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“I SHALL HAVE SHARE IN THIS MOST HAPPY WRECK”:
SHAKESPEARE’S TOPOLOGY OF SHIPWRECKING

BY

INA HABERMANN

Introduction: Happy Wrecks

“I shall have share in this most happy wreck” (*TN*, 5.1.259),¹ Duke Orsino says towards the end of *Twelfth Night* when he understands that he will not win the favour of the Lady Olivia, but that his servant Cesario is in fact the immensely desirable, devoted and available Viola. Of course he loses no time in picking this jewel out of the flotsam and jetsam washed onto his shores. Orsino’s notion of sharing in the wreck has both a historical and a philosophical dimension. Historically, the populations of dangerous coastal regions saw the goods taken from the shore as part of their natural right, as God’s gift to people living in a stern environment.² In philosophical discourse, the “happy wreck” recalls the religious notion of *felix culpa*, which rewrites seeming calamity as an ultimate expression of God’s grace, obscured temporarily by man’s partial view. Shakespeare adopts this notion when he uses shipwreck as a plot device in comedies and romances, where, in contrast to his metaphorical usage of shipwreck in tragedy, wrecks turn out to be ‘happy wrecks’ in the end. The ‘happy wreck’ is a *topos*, sometimes phrased as a commonplace. Viola exclaims, for example, when she hears her brother’s name mentioned, hoping that he is still alive: “O, if it prove, / Tempests are kind, and salt waves fresh in love!” (*TN*, 4.1.348–349) Similarly, Pericles says, when he finds his father’s armour washed ashore: “My shipwreck now’s no ill, / Since I have here my father gave in’s will.” (*Per*, 5.168–169)³

Despite its familiarity, or even triteness, as an image and a plot device, shipwreck in Shakespeare is a highly complex phenomenon, and in this essay I want to take a fresh look at its function in the plays. Previous approaches have focussed on the

¹ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, ed. by Keir Elam. The Arden Shakespeare Third Series (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2008). All citations from *Twelfth Night* follow this edition.

² Ina Habermann, “Death by Water: The Theory and Practice of Shipwrecking”, in Bernhard Klein (ed.), *Fictions of the Sea: Critical Perspectives on the Ocean in British Literature and Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2002), 104–120.

³ William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 1997). All citations from *Pericles* follow this edition.

philosophical and ethical implications of the “shipwreck with spectator”⁴ or on the motif of the voyage, both actual and figurative, because those who suffer shipwreck have of course been on a voyage; they have been covering ground, even though they do not arrive where they planned to go. In his book *Sea-Marks*, Philip Edwards offers a comparative study of early modern uses of the “traditional metaphor of the voyage”⁵ and the related explorations of identity. Edwards also draws attention to the prominent use of shipwreck in the comedies and romances, pointing out how indifferent to verisimilitude Shakespeare appears to be in the use of this plot device. “The dramatist taketh away, and the dramatist giveth”, Edwards writes, going on to argue that “[s]hipwreck symbolizes loss, deprivation, separation – the condition towards which tragedies work, and from which comedies start”.⁶ This is a valid point, and related arguments have been made time and again, also with particular reference to classical models of the epic voyage such as the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*.⁷ Rather than focussing on such kinds of spatial practice as the voyage or the itinerary, however, I want to take a different road towards exploring the significance of space in Shakespeare’s shipwreck plays. Recent theories of space have shifted the perspective from space as expanse or container to topology as a particular way of thinking about spatial constellations. This also implies a shift of emphasis from topography, mapping and the landscape paradigm to a more abstract notion of space which is yet conducive to a more thorough understanding of the spatial basis of social and cultural exchange. After a brief discussion of the concept of topology, I will explore the specific ways in which shipwreck *connects* places and people in Shakespeare’s work, moving beyond the discussion of geography or topography to a textual and theatrical construction of relational space.

The concept of topology emerged in the nineteenth century, gained particular currency in the humanities in the context of structuralism and cybernetics in the 1970s and has recently been revived again in response to the challenges of digitalization,

⁴ See Habermann (2002), 105–109; Steve Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare’s Ocean* (London: Continuum, 2009), 19–23; and Dan Brayton, “Sounding the Deep: *Shakespeare and the Sea Revisited*”, *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 46:2 (2010), 191.

⁵ Philip Edwards, *Sea Mark: The Metaphorical Voyage, Spenser to Milton* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 140, 147.

