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Susanne Zantop. *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770-1870*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997. ix + 292 pp. \$23.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-1968-9; \$84.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-1960-3.

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Students of post-colonialism and German colonialism as well as scholars interested in the formation of German identities will find much of value in this stimulating book, which illustrates the burgeoning interest, evident in a wide range of work across a variety of disciplines, in German colonialism. Considered as a whole, recent work on the German colonial experience demonstrates that the pendulum of scholarly interest has swung away from the more traditional approaches that sought to reveal the ideological, political, and economic roots of colonialism and towards those which seek to illuminate its cultural component. In this case, Susanne Zantop uncovers and analyzes colonial fantasies that “provided Germans an arena for creating an imaginary community and constructing a national identity in opposition to the perceived racial, sexual, ethnic, or national characteristics of others” (p. 7).

Edward Said has made the case for excavating the cultural roots of European imperialism in the modern era. His concern has been to show how the processes of imperialism were manifested by the authority of recognizable cultural formations (education, literature, and the visual and musical arts) and came to constitute a “cultural archive.” In this way of looking at things, empire occupied both physical and cultural space. Studies in this scholarly genre have tended to concentrate on the “discursive structures” of colonialism.

Unearthing the cultural components of imperialism/colonialism and according them a formative role in the construction of identities are goals shared by many of the practitioners of the new approach. Professor Zantop situates her study of German colonial fantasies squarely within this framework. Yet, at the same

time, she attempts a corrective by widening the focus to include gender. Drawing from a broad base of literary sources—including scientific works, travelogues, and novels—Zantop makes an important contribution to our understanding of German colonialism. She has uncovered a long prehistory of fantastic colonialism and linked this discursive formation to the construction of a “bourgeois, male German identity.” Along the way, her concern is less with pointing out German “peculiarities” than with illustrating how German notions of their own “otherness” played a role in nation-building.

In Part I, “Armchair Conquistadors; or, the Quest for ‘New Germany,’” the author charts the first stage of the German colonial imagination through an analysis of the compensatory fantasies that made up for the lack of past colonial glory or real colonial mishap. Out of this came a belief in the lack of German “colonial guilt” that when read as colonial innocence became a key element in the justification for German colonizing attributes. Zantop also outlines the rise of an “intellectual colonialism” that through the reading of travelogues and other “scientific literature” invited readers “to share in the classification of the other.” More often than not this categorization of the other went hand in glove with a privileging of the self (p. 41).

In Part II, “Colonizing Theory: Gender, Race, and the Search for a National Identity,” Zantop culls colonial fantasies from eighteenth-century “scientific” and “philosophical” texts. In them, she finds “fantastic configurations” of among others, biological, moral, and cultural superiority, *inter alia* that transformed economic need and the emigration it produced “into a mission, a special German ability for colonizing, a colonial calling.” Arm-

chair colonizers used their fantasies to construct “a distinct sense of national self and a national identity” (p. 99). Rereading the canon of German idealism, Zantop finds a connection between national self-definition and the definition of others. This connection between self and other is, of course, a well-known lesson from colonial studies (Said and Homi Bhabha *inter alios*) which Zantop adroitly situates in the German context. She makes the case that racial categories in these works “anticipated” biological racism of later nineteenth century. Her insight seems to suggest that racial theories, or at least modes of racial categorization in the eighteenth century, viewed in the orthodox historiography as marginal to larger movements in European science and philosophy, were anything but in the German case.

The tropes and anecdotes contained in the scientific and philosophical texts engendered “allegorical master narratives” in the form of family romances (p. 100). Zantop outlines the development of two distinct family romances, or colonial master narratives, in German fiction in Part III, “Colonial Fantasies; or, Displacing the Colonizers.” The numerous German versions of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* contained a de-eroticized family fantasy of an educational patriarchal father-child (Krusoe-Freitag) bond. Another version of the colonial romance, embodied in plays by August von Kotzebue and Heinrich von Kleist, positioned the German male as the “husband-colonizer” who, in his cross-cultural and cross-racial marriage with the other, packed the “generative power, that ultimate proof of masculine potency” lacked by the paternalistic German Krusoe (p. 121). Importantly, she updates Heine’s observation about the reverberation of the French Revolution through German intellectual life by looking at the racial categorization of that response. After 1793, fear of the Jacobins and radicalized masses led some German writers to associate the revolutionary hordes and with “savages” (p. 143). They were helped along in this direction by the Haitian Revolution, during which slaves “murder[ed] whites” and eventually won their independence while the French “colonized” Prussia itself (p. 160). The fear of being colonized, combined with the disconcerting thoughts about transgression and role-reversal in Haiti, brought the colonial romance to a temporary halt.

