

The Reader of Maps
By Tom La Farge

1. Mappable fictions

Why does *The Lord of the Rings* have so many maps when *To the Lighthouse* has none?

Why are the difficulties of *To The Lighthouse*, which takes place in the sort of country house people get murdered in, not clarified by a map such as used to appear on the back-jacket of mysteries? A floorplan of the house would locate the window where Mrs. Ramsay read to James while Lily Briscoe painted them. A map of the garden's pathways, showing "the gap between the two clumps of red-hot pokers" (105) through which the Lighthouse is visible, would help readers feel not so much at sea.

Or one could plot the intersecting courses of the Ramsays, their eight children, Lily Briscoe, William Bankes, Charles Tansley, Augustus Carmichael, Minta Doyle, and Paul Rayley. A set of graphic conventions could be invented and laid out in a neat legend, to show which encounters were erotic, which oedipal, which memorial, which epistemological, which aesthetic, which merely social. Characters like colored subway lines (Mr. Carmichael is mauve, Mrs. Ramsay gold), encounters like stations shaped in lozenges, circles, squares, triangles, inverted triangles, triangles within circles, and so on.

There wouldn't be a place on such a map for the amazing unpeopled section called "Time Passes," showing the house between the departure of the Ramsays and their guests and the arrival of Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast to clean. Not unless the house itself were designated a character. Then its interaction with other characters would have to be charted, under a heading

such as “indwelling.” That might be useful for some other interactions. But what sort of graphic field would the web of encounters be laid out on, if the house is a party to them and not their setting?

Are there unmappable fictions, or are there simply different kinds of map?

Is Lily Briscoe’s painting a map, intended to locate and represent a world-center (Mrs. Ramsay) in a framed composition? But Mrs. Ramsay won’t stay still. “And directly she went a sort of disintegration set in; they wavered about, went different ways” (168), following their own maps. Mrs. Ramsay has one, tracing relationships. So does Mr. Ramsay, it’s his mind, which has gotten through the alphabet of thought only as far as Q.

But after Q? What comes next? After Q there are a number of letters the last of which is scarcely visible to mortal eyes, but glimmers red in the distance. (53)

His map is a pilgrim’s, with stations of spiritual advancement.

Do the characters make the maps in a modernist text, does the author do it in a fantasy novel? Does the reader make the maps? Can I not plot my own encounters, for instance at Eros Station with “this tomboy Minta, with a hole in her stocking” (88), where I place my finger on the skin of her leg and feel the ragged woolen rim encircling her glow?

2. The reader of mouths

But the line joining me and Eros Station escapes the plane of the map. It isn’t that I can’t be visited from the book. I can be, I am, what are words but a visitation, what’s a book but a mouth? A warm mouth that takes me in and makes me aware of my true, forgotten shape; that returns me words, visitors from another body.

The mouth has a topography, of lips with their special skin, half hide, half membrane, lips that part and close, rimming a lightless cavity; a funnel of throat that houses a sinuous soft tongue. It twists, rolls, curls; it licks the palate's ridge, pulls back and stops the glottis, advances to lap a tooth's back. What of all that can be mapped? Teeth, maybe, on a dentist's chart that simplifies the several films exposing root, muscle, old work, intrusions of metal or porcelain, pockets of decay: a hard archaeology to spell my name within the known alphabet, after the mappers of the unknown dead pull me rotten from the mass grave.

The mouth as a whole can't be mapped, can't even be seen. It isn't a thing in the world of imageable things. It is in the world. It accepts me, returns me, and I have to be, to read, a reader of mouths and not just of maps.

Does every map lead to a mouth?

3. Storyable maps

Is there a direction to every map?

Some maps bind tight to story. Every fantasy saga since Tolkien's lays out a world on two facing pages. Rectangular worlds these are, their charts preindustrial, with Celtic-sounding place-names lettered in half-uncials or runic script. Mountains and trees are drawn as a bird might see them, looking down at a slant: the eagle reader who can swoop over all this terrain, tracking quests and battles. Nearly every site on the map is a location in the story, for the map epitomizes the story and the story exhausts the world.

Historical maps are juicy with stories of bloating and shrinking. They can show where on the body of earth in 700 one would have stopped being Christian and started being Muslim. A

flip book assembled from them, if brought to the same scale and registration, would release, when thumbed, the mad mazurka of the Holy Roman Empire, the deliberate wasting of Byzantium.

Campaigns and battles are woven from so many narrative lines crossing and terminating at so many points in time and space that only an animated map-movie could really present the whole story complete. But how many eyes would one need to follow Bonaparte into Italy?

