

Introduction

Mapping Imperial Hierarchies and Ruling the World

A lady an explorer? A traveler in skirts?
The notion's just a trifle too seraphic.
Let them stay at home and mind the babies,
Or hem our ragged shirts;
But they mustn't, can't and shan't be geographic!

—Anonymous verse in *Punch*

I argue that to think geography—to think within the parameters of the discipline in order to create geographical knowledge acceptable to the discipline—is to occupy a masculine subject position. Geography is masculinist.

—Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography*

In an April 2005 *New Yorker* article promoting the publication of his edited rerelease of a Victorian geography primer, *The Clumsiest People in Europe; or, Mrs. Mortimer's Bad-Tempered Guide to the Victorian World*, Todd Pruzan reintroduced the public to Favell Lee Mortimer, a Victorian woman writer of geography texts and religious works for children. In his introduction to Mortimer's work, Pruzan deliciously savors the eccentricities of her personal life and habits as well as her problematic characterizations of non-English peoples, going on to provide extracts from Mortimer's three mid-nineteenth-century geography primers: *Near Home: The Countries of Europe Described*; *Far-Off: Asia and Australia Described*; and

Far-Off, Part II: Africa and America Described. In a spirit of moral outrage, Pruzan demands, “Who would write such bad-tempered stuff?”¹ He proceeds to answer his own question by sketching Mortimer’s biography: her abusive marriage to a violent man, her decidedly peculiar experiments in animal husbandry, and her interest in missionary work.

Missing from Pruzan’s lively and provocative gloss of Mortimer’s work is attention to the imperial context in which she wrote. In his introduction, Pruzan only briefly acknowledges how Mortimer’s ideas were continuous with the attitudes and beliefs of her culture: “Still, it’s only fair to note that Mrs. Mortimer’s prejudices, while shocking today, were both widely held and fit to print when she published them. Encyclopedias from her era were far more vicious; one 1854 *Encyclopaedia Americana* entry on Malays is vile enough to shock today’s readers right out of our chairs” (10). While Pruzan undertakes the important task of reminding the reading public about the imperial past and the means of transmitting its legacy to young stewards, the reissue of Mortimer’s work effectively dismisses it as the singular production of an overwrought, hysterical Victorian mind when in fact there are more thoughtful, rigorous ways of re-collecting and framing her provocative and problematic texts.

In actuality, Mortimer and her books are not as unique or eccentric as Pruzan’s introduction might suggest, though few scholars are familiar with the genre within which she is writing. Mortimer’s geography primers *Countries of Europe Described* (republished as *Near Home*) and *Far-Off* are part of a sizeable imperial tradition in which women writers penned geographies that marshaled history, religion, economics, and anecdotal evidence to establish the social and cultural supremacy of England.² Because their voices were not welcome in scientific or academic circles, in courts of law or shipping yards or in the policy-making sessions of civil servants stationed in the empire, these women chose to write for child audiences, simplifying complex representational ideas about nation, empire, and colonialism, as well as science, ethnography, economics, religion, and commerce. In the early part of the century, primer writers such as Priscilla Wakefield (*A Family Tour through the British Empire*, 1804; *The Traveller in Africa*, 1814), Barbara Hofland (*Panorama of Europe: A New Game of Geography*, 1813; *Africa Described in Its Ancient and Present State*, 1828), Mary Anne Venning (*A Geographical Present*, 1817), and Lucy Wilson (pen name for Sarah Atkins; *Fruits of Enterprize*, 1821) produced texts that

would be reprinted well into the Victorian period. At midcentury, Favell Lee Mortimer (*Near Home*, 1849; *Far-Off*, 1852/1854), Mary Boscawen (*Conversations on Geography*, 1854), Harriet Beecher Stowe (*A New Geography for Children*, 1855), Mrs. E. Burrows (*Our Eastern Empire*, 1857), and Mary and Elizabeth Kirby (*The World at Home*, 1869) wrote their primers. Late-century writers of primers include Charlotte Yonge (*Little Lucy's Wonderful Globe*, 1871), Anne Jane Cupples (*Our Parlour Panorama*, 1882), Mary Hield (*Glimpses of South America*, 1882), Annie Wright Marston (*The Children of India*, 1883; *The Children of China*, 1884; *The Children of Africa*, 1885), and Mary Helena Cornwall Legh (*How Dick and Molly Went Round the World*, 1895).