⁷ See for example James V. Morrison, “Shipwreck Encounters: Odyssean Wanderings, *The Tempest*, and the Post-Colonial World”, *Classical and Modern Literature* 20:4 (2000), 59–90; and Barbara A. Mowat, “‘Knowing I loved my books’: Reading *The Tempest* Intertextually”, in Peter Hulme / William H. Sherman (eds.), *The Tempest and Its Travels* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 27–36.

the internet and virtual reality.⁸ Focussed on relational space, the concept originally derives from mathematics, or modern qualitative geometry, which seeks to describe spatial constellations, networks and objects abstracted from physical expanse. Generally speaking, two structures are homeomorphic, i.e. topologically equivalent, if one can be transformed into the other without cutting or gluing, since the focus is on the invariant qualitative properties of objects / spaces. The most famous visualisation of this is the 'mug-and-torus-morph', an animation which shows a mug morphing into a doughnut shaped ring and back, the one hole in the middle of the ring shifted and reduced to form the mug's handle, and one side of the ring blown up to form the body of the mug. Topology is the study of continuity and connectivity; it explores and describes equivalence within difference, structural analogies and abstractions from physical space, or geographical "first space", as Edward Soja would say.⁹ While recent interest in topology was created by the challenges of globalisation and media development, it is most of all a logical consequence of the insight in spatial studies that the cultural study of space must go beyond the simplistic notion of space as container or substance in order to embrace functional relationships and the intricate connections between culture and nature which create space as we can perceive and articulate it. This is not to say that distances and the physical features of the earth have become irrelevant, but conceived of *a priori*, space 'as such' is outside cultural discourse. Topography, the writing and visual representation of space, is part of cultural discourse, and it should be supplemented by topology as a conceptual way of thinking about cultural constellations. This would enable us to give more adequate descriptions of cultural phenomena by highlighting the connections between categorically different and yet interrelated elements, such as geography, historical individuals and literary characters, cultural artefacts and different time levels, by conceiving of them as aspects of multiple, dynamic spaces. In this essay, I will read Shakespeare's shipwreck plays as dramatizations of such spaces.

Jurij Lotman already used the concept of topology in his spatial semiotics which focused on the typological analysis of literary works. As he argues, spaces are

⁸ See Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Stephan Günzel (ed.), *Topologie: Zur Raumbeschreibung in den Kultur- und Medienwissenschaften* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007); and Wolfram Pichler / Ralph Ubl (eds.), *Topologie: Falten, Knoten, Netze, Stülpungen in Kunst und Theorie* (Wien: Turia + Kant, 2009).

⁹ Cf. Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989); and Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

demarcated by boundaries, whose crossing constitutes an event within the story.¹⁰ Still, Lotman's conception of topological space remains rather static, in line with the structuralist preoccupation with binary oppositions. In contrast, Michel Serres drew attention to the importance of in-between spaces which express the dynamic aspect of topology, as it obtains particularly in mythical discourse. To Serres, the mathematical and the mythical view of space appear to be two sides of the same coin: "Le pont d'Euler et le pont de vaisseaux sur l'Hellespont sous la tempête, le complexe de Listing ou Maxwell et le dédale de la Crète."¹¹ Thus, he argues, we ought to read myth, and the literature which grew out of mythical discourse, in terms of its spatial constellations, connections and transformations.

The early modern period saw the emergence of new technologies based on Euclidian space, such as mapping and navigation, which imply a new view of the world and new ways of negotiating space. Stephan Günzel argues that even though modern seafaring contributed to a continual expansion of horizons, it eventually needed to acknowledge a limit, while the illusion of the infinity of earthly space can only be maintained in a two-dimensional setting: "The earth is infinite as a plain, but finite as space."¹² It is in fact a paradox that the discovery of homogeneous infinite space in the early modern period produces its own kind of limit. Even now, as Günzel notes, due to our physical makeup, we do not fully inhabit the third dimension, and thinking in terms of topology can help us develop a more complex understanding of cultural practices of space. Importantly, for my argument here, Günzel reminds us of Kurt Lewin's psychological field theory and his concept of "hodological space", derived from the Greek *hodos*, or path, which denotes the topological space created by the movements and actions of individuals or groups.¹³ These can be, for example, trade routes or infrastructures created by various types of voyage such as pilgrimages or crusades. As topological structures, they include such different elements as the roads or paths and bridges, the fortresses and inns, wells and water supplies, pilots, guides, highwaymen and

¹⁰ Jurij Lotman, "Zur Metasprache typologischer Kulturbeschreibungen", in Karl Eimermacher (ed.), *Aufsätze zur Theorie und Methodologie der Literatur und Kultur* (Kronberg: Scriptor, 1974), 338–377.

¹¹ Michael Serres, "Discours et Parcours" (1974), in Jean-Marie Benoist (ed.), *Identité: Séminaire interdisciplinaire dirigé par Claude Lévi-Strauss* (Paris: Editions Grasset et Fasquelle, 1977), 39. "Mon corps, je n'y peux rien, n'est pas plongé dans une variété unique et spécifiée. Il travaille dans l'espace euclidien, mais il y travaille seulement. Il voit dans un espace projectif, il touche, caresse et manie dans une variété topologique, il souffre dans une autre, entend et communique dans une troisième. Et ainsi, tout autant qu'on voudra." (Ibid., 30).

¹² Günzel (2007), 17.

¹³ Ibid., 23; see also Kurt Lewin, *Principles of Topological Psychology* (Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2007 [1936]).

innkeepers etc. These serve as links connecting geographical, social and psychic spaces, mapping them onto each other, or transforming them into each other. In his shipwreck plays, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night* and the collaborative *Pericles*, Shakespeare constructs theatrical topologies which dramatise such hodological spaces. Thus, he creates worlds with multiple cultural resonances which are open to an infinite number of interpretations and yet complete as artistic creations. Despite the richness of these plays, however, hodological spaces still do not realise the full potential of topology, since they ultimately remain focussed on the two-dimensional ways in which spaces can be divided or connected by the characters' movements. In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare revisits topological world making and adds the view from outside, or above, thus including a third dimension which enables us to see the spatial dynamics at work, showing how spaces are transformed into each other through stagecraft, as if by magic.