A map relates, over the twenty-four hours between dusk on August 2nd, 1796, and nightfall the next day, the distress of the Austrian Ocskay who, confined by the plane of the map to the mountainous district west of Lake Garda, failed to find the French Guieu where he wanted him but ran into the equally French and no less hostile Massena where he didn't. Broken circles show me where two mighty antagonists, Despinoy and Quasdanovich (minus the hapless Ocskay), concentrated their forces, at Brescia and at Gavardo respectively. Broken lines show me Despinoy marching upon Gavardo, from which Quasdanovich must retreat. Solid arrows indicate the position of troops on the march as darkness overtook them on August 3rd, Despinoy nearly back to base at Brescia and Quasdanovich growing unhappily aware of Guieu's presence at the very place where he had hoped to dine and sleep: Salò.

These are stories a reader of maps must dedicate some attention to following. The eagle reader becomes the creature of the map, and this too is a pleasure, the joy of detached overflights, of augmented seeing. It is delightful sometimes to escape the mouth's wet implications.

But what about practical maps, the kind that offer information? How are they to be read?

4. Practical maps

They show routes connecting to other routes, ways to get “there.” How to get there underground or through the sky, across this bay, bight, channel, gat. They cover the face of the earth with lines of how to get there. They indicate the width and quality of roads, mark the dangerous bits, the reaches planned but not yet built, the scenic outlooks. In cities they shrink inhabited blocks to odd lumps in a webbing of streets, imperative: no parking! one way! commercial traffic prohibited! In case of fire they show what stair to use.

They show the weather yesterday. They show the galaxies spread out from yesterday to the origin. They dot the earth with population densities and stripe it with class, race, religion. They stipple in soil type and arability, paint the altitude above or below sea-level, shoot arrows of prevailing winds and currents. Schematic oil-wells or crossed picks mark the sources of raw materials. Across them finished goods circulate, deserts advance, continents drift. They locate and label the bumps on the cranium. Or, like Freud’s letter to Fliess of October, 1895, they reduce sex to a schema. On them the body of the earth is zoned and bordered.

Any map is a system of signs based on an opposition of the world we live in, dangerously unknowable, with a forming “I,” free and detached, the more so as it carves up and colors the world. The elegant maps made by “cataphiles” of the tunnels under Paris show a maze of quarries, sewers, smugglers’ tunnels, and the halls lined with the neatly sorted bones of Paris’ dead, to the horror of which I am alive. A museum floorplan is the clue to a labyrinth filled with terrifying monstrosities. I may not find the café-table in the Braque, may feel myself break up in front of its proliferation of rims, a mouth in motion. But with the floorplan I can find the Braque, or the WC.

5. The Braque's mouth

The pleasures of a WC are quickly enjoyed. Purged and cleansed, I comb myself in the mirror and consider myself within the system of the room. They call it a restroom, and it is restful, with so few decisions to make and those so clearly charted. The walls are packed with ramifying pipes that deliver hot and cold to mixing valves, waste lines that plunge to the museum's depths, never so truly called bowels; then this is free to be a mind. No windows, only mirrors with eyes in them. Hidden eyes see me zip up and turn to the mirror; then a measured cascade is released. Hidden eyes see my soiled hands below a tap.

No one needs a map in the WC. The outer door marks a difference between skirts and trousers, but once I'm in, the WC finds me a place in its system. I know just what to do, I will never be lost, not even in the stalls at the bus station that house forbidden narratives carved into the fat skin of a greasy wall, overdetermined signs that mark it as a map and locate me past any mistake.

A map, any map, is a strict semiotic system made up of signs that insist on being read as written. I follow it back to the Braque.

The Braque's mouth is moving. That is why the lip-lines are seen multiplied in displacement, articulating the desire of objects to speak to me, if only I can be an object too, a bottle of pastis, why not, or a newspaper rolled into a log of information gone *informe*. If I can do this, I will read a square of wallpaper, of mimic wood, I will read a wineglass' lip and its moving volume of red, and if I can read that, if I can hear the music of that shivering guitar, I can read anything uttered by a mouth.

Leaving the museum, my eye plunges into a vista ordinarily plane, a snapshot of trees, taxis, tourists, clouds, stilled even in their waving, honking, smiling, drifting, dissipating. Now the wind moves the leaves, blows the fountain into spray, there is a volume about me that speaks, and I am hearing, reading.

But can there be any reading at all without a map?

6. Emblem maps

Some maps are written only to be read. They do not refer to the world we share but to some text which they make as explicit as they can.

Fantasy maps have the shape of the book they accompany. They show an imaginary world with the limits of story, a world crafted to make a story articulable within its frame. In the less interesting, more commercial kinds of fantasy writing, the map, since the characters are game pieces, is no more than the board of a game that only the author gets to play. But a good fantasy map nourishes the reader's imagination and tends toward emblem.

