Bringing the map to life:
European satirical maps, 1845-1945

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'If Geography is Prose, Maps are Iconography'
Lennart Meri, Estonian writer, film director & politician [1929-2006]

The 17th century Dutch *carte-à-figures* represented an almost iconographic image in which the geographical centre of the engraved map sheet was supplemented by decorative images of peoples and places around its borders. The ostensible aim was to try to provide the viewer with an encapsulation of the fundamental 'essence' of each country displayed.

Seventeenth century Europe was the dominant Continental Power, a symbol of civilisation and culture, heiress of the great classical Empires of Greece and Rome. So she appeared in visual form on the title pages of the Great Atlases of the period, such as Ortelius' *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*. It was also in this guise that she took cartographic form in the oft-reproduced map of Europe in the shape of a Queen, originally designed by Johannes Putsch (Bucius) in 1537 and later published in Sebastian Munster's *Cosmographia*.

Munster Europe as Queen c.1590

Sebastian Munster also published the first separately printed map of the European Continent in his *Geographia* [1540]. The juxtaposition of these two European maps points to two quite different traditions of cartographic representation dating back at least two centuries before Munster. On the one hand, map makers presented their view of the World as perceived in contemporary 'reality', on the other they presented maps in the form

Hadol *Nouvelle Carte d'Europe* 1870

of a metaphor, in which hidden meanings and a much deeper 'essence' could be interpreted through the employment of allegory and symbol, through the use of imagination and anthropomorphism. Amongst the earliest examples of this genre are the fascinating early 14th century maps of Opicinus de Canestris.

Whilst there are many different strands and levels to this alternative tradition of map representation, in the 19th century it was given new life in a distinctive genre of European satirical map – the political cartoon map – which reflected and mirrored the momentous political and cultural changes that took place within Europe between 1845 and 1945.

Fred Rose Serio-Comic Map 1877

While the 17th century *carte-à-figures* had literally 'marginalized' its peoples and places, between about 1850 and 1914 this distinctive new form of European map witnessed those same peoples and places first being brought *onto* the map and then actually absorbed *into* the map. Instead of the European Queen of Sebastian Munster, the individual nations of Europe were now themselves 'caricaturized' in a novel and striking 'serio-comic' fashion. Not only were the political leaders of Europe satirized but, increasingly, separate and distinctive European national identities given new and symbolic visual expression.

Fred Rose Angling In Troubled Waters 1899

These developments reflected the momentous political upheavals that took place in Europe between 1848 and 1871, a period that started with almost European-wide Revolution and concluded with War between France and Prussia. Revolution and War, the development of new emergent nation states such as Germany and Italy and the rise of the so-called 'Great Powers' fed the creative fires of an emerging legion of satirical artists and caricaturists across

Europe. The accessibility, humour and affordability of the new map form made it increasingly popular and collectible in its own right. The era of peace in Europe between 1871 and 1914 crystallised the shape and design of this new genre and found new and innovative expression in the now-famous work of artists such as Fred Rose.

As each nation was 'caricaturized', these symbolic images reflected popularly-perceived national stereotypes, such as the Prussian/German soldier and the Great Russian Bear. Equally, mythical and historical national figures now appeared: the French Revolutionary heroine, Marianne and the solid and dependable Briton, John Bull. This new nationalist iconography also developed along anthropomorphic and animal lines, perhaps finding most amusing expression in *Hark ! Hark ! The Dogs do Bark !* [London 1914].

At the same time the genre also found an educational outlet, the humorous forms and shapes, even physiognomies, of a country being seen as potential mnemonics for the young student of geography who was unable to commit to memory the lifeless form of the plain 19th century geographical map and globe.

Increasingly politicised, the 'serio-comic' map form finally sunk from view amid the strident political propaganda of World War I. New mass media, such as the moving film image and the poster became the new instruments of mass manipulation and popular propaganda. Visual vestiges of the 'serio-comic' map tradition remain in the satirical propaganda posters of Bolshevik Russia after 1918

Entente Cordiale 1915

and in some propaganda posters of World War II. However by 1945, the satirical artist was coming to view the World in a new and increasingly supranational, geo-political and ideological context.
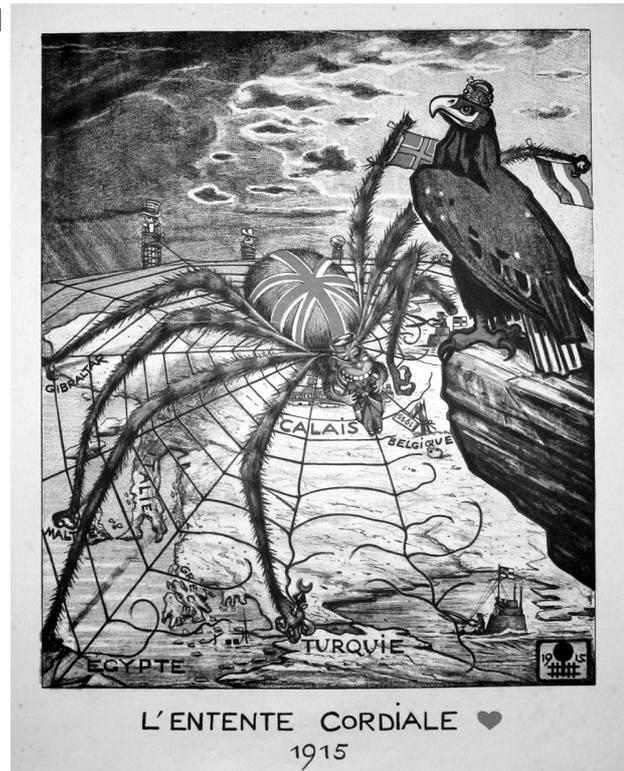
The most enduring and recurrent symbols appearing on the European satirical map in the period between 1845 and 1945 are not rooted in high art and culture or in centuries-old national myths and folklore. They are in fact two resonant icons of politics and power: the all-entangling monstrous octopus and the giant spider weaving its web across the map of Europe.

Although often perceived as sinister and negative, the spider's web may actually be considered the perfect symbolic metaphor for a supranational European unity and identity, such as the one outlined 50 years ago in the terms of the Treaty of Rome, almost exactly 420 years after Bucius's vision of a European Queen. ◉