Hodological spaces in Twelfth Night, The Comedy of Errors and Pericles

Shakespeare's shipwrecks foreground and create relations between people and situate them in space. The question is of course why the theatrical plot device for this needs to be shipwreck rather than just travel. In order to answer this question I would like to go back to an argument Stephen Greenblatt makes in *Shakespearean Negotiations* about *Twelfth Night*, in his essay "Fiction and Friction".¹⁴ Greenblatt's focus here is gender cross-dressing, and he emphasises the line "Nature to her bias drew in that" (*TN*, 5.1.253), which refers to Olivia's miraculous rescue, by Sebastian's timely appearance, from being "contracted to a maid" (*TN*, 5.1.254). Examining the metaphor and its origin in the game of bowls, Greenblatt observes:

To be matched with someone of one's own sex is to follow an unnaturally straight line; heterosexuality, as the image of nature drawing to her bias implies, is bent. [...] Something off-center, then, is implanted in nature – in Olivia's nature, in the nature that more generally governs the plot of the comedy – that deflects men and women from their ostensible desires and toward the pairings for which they are destined. This deflection can be revealed only in movement.¹⁵

I suggest that shipwreck is the most powerful image, conveniently also to be used as a plot device, of just such a deflection revealed in movement. Against their will, Sebastian and Viola are drawn to the shores of Illyria, where they find the partners

¹⁴ Stephen Greenblatt, "Fiction and Friction", in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 66–93.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

for whom they are destined. The straightforward sea voyage, like the unnaturally straight line, would have missed its mark, while the course of 'nature' is bent. In this conception of shipwreck, nature is revealed as destiny from a higher vantage point, while the conscious decisions of the characters appear short sighted. The mediator in such matters, as Klaus Reichert has shown with regard to *The Merchant of Venice*, is the goddess Fortune.¹⁶ As Shakespeare succinctly puts it in a commonplace-like closing couplet in *Cymbeline*: "All other doubts, by time let them be cleared: / Fortune brings in some boats that are not steered." (*Cym*, 4.3.45–46) In *Twelfth Night*, Viola quibbles with the Captain about chance after they have escaped from the waves, and Sebastian appears to acknowledge the necessity of swerving when he tells Antonio: "My determinate voyage is mere extravagancy" (*TN*, 2.1.9–10), which the Norton Shakespeare glosses as "My true / destined voyage is idle wandering"¹⁷ and the Arden edition as "My only travel plan is to wander aimlessly".¹⁸ Only this "extragancy", this swerving movement, enables the character to cross the path of his future wife. The space circumscribed, or rather created by this operation, is Illyria. Significantly, the wrecked company is not really lost there, because the Captain knows it well, having been "bred and born / Not three hours' travel from this very place." (*TN*, 1.2.20–21) Viola has heard of Orsino from her father, and the Captain possesses detailed information about the state of affairs between Orsino and Olivia. Moreover, it transpires at the end that Orsino also knows Viola's and Sebastian's father and can confidently testify to his high status. (*TN*, 5.1.257) The swerving movement has not catapulted the characters out of their world, but shipwreck has expanded their options by effecting a connection with new spaces, at the same time creating a more tightly knit topology of social relations.

Shakespeare situates these new spaces in the Eastern Mediterranean where he places the action, avoiding locations, however, whose associations would be too specific and thus enforce a reading in terms of political allegory. As Constance Relihan has shown, Shakespeare reduces the orientalism of his source set in Constantinople and Cyprus, Barnaby Riche's "Apollonius and Silla".¹⁹ Geographically, Illyria is part of the Adriatic coast, and the Illyrians fought the Romans until the former's subjection led to the creation of the province Illyricum. As Keir Elam explains in his introduction to the play, "[i]n Shakespeare's time the name Illyria

¹⁶ Klaus Reichert, *Fortuna oder die Beständigkeit des Wechsels* (Frankfurt / Main: Suhrkamp, 1985).

¹⁷ Shakespeare (1997), 1781.

¹⁸ Shakespeare (2008), 205.