The foregoing list indicates only some of the texts I have chosen to focus on for the purposes of this study; it is not exhaustive. Many more texts exist that undertake imperial work similar to that of the ones included here. Additionally, beyond the texts that have been collected in the archives—those that have hardily withstood the sometimes-ungentle usage of child readers—more titles included on publishers' lists have not survived. We might imagine as well that there were also fragile materials in chapbook form that have since passed out of existence. This may be one reason why these texts have received so little critical attention: there have been few studies of school textbooks, largely because these texts were traditionally regarded until the latter half of the twentieth century as, in John MacKenzie's phrase, "eminently disposable" even by librarians of national collections.³ The same marginalization applies to children's literature studies more generally; until recently, children's literature itself has not been a subject of critical attention. Peter Hunt classifies it as having been seen as "marginal to literary studies, . . . only studied either as historical footnotes or as bibliographical curiosities."⁴ Scholars of children's literature have long been sensitive to this. Indeed, the major journal in the field, *The Children's Literature Annual*, used to be subtitled "The Great Excluded."

Yet despite their absence from libraries and the historical record, these texts presented women authors a socially acceptable outlet for intellectual activity and a means of participating in the scientific and imperial discourses of their day, carefully couched as service to young people, an endeavor already long established as an appropriate calling for women, who filled roles as governesses, teachers, mothers, and nurses. The prefaces

and introductions to these texts underscore that the writers framed their work in these terms. For instance, Mary Mister's preface to *Mungo, the Little Traveller* (1814) modestly maintains that her work "was not intended, originally, for the public eye: it was the evening employment of a mother, for the amusement of her child; and as it fully answered that design, she flatters herself it may prove to other children not an unacceptable present."⁵ Like many of her contemporaries, Mister situates her work as an extension of her maternal vocation, rather than an unseemly attempt to gain public notoriety through authorship.

For the most part, these writers were members of the middle class, the wives of merchants or ministers, and their writing supplemented (in a few cases constituted) the family's income. Authors such as Barbara Hofland and Priscilla Wakefield were motivated to begin writing for children to support their families after the death of a husband or the failure of a husband's business to flourish. With the exception of Mary F. E. Boscawen, Viscountess Falmouth and author of *Conversations on Geography*, none of the writers discussed here were members of the aristocracy, and none of them belonged to the lowest economic class; presumably, members of that class would not have had access to publishers or the leisure time in which to research and prepare their material. In electing to write for a child audience, their gender provided opportunities for them that were unavailable in larger political and professional circles. A close study of the primers reveals how women's subject positions shaped their discourse in explicit and implicit ways. As Alison Blunt has noted in her study of late-nineteenth-century traveler Mary Kingsley, "the conditions under which men and women write are materially different, the social construction of gender affects how the writings of men and women are read."⁶ I address both of Blunt's concerns in that I contend that primers written by women reflect their specifically gendered experience of nineteenth-century social and historical constraints; also, the way gender is constructed and historically understood has affected the way the primers have been represented—or, more pointedly, *not* represented—in the historical record. Their absence is a critical loss to our understanding of nineteenth-century gender and race politics as well as studies of imperialism, educational curriculum, postcolonial theory, and geography. My study exposes that far from being uncritical supporters of Britain's imperial aims, these texts contain disruptive moments in which their writers

seem to express their dissatisfaction with an empire that did not offer them full participation as acting subjects. For these writers, gender was an important axis of identity that interacted with other forces of power brought to bear on the production of geography texts during this period.