Emblem hovers between image and sign. The shapes are living, the composition a dramatic riddle, a monstrosity. You can look at an emblem for a long time before you start to read its configuration of elements, with an eye on the motto. *Veritas filia temporis*. Truth is the daughter of Time. Then the woman reaching from the cave is Veritas, and the old man with the scythe is Chronos, and the beast or dragon guarding the cave is Error, who hid Truth so long and now must stand by helpless as she's pulled free into the light.

Emblematic maps offer an enjoyable set of problems, evoking sentimental or even erotic viewing with some assurance of a satisfying resolution. Love maps trace an imaginary,

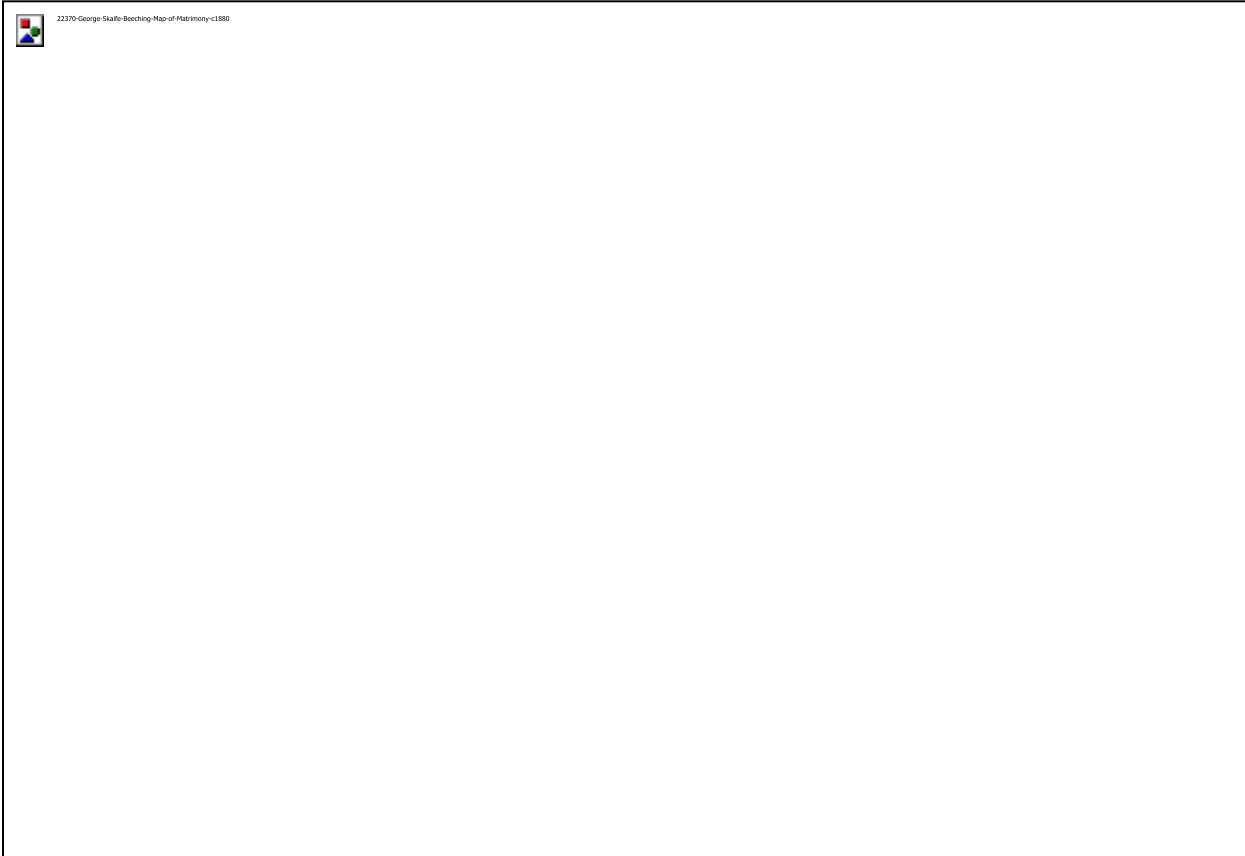
paradigmatic geography. They trace descent from the famous “Carte du Tendre” that François Chauveau drew to accompany Mme. de Scudéry’s novel *Clélie*, published in Paris in 1654. Every part of the map has been given amative significance by its name: The *Lac d’Indifférence* lies off to the east and is not connected to the central river which must represent the course of an affair, flowing north from *Nouvelle Amitié* (New Amity) to *La Mer Dangereuse*, the perilous sea (or mother). On the plain of *Tendre* there are neither roads nor barriers between the towns of *Iolis Vers* (pretty verses), *Billet galant* (love-note), *Inesgalité* (inequality, of feeling or of rank) and *Tiédeur* (lukewarm feeling); the user of this map is free to chart his or her own route.