¹⁹ Constance C. Relihan, "Erasing the East from *Twelfth Night*", in Joyce Green MacDonald (ed.), *Race, Ethnicity, and Power in the Renaissance* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997), 89–94.

could still be used to refer to part of the Adriatic coast – roughly Dalmatia – at the time under the dominion of the Venetian republic. It was thus historically a hybrid land, geographically Mediterranean, ethnically Slav but politically 'Italian'.²⁰ This makes it an ideal setting for a topology with multiple cultural resonances. "Messaline", Sebastian and Viola's home, could refer to Messina in Sicily, as the Norton Shakespeare suggests, or to Massilia / Marseille, or it could principally be derived from a textual source, Plautus's *Menaechmi*, as Elam suggests.²¹ So could Illyria, which is mentioned in Book Four of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in relation to the fate of Cadmus and his wife.²² Other geographical markers include Maria's famous mention of the "new map with the augmentation of the Indies" (*TN*, 3.2.67–68) as well as the information that Antonio's privateering, which made him Orsino's enemy, involved action in Crete (*TN*, 5.1.55). These geographical and textual spaces are interwoven with a layer of references to contemporary London. Obviously, geographical and geopolitical accuracy is not intended, which leads Elam to see Illyria as "a utopia, a no-place that could be any place. As such, it serves Shakespeare as an alibi, an 'elsewhere' not fully identifiable with any well-defined territory. This in turn allows audiences and directors to project their own mental sets onto the space".²³

From a topological point of view, this argument appears rather vague. Illyria, with its hybrid but particular resonances, could not be "any place". Rather than setting up an ultimately unhelpful opposition between geographical accuracy and fancy, I think it is more productive to ask which spatial elements are linked in the play, and how they are linked. In terms of theatrical topology, the Eastern Mediterranean world, both classical, by way of mythology and literature, and early modern, through references to mapping, contemporary maritime culture and privateering, is linked in the play to England, thus joining the Eastern Mediterranean with its ancient history and rich cultural resonances to the north-western margin of the old world. Links are forged between people, places and cultural artefacts, between the fictional and the real, and with London audiences who follow the perilous voyages of the characters, thus entering their world of joys and sorrows – strange, with Mediterranean flavour and Italian style, and yet recognisable. On the level of the action, Shakespeare dramatizes hodological space, a Mediterranean space created through the movements of the characters, with Messaline as the point of departure and Illyria as both the crossroads and goal. Viola and Sebastian's shipwreck, their enforced swerving from their course, provides the impulse for telling their story,

²⁰ Shakespeare (2008), 71.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

thus creating a theatrical topology which brings them into contact with contemporary London audiences, and, via cultural tradition, with us. For us as audiences and readers, it is less a matter of projecting our own mental sets onto the dramatic space, as Elam suggests, but of entering a topological structure: a dramatic constellation or a text woven out of cultural memory. The playwright has created a world of strange familiarity, which we may acknowledge ours.

The next two shipwreck plays I want to consider, *The Comedy of Errors* and *Pericles*, span Shakespeare's career: one early, the other late and collaborative, and both based on the tale of Apollonius of Tyre as related in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. In these plays, the stakes are higher than in *Twelfth Night*. In both cases, families have been separated through shipwreck for half a lifetime. The question might well be asked why such pain is inflicted on the characters, since they have not brought this doom upon themselves in the same way as Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* by outrageous behaviour. A close look at Egeon's account of the separation in *The Comedy of Errors* does reveal actions which turn out to be mistaken. The journey, which Egeon considered ill-advised from the start, was undertaken because "My wife, not meanly proud of two such boys, / Made daily motions for our home return." (*CE*, 1.1.58–59)²⁴ During the storm, the proud parents distinguish between their twins, Emilia caring for the "latter-born" (*CE*, 1.1.78) and Egeon for the elder, tying themselves with the respective Dromios to different ends of a mast, so that they are separated when the ship splits asunder. The rift goes right through the family, which leads to their rescue by two different parties. So in a way, the family suffers the consequences of making distinctions where they cannot, or should not be made, which appears paradoxical in a play where the dramatic complications arise from a failure to distinguish between the twin pairs of Antipholi and Dromios. The issue is how to make the right kinds of distinctions in a world of blurred boundaries. Twinning emerges here as a topologically significant operation since it serves to conflate division and connection. The Dromios' conclusion "We came into the world like brother and brother, / And now let's go hand in hand, not one before the other" (*CE*, 5.1.426–427) perhaps contains a lesson which Egeon and Emilia needed to learn.

Still, thinking in terms of T. S. Eliot's "objective correlative",²⁵ their 'punishment' appears to be out of proportion with the original error, which raises questions about the need for their swerving movements. The play evokes an Eastern Mediterranean world linked by family ties. Antipholus of Syracuse has come to Ephesus on a

²⁴ Shakespeare (1997). All citations from *The Comedy of Errors* follow this edition.

²⁵ T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems", in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1953 [1920]), 100.

quest to find his brother, and Egeon's wanderings in search of his son took him to Greece and Asia (*CE*, 1.2.132–133) and finally to Ephesus, where he is forbidden to go because of a commercial war. Looking for his son, he enters Ephesus despite the prohibition, there to be reunited with his wife and sons. Thus, a family spread all over the Eastern Mediterranean creates a hodological space circumscribed by their dispersal and deserved reunion. This space is integrated into a theatrical topology and linked within the drama with resonances of contemporary London as well as with intertexts such as classical comedy and medieval romance. The play thus manages to integrate far-flung places, different time levels and cultural artefacts as well as pagan and Christian culture – in fact, to make them 'familiar'. The linking gesture is dramatically reproduced on the plot level in the commercial dealings of the artisans, courtesans and merchants of Ephesus, perhaps best symbolised by the frequent instances of binding and the appearance of ropes and chains, golden or otherwise. While shipwreck was the means to disperse the family, the swerving movements of the individual members towards reunion create the impression of a closely-knit, familiar world. Finally, everyone is assembled in 'Ephesus', and that union is mirrored in the London playhouse.