Though literature for children, texts by women, and geography books had all been written prior to the mid-eighteenth century, this is the watershed moment at which all three traditions began to flourish in the mass market, and the primers in this study are situated in the eye of this perfect storm, being written in substantial numbers between 1790 and 1895. As children's literature developed into a commercial market, children became, in the words of J. H. Plumb, "a sales target" to whom toys, books, and clothing were eagerly marketed by publishers such as the Newbery firm and the Dartons.⁷ Further, women writers emerged as a professional class aptly situated to serve the needs of this newly profitable demographic at a time when the expansion of the British Empire was creating an appetite for information about far-flung colonies and peoples.

Primers for children worked to keep pace with the growth of the empire, and the British Library's catalog reveals that the "number of books concerning geography published in the 1760s was twice that published in the 1750s, and the numbers increased substantially in the 1780s and 1790s."⁸ These numbers indicate that as the empire grew, so did Britons' interest in it. The end of the eighteenth century saw significant imperial gains in North America, the Pacific, and India. Though the British lost the colonies in North America that became the United States, they had retained dominion over the Canadian territories after the French and Indian Wars; in the Pacific theater, Captain James Cook's voyages (1768–71, 1772–75, 1776–79) captured the public imagination; and in India, Robert Clive's victory at Plassey in 1757 effectively established the foundations for British rule in the subcontinent. The nineteenth century saw a continuation of this growth; between 1815 and 1914, the British Empire is estimated to have expanded by 100,000 square miles each year.⁹ Nominally, this meant that it encompassed 600,000,000 people, or 30 percent of the world's population.

In choosing to focus on texts written during the nineteenth century, my goal is to present a longitudinal study of the genre of geography primer writing during this time of prodigious imperial growth. I will be evaluating how the constraints of gender and the privilege of race both

limited and enabled the writers of these texts. I end my analysis in 1895, before shifts such as the end of Victoria's reign and the beginning of the great world wars of the twentieth century mark the decline of imperial ambitions, though primers did continue to be written after this point. The long nineteenth century is an especially fruitful period to examine because of the effects of Cook's voyages, the Napoleonic Wars, and the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, which spurred a growth in trade and the expansion of the British Empire into India and Africa. The breadth of this enterprise and its connection to ordinary people's lives cannot be underestimated. Indeed, these texts chronicle England's national investment in the idea of empire, forming part of the body of literature narrating, as Martin Green put it, "the story England told itself as it went to sleep at night."¹⁰ As national-cultural documents, the primers have a place alongside censuses, maps, museums, and songs as part of the print culture facilitating what Benedict Anderson has dubbed "imagined communities," those national collectives to which people feel allegiance and emotional connection; like other instruments of print culture, primers also "profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion—the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry."¹¹ The primers helped readers to perform rituals of nation-making through the circulation of national stories, techniques of memorization, and the reiteration of concepts and shared ideologies.

These texts span a broad period in which social, industrial, and political changes challenged Britons' vision of themselves as well as other nations' perception of them as they developed from a nation of farmers and shopkeepers to a fully fledged imperial power. During this period of growth, imperialism was not an unvaried monolithic drive, as it is sometimes represented.¹² Within the time frame that is the subject of this study, the enterprise of imperialism underwent growing pains as it shifted from an Enlightenment project, driven in part by an anthropological interest in other races and cultures,¹³ to an enterprise emphasizing symbiotic colonial relationships in which Britain would bring the benefits of religion, morality, and civic and social mores to peoples who would then become productive partners in trade and commerce, as well as dutiful and grateful subjects. Imperialism brought together individuals with a range of goals including the hope of gaining personal prosperity through commerce, the expectation of achieving career advancement through civil

or military service, the dream of traveling to exotic ports, the promise of scientific advancement through studies of unknown specimens of natural history, and the desire to seek opportunities for evangelization and missionary activity. Even individual imperialists often had multipronged identities; David Livingstone, for example, was a traveler, scientific explorer, and missionary. Though competing colonial powers such as the French, Spanish, Dutch, Belgians, Russians, and Americans rose to ascendancy and then declined across what Timothy Parsons has characterized as “the imperial century,”¹⁴ the idea that Britain was the most morally fit to colonize others was an unwavering tenet expressed in the primers, even when the authors disapproved of particular actions undertaken in the service of this larger goal.

