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Megan A. Norcia. *X Marks the Spot: Women Writers Map the Empire for British Children, 1790-1895.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010. xii + 260 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8214-1907-6.

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Mapping Women

Megan A. Norcia's *X Marks the Spot: Women Writers Map the Empire for British Children, 1790-1895* presents a valuable discussion of nineteenth-century children's geography primers written by women. Norcia's study is at root a recovery project that argues that these primers were lost because of "a deliberate omission rather than an oversight" rooted in a Romantically inspired backlash against didactic texts (p. 13). Norcia addresses texts by authors from both England and America, using detailed textual and topological analysis to assert the importance of these texts to the British imperial project. This textual work is the study's main strength. Norcia portrays the complexity and ingenuity that went into the production of these texts: women, often supporting their families, sifting through available material to cull the most important and accurate information possible about different locations and cultures across the globe. Working within the limitations of their gender, these authors–who rarely had the option of travelling to the locations they discussed–came up with innovative narrative metaphors to convey this information to their young charges, such as presenting "the world as a palimpsest overwritten by imperial inscription" (p. 27). Perhaps one of the most fascinating aspects of Norcia's text is the discussion of some of the pedagogical strategies conveyed in these texts for teaching geography to children: role playing, dinner parties, and a variety of other ideas that move beyond the simple recitation model so favored in the nineteenth century.

The nuances unearthed in the study's detailed textual analyses present some truly fascinating and complex ideological puzzles. The first two chapters present discussions of two primary tropes used by primer authors to discuss the different races of the empire, the "Family of Man" and the "Dinner Table," respectively. Chapter 1 places use of the "Family of Man" trope within the tradition of monogenesis wherein the races are all understood as deriving from a common origin. Often associated with the more benevolent colonial thinkers who saw themselves as engaged in a project of saving and developing their colonial children, this model at least, as Norcia argues, provides a sense of humanity to the colonized.

In chapter 2, the "Dinner Table" trope uses the idea of food to transmit particular ideas about individual cultures and races, though for the most part ascribing clear superiority to the English palate. Imperial supremacy in this model is often represented by the English contribution to the dinner–often the main course–a joint of beef, for instance. This model will be familiar to many who study cultural events such as the 1851 Crystal Palace, which used products of the different nations of the empire to represent the diversity and wealth of the colonies.

Less convincing is Norcia's argument for the wide-ranging implications of these texts. Building on the work of Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, as well as other recent feminist geographers, Norcia looks at these texts from within a nexus of issues: imperialism, race, gender, children's literature, religion, politics, and female authorship. The work's attempt to assert the importance of these texts for such a wide range of ideological concerns is, ironically, its most significant limitation. Norcia overshoots in attempting to argue for the centrality of these texts in building the critical infrastructure for these ideologies. Yes, geography is central to any understanding of the imperial enterprise. And I certainly agree with the author that both didactic and children's works are often undervalued in their significance for developing and solidifying imperial ideologies. But the text is less successful in providing a strong historical context for the work than it is in arguing for their recovery. For instance, in a discussion of author Priscilla Wakefield's arguments for more exercise and outside amusements for girls, Norcia neglects to put these idea within the con-

text of, most obviously, first-wave feminist works such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). And it would have been helpful to have definitions of terms such as "map," "mapping," and "geography" and perhaps some visual materials to give us a more concrete sense of the materiality of these texts, to even more fully add to the expert detailed analyses of the individual works under discussion. The study's limitations originate in an overreliance on Edward Said's idea from *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) that empire exists in the silences or interstices of a text, which leads to his seminal reading of *Mansfield Park* (1814). What results is at times an over-reading of the liberatory and resistant aspects of these texts, which can take the focus away from the truly valuable detailed analysis.

More productive is Norcia's engagement with Susan Stanford Friedman's argument that the female author engages in a perpetual negotiation of identity. For example, in the third chapter, "Terra Incognita," Norcia examines the conflicted position of Victorian primer writers who for the most part were unable to visit the very location they wrote about and thus found themselves reliant on texts written by men for crucial information. While Victorian writing about the empire from those who never left England is certainly pervasive, what is interesting here is the ways in which the women conveyed their impatience with their limited position: "[s]mall, disruptive moments in the texts suggest frustration with these limitations and restrictions" (p. 110). Norcia catalogs a number of instances where, from within the fictional story that often provides the skeleton for the geographical information, the mother/teacher/female geographer expresses impatience with unthinking expressions of male privilege. In the anonymously written *Geography in Easy Dialogues, for Young Children, by A Lady* (1816), for instance, the mother explains her lack of direct experience of the places under discussion to her son: "'[I]f I had not so many little boys and girls to attend to at home, I might perhaps travel far enough to see these lakes, and give you a better description of them"' (p. 131). These moments in themselves, and Norcia's expert discussion of them, provide a fascinating and valuable discussion of the ways in which female intellectuals negotiated the limitations of nineteenth-century society.

Norcia's last chapter uses Henri Lefebvre's concept of "thirdspace" to discuss the ways in which women negotiate the different maps and geographies with which they come into contact: "In this struggle for spatial self-determination, women writers negotiate their own identities as well as, and often at the expense of, those peoples represented within the primer as resisting these very mappings" (p. 181). And within this negotiation, Norcia argues, the complex hybridity of English identity itself comes into relief: "In this way, primers written by nineteenth-century women writers operate as thirdspace, looking beyond and beneath the master narrative of empire to expose disruptive traces, creating a hybrid narrative of empire" (p. 189). But, as Norcia herself asserts, the hybrid nature of imperial identity and its relationship to space and geography is an argument made by many writers–Robert Young, Homi K. Bhabha, Ian Baucom, as well as many others. What is valuable here is the primer writers' negotiation of gender identity and intellectual vocation from within the limitations offered by restrictive Victorian gender codes. These authors discerned a way to do intellectual and pedagogical work from within the confines of their culture. Identifying and unpacking moments of this complexity is the invaluable contribution provided in Norcia's compelling study.

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