A German postcard represents a similar terrain as a *Geographisches Liebes-Räthsel* (love-riddle), using the line tracing the coast to create a different profile, that of two lovers facing. The man, on the right, bends his arm to his chest in a gesture of sincere declaration, - while the woman stares openmouthed and roundeyed. Her eye is round because it is the capital, *Augen* (eyes), of her country. All the place names are words from one of Heinrich Heine’s songs and are to be read, the legend instructs, from left to right, according to the color-coding that in a normal political map would identify nation-states. The placement of Heine’s words produces some odd effects. The large *Brust* (breast) that names the man’s country is actually inscribed on his elbow. The woman’s country is named *Leid* (sorrow), and where her breast should be I find a confusing unbreastlike shape, more like another staring face but upside down, with the city of *Weh* (woe) as its eye, or her nipple.



The “Map of Matrimony,” issued as a Valentine in Victorian England, mimics an explorer’s map and charts “Cap^t Batchelor’s Course.” I follow the dotted line from Dismal Town in the Country of Single Men all the way to Cape Look out, which looks back at the very country from which he emigrated. In between the captain has touched shore at Lonely Isle, where he took aboard stores of matrimonial motivation, and then sailed through the sea of Introduction into the Ocean of Admiration (was it boundless?), where he coasted the Country of Compliments, came in close to the City of Dames but then, as if alarmed, stood off and gave the Coast of Spoons a wide berth. Having rounded Cape Flirtation and, inevitably, Cape Proposal, Captain Batchelor sailed blithely into Engagement Bay and docked at the mouth of the River of Kisses. The city there is See Pa Town, where his ship was impounded by hostile Customs men and its cargo of intentions thoroughly searched. No contraband was found, but the encounter cannot have been agreeable, for the captain sailed directly to the Jealousy Isles. What awakened

jealousy? Was it seeing Pa? Was it Pa whose oedipal resentment is permanently registered in that cramped and mountainous archipelago?



If so, Pa got over it, for next the captain is rounding Acceptation Point and battling through the choppy seas of Settlement Bay. He hugged the coast, keeping far from the island of Fear, whose southernmost cape is Point Love, perhaps because it receives some current from the tropics, or because love is the point of fear. Rù (rue?) Town is very near Port Joy. Does it imply post-coital disappointment? But it was too late to change course, the captain soon afterward landed at Church Town on Parsons Bay, just on the frontier of the states of Solemnization and Agitation. Here he abandoned his ship and the freedom it gave him to distance himself (but only in fancy) from his fate; he marched inland into Matrimony, first to Bann City, next to Bridesmaids City. Then the slow trek through the Mountains of Delay, to his right the Province

of Jewellers and Milliners (capital: Veil Town) and then Wedding Cake Land, while left he looked into sinister Feeland (“inhabited by lawyers”). At last Cap^t Batchelor, by now perhaps Cap^t Benedick, climbed down into the Region of Rejoicing. With much baggage he followed a well-worn trail just this side of the border between Rejoicing and the Country of Compliments and was in a position to roll an eye aside to the dazzling Lake of Darlings.

And so the captain’s voyage ended at Cape Look out, not far from Beauty Town. Perhaps his villa still stands, out in the countryside. On a clear day I imagine him on the roof, spyglass clapped to his eye, searching the opposite coast till, at its nearest point, the City of Uneasiness comes into uncertain focus.

I do not consider myself at all clever to have seen how far this card figures a man’s anxiety. As a fantasy it is not available to a woman, and “she,” daughter of Pa, is present only by implication. Women who are not darlings or bridesmaids are relegated to the Land of Spinsters in the frigid north, whose cities are named Precision, Teapot Town, and Languish Town. Yet there is a name on the map that appears not to be original; it is typewritten where all other place-names are either neatly hand-lettered or printed with worn type. To the north of Fear, to the west of the Land of Spinster, just in that quadrant whose coordinates should define it as unambiguously aversive, someone – some woman? – has typed, perhaps on the very machine that signifies her own desirable alienation from “Matrimony,” the legend “Ocean of Felicity.”

7. The mind drifts

The allegories in real maps are harder to read. I can infer time and cause from a map, if I’m attentive. Look, this holy city grew up here as an entrepôt on the caravan route between

India and the Mediterranean. A river must find a sea; then its source must be higher than its mouth. Then this river, Oued Drâa, which has its source in the High Atlas (appropriately) and its mouth on the Atlantic coast, must find its way from the one to the other. I can't see where, it must go under the sand.

I follow traces laid down by mapmakers. But maps are also dense with words ("Drâa") asserting a presence and the scale of that presence. A country is set all in capitals with a serif face. Its capital is capitalized (sans serif) only if it's as big as Paris. Smaller towns, smaller faces. Italics for the geography; and here is where one can play Dupin's game, from "The Purloined Letter," of finding words hidden in plain sight. Where are the *ALPS*? *A* hangs at a tip-of-the-hat angle above the *T* in *TORINO*. *L* balances on the *O* of *MILANO*. *P* fills in between *Trento* and *LICHTENSTEIN*, while *S* is squeezed in the triangle formed by *A U S T R I A*, *Klagenfurt*, and *Brenner Pass*.