In tandem with this expansion, which offered new opportunities of travel, service, and adventure to British men, British women were emerging as a professional class serving the needs of child readers, and they enjoyed unprecedented commercial success. Hannah More was the first British woman ever to make a fortune with her pen; at her death in 1833, she was worth £30,000.¹⁵ Though less successful than More, other women writers entered the public sphere and “engaged directly in the marketplace and the capitalist enterprise through their participation in the publishing industry and by choosing educational writing as a profession.”¹⁶ This type of writing proved to be a much-needed service, as evidenced by some of the sales figures for the primers. For instance, E.R.’s *Geography and History, Selected by a Lady, for the Use of Her Own Children* (1790) went through twenty-two editions and continued to be reprinted over the course of seventy years, as late as 1859.¹⁷ A publisher’s note at the beginning of the tenth edition remarks on the runaway popularity and utility of the book: “[T]he preceding nine editions have been sold with a rapidity beyond expectation.”¹⁸ *Geography and History* was probably used in private homes as well as in schools, as is indicated by its presence in the Harvard textbook collection. Surviving copies of primers such as E.R.’s bear out that they were often given as Sunday school prizes for good behavior, attendance, or scholarship; organizations such as the Religious Tract Society (founded in 1799) and the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (established in 1805) were powerful patrons of Christianized geographies, which supported missionary efforts and promoted muscular Christianity.

Yet these primers, written in large numbers and delivered in a range of formats by a variety of authors over the course of one hundred years, have largely disappeared from the historical record. Relegated to what Richard Phillips has dubbed “the shadows of history” populated by other “geographical narratives[, which] are denied the power to map,”¹⁹ the absence of such primers is due to a complex set of reasons, driven in part by the tension surrounding the emergence of women as professional writers in the late eighteenth century. E.R.’s primer appeared in 1790, at a cultural moment when there was a rising uncertainty about the place and role of women; publicly, women such as Mary Wollstonecraft challenged patriarchal authority in works such as *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), expressing strong opinions that defied dominant ideology in print. Even women writers whose texts have been read as seemingly docile have been shown to contain coded political and social messages. Mitzi Myers’s critical recuperation of eighteenth-century writer and child-rearing expert Maria Edgeworth and Norma Clarke’s study of the backlash against popular women writers such as Anna Barbauld and Sarah Trimmer are part of a critical effort to reexamine underread or marginalized texts that were dismissed as didactic, unimaginative, and dry in the late eighteenth century. Instead of being dull and rulebound, Myers has argued that this writing often encodes “political messages that would be dangerous to disseminate in other forms: teaching children, especially girls, to think, judge, and act for themselves.”²⁰ Clarke agrees with Myers that rational literature offered readers, especially young girls, the “tools for reappraising their social and political situations”;²¹ this empowerment may have been potentially threatening in the wake of the French Revolution and the rise of a new middle class.

Subsequently, rational literature for children fell out of favor in the throes of the Romantic movement, and these writers were scorned for their didacticism and lack of imagination. One familiar example of the animosity toward this class of women writers of instructional or moral literature occurs in an 1802 letter from children’s author Charles Lamb to Samuel Taylor Coleridge in which Lamb passionately libeled “the cursed Barbauld crew” as “Blights and Blasts of all that is human in man and child.”²² Lamb’s objection to Barbauld and writers like her is not overtly attributed to her gender; yet his distaste for the instructional writing is part of the Romantic period’s emphasis on the child prodigy whose

