domestic situation was also fraught with crisis.²³ Moreover, in overseas territorial expansion, England lagged far behind its arch-rival Spain and did not establish its first North American colony until 1607. Therefore, whether in terms of domestic and international security or overseas territorial expansion, the conditions in Dee's formula for "an incomparable British Empire" were not yet met; England's imperial dream remained far-fetched.

The cognitive mechanisms by which the female body map renders territory legible differ fundamentally between visual cartography and literary representation, and understanding this divergence is essential to grasping the specific ideological work that literary body maps perform. In visual cartography, as exemplified by the *Europa Regina* maps and Ortelius's personified continents, the body-territory relationship operates through cartographic transparency: the map presents itself as a mirror of objective reality, and the female body functions as a naturalized container for geographical content, with each body part corresponding to a specific region through direct spatial isomorphism. In this visual regime, power operates through fixity—the borders of nations coincide with the contours of the body, and the hierarchy of nations is encoded in the hierarchical arrangement of body parts, with the head (Spain) commanding the subordinate limbs and appendages. In literary texts, by contrast, the body map operates through an entirely different cognitive logic. In literary body maps, the connection between body parts and territories is established not through spatial resemblance but through metaphorical association: Ireland is located in her buttocks not because buttocks anatomically resemble Ireland's shape, but because the bogs of Ireland are metaphorically linked to the soft, damp terrain of the buttocks; Scotland appears in the palm of her hand through the metaphor of barrenness and hardness. This shift from iconic correspondence to metaphorical substitution has profound consequences: whereas visual body maps tend to reinforce existing power structures by naturalizing them, literary body maps, because they exist in the medium of language and readerly imagination, possess a greater degree of fluidity and reversibility, making them available for both ideological reinforcement and ideological subversion.

Shakespeare, like the protestant cartographer Bünting and many writers of his time, sensed the worries of the Elizabethans and expressed them artistically through the Luce's body map. This particular body map generates anxiety by rendering abstract geopolitical relations legible on a visible surface, compelling the audience to confront England's marginal position within a symbolic order it cannot control. Where the *Europa Regina* maps fix Spain at the head of the European body, Luce's body map forces the English audience to encounter the same hierarchy from the position of the peripheral, the "untraceable." The anxiety here is not merely personal or psychological but structural: it arises from the collision between England's imperial imaginary, the dream of "an incomparable British Empire" articulated by Dee and Hakluyt, and its symbolic reality within the European order, which relegated England to the status of a marginal island.

Furthermore, this body map not only simultaneously renders the nation's imperial inadequacy visible but also makes it available for artistic reworking: it produces anxiety by exposing marginality, while also providing a symbolic space in which that marginality can be imaginatively contested and reconfigured. Re-examining the play's body map discloses that the playwright's use of the black female body map strategy may provide a possible artistic resolution for England's anxiety. First, the established cartographic order of the *Europa Regina*

maps produces anxiety precisely through its fixity: by fixing Spain as the crowned head of the European body and consigning England to a crude mass above the queen's shoulder, these maps materialize a geopolitical hierarchy that Elizabethan England lacked the material power to alter. Second, Luce's verbally constructed body map introduces a fundamentally different representational logic: because it exists only in language and the audience's imagination, its boundaries are mobile, its positions are mutable, and it cannot be fixed by any cartographic authority. Third, this fluidity enables a specific act of symbolic displacement: by relocating Spain from the sovereign "head" to the "breath" and the "nose". This displacement occurs not in the realm of material geopolitics but in the realm of theatrical imagination, where the audience is invited to participate collectively in the redrawing of the European map. The collective experience of this imaginative redrawing produces a specific psychological effect. The audience, having witnessed the symbolic dethronement of Spain and the dissolution of the fixed hierarchical order, undergoes a momentary alleviation of the deep-seated anxiety produced by England's real-world marginality. By rendering the hierarchy fluid and reversible in imagination, the resolution offers the English audience a temporary but potent experience of imperial agency, symbolically alleviating the anxiety over imperial identity and momentarily assuaging the deep-seated national insecurities arising from England's perceived marginality and its laggard status in overseas exploration and colonization.