In the ambitious final section, “Virgin Islands, Teuton Conquerors,” Professor Zantop charts the colonial imagination from the 1820s to the era of actual colonial acquisition in the *Kaiserreich*. While the Revolutionary Era may have resulted in a “metaphorical divorce” from the colonial romance, by setting in motion the dissolution of the

Spanish colonial empire, it also opened a new vista for colonial fantasies. The vacuum created by Spanish colonial retreat left room for Germans to enter, explore and classify “empty” territories (p. 167). Here the main figure was, of course, Alexander von Humboldt, the “German Columbus.” Humboldt’s published observations of his journeys in Central and South America served to confirm to the German public “that conquests are natural events and that they are nonviolent as long as the weaker, recognizing his weakness, cedes.” Humboldt’s Germanness was clear in the difference between his discovery and Columbus’: “whereas Columbus had only discovered a physical new world, Humboldt opened up an intellectual universe with potentially much greater, spiritual rewards...” (p. 169). “As a ‘German,’” we learn, “Humboldt inscribed not just himself but Germany in the international pursuit of new territories; his successes had obliterated Germany’s past failures and paved the way for future glory” (p. 171).

Zantop offers a provocative and rewarding discussion of nineteenth-century German Columbus dramas. Centered around “the connection between lone discoverer and virgin land to which he is entitled by virtue of his mental effort” these dramas “anticipate” the later concern of moving out of the world of ideas and into the world of *Realpolitik*—of reaching political maturity as a nation and becoming a colonial power. Importantly, the act of discovery took place on gendered terms, for “the fertile male mind brings forth female territory, which is, by definition, his” (p. 173). In her nuanced reading of a Columbus text written in the heat of the German nationalist sentiment stirred up by Bismarck in the early 1860s, Zantop reveals the connection between “discovery and the creation of the empire on the one hand, and self-discovery and the creation of a unified national territory on the other” (pp. 185-86).

Whereas Said calls for reading the canon as a “polyphonic accompaniment” to European expansion, Zantop draws upon a wider base of literary sources, including “science” and *Trivallliteratur* that were directed at a wider audience. Nonetheless, her focus is still on literary and elite culture, and on words rather than images. Take, for example, the author’s consideration of Humboldt. She admits to being most concerned with the “impact of his utterances.” Yet an analysis of the stunning illustrations, executed under Humboldt’s guidance, in *Vues des cordilleres et monumens des peuples indigenes de l’Amerique*, might have afforded the opportunity to take stock of the visual components of the colonial imaginary studied here. Towards the end of the nineteenth century,

colonial enthusiasts were mostly agreed that the colonial “idea” had failed to garner broad popular support. Some attention directed at the transmission belts of colonial ideas and fantasies, for example in the popular press and in the schools, might have provided more support for the author’s valuable point that the “cultural residue” these fantasies formed had an impact in the late nineteenth century (p. 193). Such attention might also have gone some way towards demonstrating the existence of the “hegemonic discourse” of conquest that the author sees drowning out anti-colonial “counternarratives” (p. 209).

Notwithstanding these criticisms, *Colonial Fantasies* constitutes an important contribution both to our un-

derstanding of German colonial desire and to our understanding of the formation of national identity. The author does a great service in reminding us that, before the advent of colonial acquisition, there was a long period of literary and psychological preparation, a prehistory of desire. Professor Zantop has also managed the laudable feat of a sophisticated study that weaves together disparate theoretical strains while keeping the jargon mostly in check.

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