

## Seminar

### **Explorations and Geographies of the Self: Microcosmic and Macrocosmic Shakespeare**

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In the final scene of *The Tempest*, Gonzalo draws attention to the cosmographical thinking that has underpinned Shakespeare's play: 'one voyage', he suggests, has not only enabled more than one dynastic Mediterranean marriage, but also allowed Prospero to find 'his dukedom / In a poor isle' and prompted self-discoveries at a moment 'when no man was his own' (5.1.208-13). In its closing actions, the play's microcosmic and macrocosmic relationships come into peculiar focus: the 'bare island' to which Prospero refers in his Epilogue clearly encompasses both the play's fictional island and the theatre in which it has been conjured; and this layered space, we perceive, has served as a stage on which interweaving allegories—political, psychological, colonial—have been played out.

Seafarers, merchants, travellers, and pirates people Shakespeare's worlds; storms, shipwrecks (disastrous and fortuitous), and miraculous rescues propel his dramatic narratives. Our seminar is concerned with how Shakespeare's plays variously refract early modern cosmography—manifest in maps and atlases, writing on climes and zones, treatises on the arts of navigation, accounts of voyages and shipwrecks, and a new awareness of cultural relativism—and how, in particular, this is accomplished through microcosmic and macrocosmic modes of thought. How, for example, might horizontal, surface mapping—and its cognate images—translate to vertical mapping (of heaven or hell) or to questions of the 'inner' life? How might voyages provide ways of thinking about individual heroism or transgression—or, alternatively, about providential order? Asking these and related questions, the seminar will explore how Shakespeare's work is fashioned by and responds to the dramatic potential of the new geography. Topics to be explored might include sea-voyages, mariners and cultural encounters; weather conditions; maps onstage and the stage as map; the place of the heavens and the underworld; the body as map/world.

*Keywords:* voyages, mariners, cultural encounters, cosmology