The same gesture is repeated in *Pericles*. Pericles is shipwrecked twice, or perhaps even three times – the first time, he finds his wife Thaisa, the second time, he loses her, supposed dead after delivery of the baby daughter, and thrown overboard by the superstitious crew to appease the storm. The third time, as Gower relates,

We left him on the sea. Waves there him tossed,
Whence, driven tofore the winds, he is arrived
Here where his daughter dwells.

(*Per*, 20.13–15)

After the reunion of father and daughter, the dramatist does not even bother to include another shipwreck, but Diana herself descends from the heavens to direct Pericles to her temple in Ephesus where he will be reunited with Thaisa. As in *The Comedy of Errors*, the Eastern Mediterranean is made familiar through the ties of a family dispersed by shipwreck. This is in contrast to Constance Relihan's argument that Shakespeare introduces Otherness through the setting, thus amplifying "the political implications of his text".²⁶ "If the play is read in relation to sixteenth and early seventeenth-century conceptions of Eastern Mediterranean cultures", Relihan says, "it reveals an ambivalence toward the political and familial structures it asks us to accept".²⁷ According to Relihan, Shakespeare creates a "liminal

²⁶ Relihan (1992), 71–72.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

realm", which "permits us to interpret the events of the play as simultaneous rehearsals of the problems and anxieties of James I's 'restoration' of the royal line and expansion of the English kingdom, and as an opportunity to increase the power base of the non-Christian cultures centred in Asia Minor and Africa".²⁸ I fail to see the subversive element here; in Gower's moral, it is emphasized that everyone got what they deserved, and in a play which eschews complexities of character, there is no reason not to take this at face value. Against the background of several bad examples, Pericles's virtue shines out more clearly:

In Pericles, his queen, and daughter seen,
Although assailed with fortune fierce and keen,
Virtue preserved from fell destruction's blast,
Led on by heav'n, and crowned with joy at last.

(*Per*, 22.110–113)

If a topical, or political reading was intended, there is a warrant to see the play as a compliment to James.

It would be reductive, however, to treat the play as a political allegory, although the 'English' elements are more conspicuous than in *The Comedy of Errors*. The scenes with most local colour, the conversations between the fishermen and between Bawd, Pander and Bolt, have an English, or London flavour, and an obviously English medieval context is introduced through the figure of Gower, whose narrative knits the dramatized scenes together. The play as a topological structure connects Mediterranean geography, history, late Greek antiquity and the Middle Ages, the classical world and biblical lands, myth and Christianity, literature, both classical and medieval, and contemporary politics. The emphasis is not on psychological realism with a focus on the complexity of an individual character, as in the tragedies, but on the hodological space produced by the swerving movements of Pericles's family. Read this way, the 'unevenness' of the play, which has been lamented and attributed to collaboration, becomes less of a problem, and in fact, the topological structure that emerges is hard to reduce without loss. In this play, it becomes particularly evident that shipwreck, not so much the contemporary reality but the *topos* inherited from classical epic narratives, is first and foremost a dramatic connecting device in the service of world making. In fact, the playwrights appear to have realised that the focus on hodological space draws the drama towards the epic. With the *Odyssey* as an important intertext, Gower's narrative gains structural relevance. Michel Serres has drawn attention to the topological equivalence of Odysseus's travels and Penelope's weaving and the relevance of

²⁸ Ibid., 83.

these linking activities for the creation of the epic.²⁹ The same structure is at work in *Pericles*, where the presence of the English story-teller effects a mental connection of far-flung places:

Thus time we waste, and long leagues make we short,
Sail seas in cockles, have and wish but for't,
Making to take imagination
From bourn to bourn, region to region.
By you being pardoned, we commit no crime
To use one language in each sev'ral clime
Where our scene seems to live. I do beseech you
To learn of me, who stand i'th'gaps to teach you
The stages of our story.

(*Per*, 18.1–9)

Gower stands in the gaps between spaces, bridging those gaps and connecting spaces into a topology. Fittingly, in Gower's tale, the account of Pericles's perilous sea voyage appears side by side with an account of Marina's life-like needlework (*Per*, 20.1–16) which saves her, like Penelope, who spins her yarn to buy time, from sexual exploitation. The fame of her accomplishments then serves to reunite Marina with her father. Gower's narrative is crucial, and the experimental mixture of narrative, dumb show and dramatization in *Pericles* draws attention to the ways in which the topology is created. So does the final play I will consider, whose topography presents a topological hotspot: the island, surrounded, delineated, cut off and connected by the sea.