S A H A R A is spread across seven countries but has only six letters! Chad is lightly spurned by *R*'s heel. Sahara.

How do you map a desert?

The connected lines are oil pipelines. Dotted lines show intermittent rivers. In Yemen, north of the Hadramaut, these rivers end in arrowheads, to show which way they were heading when lost sight of. Stippled blue tracts show dry salt lakes. Here's Algeria's Grand Erg Occidental. Here's her Grand Erg Oriental an inch to the right. Here's the Erg Chech – these are all just italics in white space. *Tanezrouft*, *El Djouf*, *El Mreyyé*, all in italics, large and well-spaced, but what is it that they're naming?

Three dots in an upright triangle indicate "ruins," the dots showing disconnection, the triangle signifying a falling off from the built square in an entropic heap. That's clear. Along the

Algerian roads (red lines) there are towns (black dots); but Poste Maurice Cortier is also Bidon 5. Bidon means oil-drum. Travel northwest from Timbuktu and there is bugger-all, not even an oil-drum, mate. The Empty Quarter in Arabia has a single feature, the meteor craters at Al Hadidah. Holes in vacancy.

This mapping is desperate. I am reading words, guessing how they're pronounced: Drâa, Mreyyé? Uncanny articulations drifting in the ergs, where dune-crests move like slow lips.

Recall the attention to the matter at hand. What do maps show, what does the mapmaker want me to see in the signs inscribed on the map?

8. Following the signs

But the attention is not so easily governed! Attention steers poorly over the ocean, where it cedes to another sort of looking, one with a taste for vastness, moving patterns like wave crests licked into foam by the wind. This oceanic seeing is almost the same as hearing. A seeing-without-looking, a hearing-without-listening. A taking in.

Very zen, now get back in your cage. The eagle reader does like objects. Homer's Hermes, who skims the ocean like a bird, has no kind words for it: salt, barren, fish-infested, unplowable. Homer asks our attention to mappable matters such as the path a spear travels through a male body. It is impossible not to follow Homer's spears, though attention may want to linger in less fierce places where questions open. Nausicaa and her maids, when they play ball on the riverbank, are they wearing anything at all? They spread their clothes on the grass to dry after doing the laundry. Have they put them back on? What does Odysseus see when he comes

forth naked? Is his decision not to hug Nausicaa's knees governed by a sense of the coordinates at which that action would place his mouth?

And what body do they see, Nausicaa and the girls, when Odysseus strides out of his boar's lair? Feral, crusted with the salt scurf of ocean, naked save for the branch with which he covers his parts. It's a sort of cancellation, that spray of leaves, it's a sort of mapping too, but of what? A presence, an absence? A sign in any case to make a girl's mouth open as she wonders if a stranger has become a boar-woman.

What map charts the course of wondering?

9. Psychogeography

In 1925 Le Corbusier drew a map, the "Plan Voisin," that imagined the Right Bank of Paris leveled along a belt as wide as the Île Saint-Louis is long and stretching north of it from the Seine through the Marais, the late-medieval quarter inhabited by courtiers and Jews. The razing of the old ghetto and the houses where Mozart stayed and Madame de Sévigné lived leaves a pleasingly rectangular void. Le Corbusier filled it in notionally with a grid of cross-shaped high-rise buildings. In the same spirit Januz Deryng proposed in the 60s a plan of *garages noyaux*, a rectangular grid of underground parking garages beneath Paris. And in 1968 Les Halles, the belly of Paris, a whole district of streets enclosed in cast-iron and glass to house its mouth-watering array of produce and seafood, was replaced by an important dot on the map of subway and commuter rail lines.

The map the very size of the thing. The 1:1 scale map imagined by Borges and Bioy Casares as created and then discarded by the geographers of a nameless Empire has here

replaced the place. The RER station is hidden underground, and one is faced by a hole rimmed by a shopping mall. This vacancy is an apt symbol for the Society of the Spectacle attacked by Guy Debord, clearest (and loudest) voice among the Situationists. “Spectacle,” power making itself visible, replaces experience with empty systems within which the individual must signify as worker, bowler, diner, sleeper, each in turn exclusively. “Spectacle” forbids one to live, work, drink, create, love, water the plants, walk the dog, or piss in the alley, all in one district without changing clothes or facial expression.