native talents, wisdom, and purity could serve as models for adults.²³ The rational Enlightenment emphasis on instruction and reason was perceived as antithetical to the new rush of poems celebrating imagination, intuition, and nature. While Lamb was inveighing against a type of literature, rather than the gender of the writers, instructive or moralizing fiction was a field in which women writers were rapidly developing into a professional class of writers. In her work on Sarah Trimmer, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Anna Barbauld, Mary Hilton stipulates that “by the eighteenth century women were opening up a public space in the world of letters in which their rational and didactic voices could help moralize the population, a space which was eventually eclipsed again by a powerful male literati.”²⁴ Quite simply, literature with a didactic bent went out of fashion, and its authors’ substantial and energetic contributions to pedagogy and nation-making were marginalized in the historical record. An investigation into the primer writers’ contributions not only fortifies critical theories about the reactionary backlash against a commercially successful class of professional female writers but also challenges the established assumptions about the gendering of imperial geography.

The critical focus on children’s education and imperial propaganda that does exist has tended to look at the period of high imperialism in the late nineteenth century as the time when “a close relationship [was] established between the system of secondary schooling, propaganda and the concept of imperialism.”²⁵ In his research on imperial propaganda, John MacKenzie identifies the period between 1880 and 1960 as the one in which geography flourished as a school subject, a time when men such as James Hewitt (*Geography of the British Colonies and Dependencies*, c. 1869), Edward Salmon (*The Story of the Empire*, 1902), and Rudyard Kipling (*A School History of England*, 1911, with C. R. L. Fletcher) were publishing their geography texts.²⁶ The Royal Geographic Society sponsored annual competitive exams, and lantern slides were commissioned for classroom use.²⁷ These examples offer evidence of the variety of tools available for classroom instruction and the importance of geography to the curriculum in the high imperial period.

Though the period of high imperialism may have been the moment in which imperial ideology achieved critical mass in popular culture and education, the historical record has failed to reflect the foundation laid by women writers since the eighteenth century. Historians have dismissed

the one-hundred-year period preceding high imperialism, during which the women writers studied here were actively writing, as a time of limited importance. MacKenzie characterizes school texts written before the 1880s as “large compendia of facts, often lacking any real interpretative thrust.”²⁸ A careful study of the primers reveals that this is simply not the case. Though the primer writers were in effect armchair geographers whose work depended to some degree on the actions of others, they were still professional writers whose texts were widely circulated in schools and homes well before the late nineteenth century, and their texts make claims about race and culture, imperial privilege, religion, and gender that offer significant new insights into the relationship between science and politics, nineteenth-century pedagogy, and the ways in which marginalized citizens expressed their agency. The paradox is that these writers may have fallen through the cracks of history because they were too didactic for late-eighteenth-century Romantics but were not perceived as rigorous or professional enough by late-nineteenth-century historiographers. This trend is in keeping with the lack of recognition for women’s participation in other sciences as well. Patricia Fara neatly sums up this disparity in a study of women’s involvement in the natural sciences: “Women are absent from the written reports, but in reality they were very much present.”²⁹

As far as the study of geography texts, recent critical focus has begun to recognize this disparity, and the horizon of inquiry has been shifting slowly to study works written earlier in the century: Mangan’s 1993 edited collection on the imperial curriculum included essays such as T. Lilly’s study of representations of Africa in geography texts beginning in 1850, alongside Kathryn Castle’s focus on India in British history textbooks between 1890 and 1914; two years later, an edited collection by Morag Bell, Robin Butlin, and Michael Heffernan moved the horizon to 1820; and in 1998, Clare Midgley called for more work outside the 1880–1914 period of high imperialism to enhance our critical understanding of how ideologies of empire were transmitted before state-subsidized schooling became widely available.³⁰ In 2001, Johanna M. Smith asserted in *Constructing the Nation* that geography “lends itself to ideological uses” (134), calling for an investigation into the cultural work performed by geography texts for children.³¹ My study answers that call as the first full-length analysis of the genre as a distinct tradition of writing produced on the

fringes of professional geographic discourse before the high imperial period. The critical moment to begin evaluating the ways in which imperial ideology was communicated in school texts is here.