Theatrical Topology in The Tempest

The Tempest begins with a storm and shipwreck and goes on to relate – if not an earlier shipwreck – an enforced departure on a wrecked ship, where Prospero and his daughter Miranda were so fortunate as not to perish but to be stranded on an island, uninhabited but for Caliban, who had arrived there due to another enforced

²⁹ "Pénélope est l'auteur, la signataire du discours, elle en trace le graphe, elle en dessine le parcours. Fait puis défait ce tissu qui mime l'avance et le recul du navigateur. D'Ulysse à bord de son navire, navette qui lace et entrelace des fibres séparées de vide, des variétés bordées de crevasses. Brodeuse, dentellière, par puits et ponts, de ce flux continu coupé de catastrophes qui se nomme lui-même discours. Au palais d'Ithaque, Ulysse enfin dans les bras de la reine, trouve la théorie finie de son propre μῦθος." (Serres [1977], 36). On Serres's thinking see also Steven Connor, "Michel Serres and the Shapes of Thought", *Anglistik* 15:1 (2004), 105–117.

departure, the exile of his mother Sycorax. Thus, two exiles meet the son of another exile on the island, connecting the refined and Machiavellian world of Renaissance Italy with Algiers in North Africa, from where his mother was banished. Sycorax: a witch with astonishing powers who may have come from the Americas, since according to her son she worshipped a Patagonian god, Setebos (*Tem*, 3.1.372), or devil, whose name was probably inspired by “Richard Eden’s 1555 translation of Antonio Pigafetta’s account of Magellan’s circumnavigatory expedition”, as the editors Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman note.³⁰ Now, “by accident most strange”, as Prospero says,

bountiful Fortune
(Now my dear Lady) hath mine enemies
Brought to this shore.
(*Tem*, 1.2.178–180)

Antonio, the usurping Duke of Milan, together with the King of Naples and their fleet, are on their way back from North Africa, where the King’s daughter Claribel was married to the King of Tunis, effecting another North African connection in this Mediterranean theatre.

As the company is wrecked and dispersed on the island, the audience witnesses the characters’ wanderings, swerving movements recalling those of earlier plays, as in a nutshell. Ferdinand is searching for his father whom he thinks drowned, and finds a wife on the strange shores, like Pericles. The King of Naples in turn is looking for his son, like Egeon in *The Comedy of Errors*, almost despairing in his search:

[H]e is drowned
Whom thus we stray to find, and the sea mocks
Our frustrate search on land.
(*Tem*, 3.3.8–10)

The various groups are wandering the island, hatching their treacherous plots or looking for their loved ones, deprived, almost driven to despair, threatened by madness, overwhelmed by wonder and delight and tortured by impediments to their desires, little knowing that their plight is part of a master plan and that they are watched from above. Such is the condition of man, one might say. Ultimately, it will be revealed that the straying, the swerving movements were necessary to bring about the happy ending. All the protagonists have “share in this most happy wreck”, to quote Orsino again, as Gonzalo acknowledges at the end:

³⁰ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. by Peter Hulme / William H. Sherman. A Norton Critical Edition (New York / London: Norton, 2004), 19. All citations from *The Tempest* follow this edition.

Was Milan thrust from Milan that his issue
Should become king of Naples? O, rejoice
Beyond a common joy, and set it down
With gold on lasting pillars: in one voyage
Did Claribel her husband find at Tunis,
And Ferdinand her brother found a wife
Where he himself was lost; Prospero his dukedom
In a poor isle; and all of us ourselves
When no man was his own.

(*Tem*, 5.1.205–213)

Like in the other plays under consideration, the characters' movements outline a hodological space. But *The Tempest* expands the topology beyond the Mediterranean world to include resonances of the Atlantic ocean and the New World, via Caliban's mention of Setebos, Ariel's reference to "the still-vexed Bermudas" (*Tem*, 1.2.229) and the references to early modern travel and exploration, such as Stephano's idea that he might bring the 'monster' Caliban back to Naples to exhibit him (*Tem*, 2.2.65–67) and Sebastian and Antonio's ironic assertion that from now on they will believe every fanciful detail in travel accounts. "I'll believe both", says Antonio, that there are unicorns and that the phoenix exists in Arabia,

And what does else want credit, come to me,
And I'll be sworn 'tis true. Travelers ne'er did lie,
Though fools at home condemn 'em.

(*TN*, 3.3.24–27)

This is not a question of actually situating the island in the New World, or suggesting that the play is 'about' the New World, but a question of making a fluid connection between the 'Old' World and the 'New', thus emphasizing that we are in fact dealing with *one* world.

In *The Tempest and Its Travels*, Peter Hulme and William Sherman collected essays which amplify a number of geopolitical and cultural resonances of the play, thus highlighting various parts of the topology with which I am concerned. For example, Andrew C. Hess argues that "colonial readings of the play have tended to obscure the significance of the Mediterranean world for Elizabethan and Jacobean England".³¹ According to Hess, Shakespeare's project was to "delimit the cultural boundaries of Europe in the face of chaos and strong competition from an Islamic

³¹ Andrew C. Hess, "The Mediterranean and Shakespeare's Geopolitical Imagination", in Peter Hulme / William H. Sherman (eds.), *The Tempest and Its Travels* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 121. For a concise summary of the (post)colonial arguments see Hulme / Sherman, "Transatlantic Routes: Introduction", in Hulme / Sherman (2000), 171–178.