In the Situationist city you would drift through “situations”; and “situations” are the unit of experience that must overturn “spectacle.” While waiting for this city to be built, you can practice the drift in the city where you live. Like Baudelaire’s flâneurs you can amble with no business or destination, taking in, beyond what the map shows of measured ways and distances, the quality of light, the movement of air, the glimpses into houses, the sense of earlier times, the associations of ideas. You can hear sounds, their echoes, their pitch and reverberation. You can use smells as a dog might to identify territories not as claimed but as marked with a distinction you might yourself wish to alter or enrich. You could sense where the atmosphere thickens into an integrity and where it thins out to the ghost of place, the mere map, the spectacle. Feel out which directions invite and which prohibit your reverie.

Situationists called what you’ve been doing “psychogeography” and found a way to map it. Guy Debord and Asger Jorn produced two maps: the *Guide psychogéographique de Paris* (1956) and *Naked City* (1957). To make them they took a particularly fussy street atlas, the *Guide Taride* of 1951, and scissored out the parts of Paris still animated by *unité d’ambiance*, an integrity of experience. The rest of the city was junked. They laid out the selected bits and linked them with arrows that trace “slopes”: the “spontaneous tendencies for orientation of a

subject who traverses that milieu without regard for practical considerations” (Sadler, 88). That is, while drifting. The fatter the arrow the stronger the tendency. Go there.

C'est charmant, tout ça. But who is this rather puritanical subject who must read “ambiance” and throw away the map? For whom a map is, not an engine that creates strangeness unleashing fantasy, but a means of control, a sign that “situation” has been converted into “spectacle” by the powerful? Fireworks, those domesticated volcanoes, are a spectacle we experience. When they burst in patterns on the sky, our mouths open. The grass grows through the cracks at any mall, or even Disney World.

10. Subject to strangeness

Who thinks a map sufficient to guarantee the subject from the strange?

Even reading the soberest maps the most disciplined eye travels to anomalies. Place name, first of all: Nancy, See Me No More. The first is in France, the second in Jamaica, and in upstate New York, Greene County, you can travel a road called the Surprise-Result Road, between the villages of Surprise and Result. Or Route 81 will take you from Surprise to Climax, the Surprise-Climax itinerary. Easy to lose yourself, though Rte. 81 is a straight highway maintained by the state. Climax is in the township of Coxsackie, which marries the lingam and the yoni in its name. And nearby one reads, with an eye aroused, “All Peat Beds Road,” “Beaver Dam Lake,” “East Honey Hollow.”

Roads should proceed as straightforwardly as State Rte. 81, so fantastically twisty roads draw the eye. The highway linking Marrakesh and Taroudannt across the High Atlas goes mad between Mzouzite and Tafinegoult: the pass of Tizi-n-Test. This road has the width of a car and

a half. So fierce are the turns and so sheer the drops that drivers take the pass at night, to see headlights coming before the truck roars at you round the bend.

Islands are self-contained worlds and should be rounded to an integrity. Gran Canaria does this very well, spreading out evenly in all directions from its volcanic core; so does Nevis, so does Marie Galante. Puerto Rico reads as clearly as a brick, but what about Guadeloupe? A wasp-waist isthmus joins its twinned bodies of Grande Terre and Basse Terre and divides the Grand from the Petit Cul de Sac Marin.

Electoral districts should be islands of shared regional interest, but some have been drawn up by political hysterics: the map the Colorado Supreme Court struck down in 2002, or the North Carolina one, whose first congressional district is an amazing archipelago dotted across the eastern plain, while its twelfth, the ductile “I-85” district, is so drawn out into one dimension (or dementia) as to escape from the category of district and enter that of *idée fixe*.

Someone has rigged the world. Is the reality of a political party’s power indifferent to a reader of maps? A subject learns the hard way not to read from a presumption of some absolute, true “there.” *El sombre de la razòn produce monstruos* in one of Goya’s engravings, and signification, like the sleep of reason, produces illegibilities.

11. The Gulf of Mexico

On navigational maps the subject is merely displaced. On a chart of Buzzard’s Bay the void of ocean fills with channels, buoys, bell-buoys, lightships, shoals and reefs, sunken ships, and unexploded depth-charges, a pinpointing of hazards among a serry of figures measuring the fathoms between a boat’s thin bottom and Davy Jones’ Locker. Terra firma is colored yellow,

blue's complement, and purged of all signs but landmarks. Water towers, steeples, the pylons of the power grid, the campaniles firemen practice climbing on, these occupy the land.

What must I make of the maps recording the dreams of Siberians, when my own so far exceed my powers of analysis? I stare at the map that Adolf Wölfli, locked in a Swiss lunatic asylum, made in 1911 of "The Gulf of Mexico."

The Gulf arcs across the bottom of the map, a band of blue more like river than ocean, in fact there appears to be a bridge across its middle. How odd. It is bordered to the north by five named places: another gulf, the "Golf v. Campeche"; two cities in Texas, Galveston and "Brunsville"; and the mysterious "Tarapasa" and still more cryptic "Hug Chrütz." Rivers flow down to the Gulf, and one might be the Rio Grande, since it enters beside "Brunsville." Other rivers flow away from it, if all the ramifying blue veins are indeed rivers.