5. Conclusion

Cartography expert Matthew H. Edney once noted, "'Map-ness' is not something inherent in an image but is determined by the reader,"²⁴ a crucial insight that shifts the analytical focus from the physical properties of the map to the interpretive agency of its audience, and this is even more true for the connotation of a literary map, where the image exists not on parchment or paper but in the fluid and often unstable medium of language, thereby rendering its meaning even more contingent upon the reader's cultural and historical context. The female body map, as a gendered spatial representation for interpreting literary works, demonstrates the rich interpretive power of literary cartography, precisely because it operates at the intersection of three potent and contested discourses: gender ideology, bodily representation, and spatial imagination. The body map of the maid Luce in *The Comedy of Errors*, with its two major characteristics of a black background and distorted geographical space, is an alienated version of the widely circulated *Europa Regina* map in literature, yet its alienation serves not as a mere parody but as a critical reappropriation that exposes the ideological underpinnings of the original cartographic model. This special female body map provides further possibilities for interpreting the play's identity theme, opening up new avenues for understanding how early modern drama engaged with the pressing geopolitical and social anxieties of its time through the seemingly innocuous medium of comic description.

Situated at the intersection of gender politics and imperial ambition, this cartographic representation yields a dual-layered significance. On one hand, Luce's black, distorted, even demonized body map reveals early modern patriarchal England's gender anxiety, male's fear of inverted gender power relations and anxiety over power loss, as the grotesque exaggeration of her physical form serves to contain and neutralize the threat posed by female agency, particularly when that agency is coupled with racial and class otherness. On the other hand, viewed within a broader historical-spatial context, this special body map also reflects late sixteenth-century England's anxiety regarding its place in the imperial order amid the burgeoning imperial consciousness and its longing to establish a new imperial order, a longing that finds symbolic expression and imaginative resolution in the imaginative reconfiguration of European geography, wherein England's marginal status is both acknowledged and tentatively overcome through the very act of cartographic imagination. Ultimately, what emerges from this analysis is a recognition that the female body map in literary works is not

merely a unique gender-political symbol but often carries more profound and complex historical-political significance, functioning as a condensed site where questions of national identity, colonial aspiration, and gender hierarchy converge and are negotiated, and thus deserves further exploration, particularly as it illuminates the ways in which literature participates in the construction of early modern spatial and political imaginations.

By developing the concept of the female body map as a distinct interpretive category, this study makes three specific scholarly contributions. First, it advances the theoretical framework of literary cartography by specifying the cognitive mechanisms through which the female body operates as a map and by demonstrating that these mechanisms differ fundamentally between visual cartography and literary representation: whereas visual body maps produce legibility through spatial isomorphism and naturalize power relations through the illusion of cartographic objectivity, literary body maps generate meaning through metaphorical substitution, creating a more fluid and potentially subversive form of spatial knowledge. Second, it offers a novel dual-layered reading that connects gender anxiety with imperial anxiety through a single cartographic device, demonstrating that these two forms of anxiety are not isolated phenomena but could be mutually constitutive, each shaping and intensifying the other within the specific historical context of Elizabethan England. This integrated approach moves beyond existing scholarship that treats gender politics and imperial geography as separate domains, revealing how the female body map serves as a condensed site where both forms of anxiety converge and are negotiated. Third, it demonstrates the subversive potential of the female body map when applied to a racially marked, lower class woman. By transplanting the conventions of elite cartographic representation onto the body of a humble black maidservant, Shakespeare's comedy does not merely parody the Europa Regina tradition but dismantles the gendered and racialized hierarchies that the original map ideology consolidates, thereby opening up critical perspectives on the intersections of gender, race, class, and imperial expansion within early modern literary culture. Taken together, these contributions establish the female body map as a useful analytical category that merits further exploration not only in other Renaissance texts but potentially in literature beyond the early modern period.

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