civilization whose political leadership had paradoxically become an ally of England".³² Barbara Fuchs already argued this in an earlier influential essay where she also extends the exploration of colonialism in *The Tempest* to Ireland: "Yet this critical privileging of America as the primary context of colonialism for the play obscures the very real presence of the Ottoman threat in the Mediterranean in the early seventeenth century and elides the violent English colonial adventures in Ireland, which paved the way for plantation in Virginia."³³

Are we to conclude that all these very valid readings are mutually exclusive, that one obscures the other or that they are just unrelated? I suggest that we need to analyse the connections between these various interpretations and contexts more thoroughly if we are to understand Shakespeare's artistic achievement in *The Tempest*. Peter Hulme states cautiously that "there could be a sense that the play was associated with the Caribbean".³⁴ Fuchs emphasizes that "multiple contexts" must be taken into account in an adequate reading of the play, and with reference to Hulme's *Colonial Encounters*, she talks about a "textual palimpsest".³⁵ Hulme and Sherman speak in their Preface about "complex negotiations" explaining that their book, seen as a "map", "charts the play's own movement through time and space". They see *The Tempest* as characterised by "openness", revealing its own "will to travel".³⁶ They also use the phrase "transatlantic routes", thus trying "at least to hint at something less than a radical division between the European and American dimensions of *The Tempest*".³⁷ Jerry Brotton argues that *The Tempest*'s "geographical complexity lies in the play's historical allusions to a past – but still culturally influential – classical world. The magical, masque-like quality of *The Tempest* comes from the sense that its voyaging is partly through time, partly through space." This "classical topography confers a sense of the play as shuttling between the weft of the present and the warp of the past",³⁸ which prompts Brotton to compare the play to contemporary tapestries.

Thinking in terms of topology, it is possible to form a more precise idea as to how all the different contexts which critics have traced contribute to the whole. I suggest that we stop thinking about the play in terms of a map, a chart, a tapestry

³² Hess (2000), 124.

³³ Barbara Fuchs, "Conquering Islands: Contextualizing *The Tempest*", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48 (1997), 46.

³⁴ Peter Hulme, "Reading from Elsewhere: George Lamming and the Paradox of Exile", in Hulme / Sherman (2000), 220.

³⁵ Fuchs (1997), 46.

³⁶ Hulme / Sherman, "Preface", in Hulme / Sherman (2000), xi, xii, xiii.

³⁷ Hulme / Sherman (2000), 178.

³⁸ Jerry Brotton, "Carthage and Tunis, *The Tempest* and Tapestries", in Hulme / Sherman (2000), 132.

or a textual palimpsest but that we think about it as an interface, a topological point of connection, which opens up a multiplicity of dynamic spaces. A spatial logic of this kind allows for simultaneity, for the simultaneous presence of multiple resonances which produce the play's 'complexity'. This topology forges, or rather highlights, links between the Old World and the New, both geographically and in terms of the cultural resonances which infuse space with meaning. Tapping into the reservoir of cultural memory, the textually transmitted myths and stories of the classical Mediterranean world are linked with the early modern political and commercial situation, thus making sense of Gonzalo's equation of Tunis with Carthage (*Tem*, 2.1.80). While the modern city of Tunis is geographically located a few miles from the ancient site of Carthage, the equation provides an interface with the classical world of Virgil's *Aeneid*. The reference in turn prompts Antonio to recall the myth of Amphion, who raised the walls of Thebes with his harp playing. Significantly, though, the theatrical topology has to do some cultural work, so to speak, since the classical connection is in need of interpretation. It prompts us to ask in which ways Claribel could be another Dido, to what extent history repeats itself and whether we ought to reflect on *translatio imperii*, about city and empire building and the transience of glory. Whatever we conclude, it is crucial for my argument here that we are presented with a "third" space³⁹ in which the fictional Claribel and the mythic Dido can exist side by side, and this space is materialised on stage.

While all the shipwreck plays lend themselves to a topological reading, mostly with an emphasis on hodological space, it is striking that in *The Tempest*, the spatial structure is particularly tightly knit, compared for example with *Pericles*, or with *Antony and Cleopatra*, which also recalls epic voyages and the story of Dido and Aeneas. In the latter Roman tragedy, an impression of expansiveness is evoked through the setting, the episodic action and the scope and depth of the protagonists' love. Although it does not seem to be particularly difficult to travel back and forth between Rome and Egypt, spaces appear wide, and it is almost possible to feel the Mediterranean winds blowing. In *The Tempest*'s island setting, through the unity of time, place and action, the atmosphere is almost claustrophobic. When Sebastian and Antonio hatch their abortive plot against the King of Naples, their wishful thinking prompts them to exaggerate the distance between Tunis and Naples.⁴⁰

³⁹ Soja (1996).

⁴⁰ Barbara Fuchs also observes this, reading it as "a strategy for containing the role of Islam in the play. In a perverse metonymy, the European woman, instead of her threatening husband, becomes 'Tunis'." (Fuchs [1997], 60).