But what is represented by the demilune below the Gulf, filled in with a couple of daisies, a couple of skulls with crosses growing out of them, and some writing? More of the cross-capped skulls, or faces with empty eyes are to be found north of the Gulf, and what do they signify? Pilgrimage destinations, cathedrals, the sites of martyrdoms? Why does the Galveston-Brownsville highway turn into a belt of music behind "Tarapasa"?

And what are the ectoplasmic lobes, eye-shaped but marked near the rounded end with a secondary eye, a long dark slot? A red one in the upper left rubs its belly on the back of a white one that faces and is linked to its mirror-image. And all along the right bank of the river that flows north-north-west through the upper middle of Wölfli's map there stand, dividing the affluent streams, what appear to be angels, whose wings have those same eyes! Or they're not wings but creatures, standing looking up at the angels on twin forelegs pressing against the bell-shaped bodies that each contain an entire other figure. Wölfli called these shapes "snails," or,

alternately, “birds.” He had names for different sorts, although it is hard to grasp the taxonomy; but there are “bandage-snails” and “snail-star-rings,” “herdsman-“ and “herdswoman-snails”: “fountain-birds,” “midwife-birds,” “music-barrel-birds” (Spoerri and Baumann, 17). Perhaps the cluster of overwritten crumpled papers at bottom right, growing behind some half-timbered houses in what ought to be Texas, gives the legend for these, but they are illegible and if legible would be incomprehensible.

12. Speechless Maps

What is the Gulf of Mexico? We don’t know. As for Wölfli, his lips are sealed. His rivers have no mouths, only ramifications. This is a map with no negative space. Everything in it is both object and frame, everything signifies, but what, and to whom?

Wölfli is, we may say, no cartographer. He is an artist, he is not a normal artist either, he is an “outsider” artist, almost the first, archetypal outsider. Thirty-five years in Waldau Mental Asylum in Bern, committed for soliciting sex from girls, the first fourteen years old, the second seven, the last three. Then fifteen years of death, till in 1945 Jean Dubuffet visited Waldau and took away some drawings as the core of his famous collection of *art brut* – raw art. Soon André Breton proclaimed Wölfli a surrealist saint.

But before he was an artist he was a case history, whose work would have gone the same way as most art-therapy scrawls, had it not been for a doctor at Waldau, Walter Morgenthaler, who wrote a monograph in 1921. *Ein Geisteskranker als Künstler*: a lunatic as artist.

But still a lunatic, and under that sign a mapmaker. Wölfli’s work maps – in all its particulars diligently maps – a world we will never live in, whose narratives we are incapable of

following, so that it must be the mapmaking itself we admire. It is the framing, it is the division and subdivision of the framed space, it is the figures that fill those frames that we squint at, the figures drawn so meticulously in lines that turn to further frame. For there are no shadings in a Wölflli drawing, only more or less densely subdivided areas. The fascination we feel, as the Gulf of Mexico pulls us nearer to its figured surface, which is closed, which never will take us in, grows from our sense that it must be legible; that if we could read it, it would be a total text, a scripture containing what a world contains, written in the language of Adam.

In this it would be just the opposite of the useless, arid, map-in-the-scale-of-the-place-itself imagined by Borges and Bioy Casares.

But we can't read it.

13. The reader of maps

What can we read? The Book of the World is unbound. Readers follow the maps they impose, finding pattern and meaning in stars, cards, tea leaves, coins, oracle bones. Emblem wishes its own legibility into being, and some emblems endure: the map of the benzene-ring. But really the world has no frame. A map falsifies it, or the world falsifies the map. What's a true map? If we depend on maps to read, then legibility is a fantasy.

But fantasy is a reality.

Contained by it, we shift our scale and frame. The maps we traverse read us; the subject is a creature of the map. To prevent the hardening of fantasy into obsession, the maps must continue to shift us. The reader who must always only be the eagle reader, flying high above the battlefield where Ocskay's and Quasdanovich's detachments forever worm through north Italian

valleys to engage with the orc-hordes of Mordor – that reader, though high enough to see the frame of the map and read its legend, though keen-eyed enough to see from so high the hole in Minta’s stocking, still will never press fingertip or lips against her glow.

The reader must drift from map to map, and, drifting, must register the flicker of frames. Each frame reveals a wholeness and its lover. Like moving lips they open and take in, they narrow and express. Opening and narrowing, they whisper an endless polysyllabic “I” in all the phonemes of the emblematic, the fantastic, the practical, the mad, till the long name swells to a roundness.

The reader of maps is the only reader. The reader’s choice: flat or round?