Sebastian: 'Tis true my brother's daughter's Queen of Tunis,
So is she heir of Naples, 'twixt which regions
There is some space.

Antonio: A space whose ev'ry cubit
Seems to cry out, "How shall that Claribel
Measure us back to Naples? Keep in Tunis,
And let Sebastian wake."

(*Tem*, 2.1.251–256)

The space is there, but the plotters have misheard its 'message' about the desired opening for their machinations. Significantly, the classical world is presented as expansive, while the early modern world, although it now includes the 'New World', i.e. more geographical space, appears to have shrunk and to have become more tightly interconnected. This may be a commentary on exploration, discovery and colonialism, on the global dimension which, to refer back to Stephan Günzel's argument, makes the earth finite as space and thus more susceptible to being tightly controlled by those in power, like Prospero on 'his' island. In terms of the theatre, this tight control is effected through the inclusion of an additional dimension. The hodological space created through the characters' wanderings, expansive in *Pericles*, is re-created in miniature, as it were, on the island. We can zoom in and take the characters' own limited perspective, as in the initial storm and shipwreck, or out to Prospero's activities, where chance is resignified as design and destiny, or, interpreted negatively, as paranoid coherence. In terms of stagecraft, this produces a *mise-en-abîme*: revealing the storm and the events on the island as 'staged', Prospero's world becomes more real *within* the logic of the play and more artificial 'without', as a self-reflexive commentary on the theatre which reveals the playwright, the actors and the playhouse as part of the theatrical topology, where happy wrecks are staged in which the audience has share.

Conclusion: The Island-Into-Apple-Morph

What does the topological approach allow us to see? Thinking in terms of topology makes it possible to handle a greater complexity than thinking in terms of trajectories or mutually exclusive settings and contexts. Texts as well as places and people, both real and imaginary, can be integrated in a spatial logic. Thinking of characters as points of connection in a complex structure helps to understand the multi-perspectivity of Shakespeare's plays. In *The Tempest*, for example, we can look at the whole edifice from the point of view of Caliban, or Prospero, or Miranda, or even characters such as Claribel and Sycorax, who do not appear on stage but are very much presences in the topology of the play. This has been done and continues to be

done, but my point is here that it is reductive just to use the play as a springboard, since no element can be isolated from the whole without changing its meaning. This explains why readings or productions sometimes appear unsatisfactory: they highlight one part of the topology without managing to keep the rest in view. And doing justice to the complexity remains a challenge, since multiple associations can be held in the mind simultaneously but tend to elude a discursive interpretation. Shakespeare found a suggestive image for this topological complexity, which appears in an intriguing exchange between Antonio and Sebastian, right after the equation of Tunis with Carthage. Antonio and Sebastian are teasing Gonzalo:

Antonio: What impossible matter will he make easy next?

Sebastian: I think he will carry this island home in his pocket, and give it his son for an apple.

Antonio: And sowing the kernels of it in the sea, bring forth more islands.

(*Tem*, 2.1.85–89)

In this surprising image, which recalls the mythic genealogy of the Greek Spoures, the island morphs into a small, three-dimensional object which can be carried in a pocket, like an apple, recalling a little globe, and back again, via a kind of spawning process, into an island. Here is a whole world in miniature, carrying potential new worlds within itself. I take this image to be an apt visualisation of theatrical topology: the “impossible matter” of morphing Carthage into Tunis, the Mediterranean into the New World, time into space, through the magic of the stage. One powerful way of forging such unexpected and yet necessary links are the ‘happy wrecks’ which propel people through time and space, forcing them to get lost, so as to find themselves again. Finally, a topological reading of *The Tempest* draws attention to something sinister in the fate of Caliban, although one might think it good that he is left in peace on his island. The connection has been made with his world, but it is one way, so to speak. He is denied the right to procreate, but also to travel, so that there can be no ‘happy wreck’ for him. It makes historical sense, but is also curiously limiting – despite the inspiring work, for example, of George Lamming, to think of Caliban’s travels only in terms of the middle passage. Perhaps another rewriting of *The Tempest* might consider how he embarks with the others, suffers shipwreck, like Odysseus and Aeneas, and takes the long way home.

Zusammenfassung

Der Aufsatz betrachtet Shakespeares Schiffbruchs-Dramen als theatrale Topologien. Der Schiffbruch erzeugt sowohl eine Trennung als auch eine umwundene Verbindung von Menschen und Orten und ermöglicht daher als Handlungsmotiv eine Dramatisierung komplexer

Beziehungsräume, in denen Geographie, historische oder mythologische Personen, literarische Figuren, kulturelle Artefakte und unterschiedliche Zeitebenen sich miteinander verknüpfen. *The Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night* und *Pericles* evozieren 'hodologische' Räume, die durch Wanderungsbewegungen der Figuren erzeugt werden und in denen sich eine Vielzahl kultureller Resonanzen überlagern. *The Tempest* bietet schließlich eine direkte Thematisierung theatraler Welterzeugung, in der die hodologischen Räume in ihrer Beschaffenheit und Begrenztheit ausgestellt und durch eine genuin theatrale Außenperspektive ergänzt werden.