Works Cited or Consulted

“Africa.” Cartographic Division of the National Geographic Society. Washington, 1980.

Borges, Jorge Luis, and Adolfo Bioy Casares. “On Exactitude in Science.” *Extraordinary Tales*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1971. Page 123.

Esposito, (Brigadier General) Vincent J. and (Colonel) Robert Elting. *A Military History and Atlas of the Napoleonic Wars*. Compiled for the Department of Military Art and Engineering, The United States Military Academy, West Point, NY. New York: Praeger, 1964. Map 15: “Italian Campaigns, 1796-7. Würmser’s First Advance. Battle of Lonato.”

“Greene County. New York State.” Jimapco Map C11. 5th Edition. Burnt Hills, NY, 1986.

Harmon, Katherine, ed. *You Are Here: Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003. *Maps passim*.

“Maroc.” Michelin Editions du Voyage, Map 959. Paris: Michelin, 2000.

Sadler, Simon. *The Situationist City*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998. Chapters 1 and 2, *passim*, and Figures 1.5, 1.8, 1.9, 1.32. Quotation on page 20 from Asger Jorn, *Helhesten 2*, cited by Lambert, *COBRA* (New York: Abbeville), 36-7, cited by Sadler, 88.

Scudéry, Madeleine de. *Clélie, histoire romaine*. Paris, 1654. Map by François Chauveau.

Spoerri, Elka, and Daniel Baumann. *The Art of Adolf Wölfli*. St. Adolf-Giant-Creation. Princeton, NJ: American Folk Art Museum in association with Princeton University Press, 2003. Pages 15-19 and Plate Ag243-39, page 65.

Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1927. Harvest paperback edition.

LIST OF MAPS

1. Marshall Islands palm-fiber map photographed on page 10 of Charles Bricker and R.V. Tooley, Landmarks of Mapmaking. An Illustrated Survey of Maps and Mapmakers. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, Co. 1976.
2. From the Redstone Diary for 1997, Maps to Get Lost In, published by Chronicle Books, 275 Fifth Street, San Francisco, 94103 (ISBN 0-8118-1392-4: The Map of Matrimony opposite the page beginning February 3rd. (Credits attribute this image to “courtesy Peter Knowle.”)
3. From the Redstone Diary for 1997, Maps to Get Lost In, published by Chronicle Books, 275 Fifth Street, San Francisco, 94103 (ISBN 0-8118-1392-4: Siberian dream map opposite page beginning April 7th. No credit listed.
4. From the Redstone Diary for 1997, Maps to Get Lost In, published by Chronicle Books, 275 Fifth Street, San Francisco, 94103 (ISBN 0-8118-1392-4: Poem map containing lovers’ profiles opposite page beginning June 23rd. Credit page cites a copyright to James Dalgety.
5. From the Redstone Diary for 1997, Maps to Get Lost In, published by Chronicle Books, 275 Fifth Street, San Francisco, 94103 (ISBN 0-8118-1392-4: Back-cover map for Ladies in Hades opposite page beginning August 25th. Book was published by Dell Books in 1950.
6. From the Redstone Diary for 1997, Maps to Get Lost In, published by Chronicle Books, 275 Fifth Street, San Francisco, 94103 (ISBN 0-8118-1392-4: “A Map of the World as Seen by Him” by James Montgomery Flagg, opposite page beginning October 6th. Credit page cites a copyright held by James Dalgety.
7. From the Redstone Diary for 1997, Maps to Get Lost In, published by Chronicle Books, 275 Fifth Street, San Francisco, 94103 (ISBN 0-8118-1392-4: Adolf Wölfli, cosmological drawing

dated 1910, opposite page beginning June 2nd. Copyright held by Aldof Wölfli Foundation in Bern.

8. Maps from Hardy de Périni, *Batailles Françaises, Tome III: Louis XIII et Richelieu* (Paris: Flammarion, n.d.) Public domain.

9. Guy Debord, “Life continues to be free and easy,” frontispiece to Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998).

10. Ordnance Survey (UK) map: Explorer 143. Warminster & Trowbridge. Westbury & Mere. ISBN 031921771X

11. William Faulkner, maps to Yoknapatawpha County in Absalom, Absalom (NY: Random House [Modern Library edition], 1936) and The Portable Faulkner (NY: Random House, 1948).

12. Maps by J.R.R. Tolkien and C.J.R. Tolkien to accompany The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings (both Boston: Houghton Mifflin). Specific maps wanted: Front endpaper map to The Hobbit. “Shire map” following preface in The Fellowship of the Ring. Middle-Earth map attached to The Fellowship of the Ring. Map of Gondor and Mordor attached to The Return of the King.

13. Map of Middle-earth from Manguel and Guadalupi, The Dictionary of Imaginary Places (NY: Macmillan, 1980), page 243.