In addition to being written in a time period that has not previously attracted sustained critical attention, primers may also have been overlooked because they were not featured as part of the elite public school curriculum that has attracted scholarly interest. The focus on public schools has overshadowed the production and circulation of the primers in settings that are more modest and target much younger readers. The public face of imperial geography has always been in elite schools in the 1880s and 1890s, where students wrote essays on imperial topics for the Royal Colonial Institute contests, faculty followed the suggestions for instruction laid out in the Education Code of 1892 and the recommendations of the Geographical Association regarding the teaching of imperial geography in secondary schools in 1896, and the future librarians who would recommend texts to this population were quizzed on colonial literature on the library assistants' examination by the Library Association from 1904 onwards.³²

While much has been made of the fact that gentlemen's sons like Kipling's Stalky and friends were molded by their educations at these institutions to take up the flaming imperial brand, as Newbolt urged in his "Vitai Lampada" poem,³³ as yet we know comparatively little about the curricular reading taking place within these schools, though much good work has been done on prize books, adventure stories, and other extracurricular reading. As well, the focus on the public schools where gentlemen's sons were groomed has ignored the education going on in parlors and nurseries in towns and villages and the common rooms of Sunday schools prior to and alongside the late-century public schooling. A careful study of geography primers will also facilitate a greater understanding among cultural historians of what education looked like outside of the public schools where generations of students whom Jeffrey Richards characterizes as Britain's "ruling elite" received instruction.³⁴

Before education became compulsory, there is still a likelihood that children of various social classes would have come into contact with the geography primers. The 1851 census indicates that 50 percent of children between the ages of five and fifteen had some contact with Sunday schools, and religious publishers often commissioned primers to support

missionary work while providing a gloss of other peoples around the globe.³⁵ In addition, many towns offered dame schools: small, often single-sex, establishments where girls and boys could learn reading, writing, social deportment, music, and arithmetic. Schools sometimes offered extras such as French, Latin, accounts, navigation, surveying, and needlework. Aristocrats such as the Marquis of Rockingham sometimes provided schools on their estate, paying for books and a schoolmaster. Philanthropic industrialists like Robert Owen also ran schools, such as New Lanark.³⁶ What was studied at small, independent schools is to some degree difficult to reconstruct; yet the 1851 census reports that geography appears fourth on the list (after reading, writing, and arithmetic): 31 percent of male and 26 percent of female scholars are recorded as studying this subject.³⁷ The appeal of geography may have been driven by its accompanying accounts from travelers and voyagers. As late as 1899, only 25 percent of elementary schools taught history, but 75 percent found geography more congenial, perhaps in part because it stimulated the imagination and offered a window into a larger world of adventure and opportunity.³⁸

Evidence suggests that in addition to classroom use, primers may have been privately purchased for use in home instruction. The recent rediscovery of the homemade nursery library of Jane Johnson (1706–59) has sparked discussion among scholars about the eighteenth-century pedagogy practiced at home through stories, educational aids, and instructional books.³⁹ Certainly there is evidence of a broad circulation of educational primers in grammar, spelling, and basic instruction during the early nineteenth century. Cobbett's *Grammar*, first published in 1818, had sold 100,000 copies by 1834, and the numbers associated with religious publishers such as the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge and Religious Tract Society are even more impressive. By 1818, these firms had published and distributed 25 million tracts on a range of subjects.⁴⁰ These numbers affirm David Vincent's contention that "[a]dulthood from a wide range of backgrounds had for centuries accepted a responsibility for instruction in basic literacy, and continued to play a role alongside the growth of state-funded and controlled education."⁴¹ Industrialization only spurred the importance of getting an education, especially to upwardly mobile families, who glimpsed opportunities for their children as more and more clerical jobs were being made available.

These parental ambitions and hopes have been linked to the rise of the middle-class consumer culture and a boom in literature marketed to children. Though critical attention has been focused on how the passage of educational reforms such as the 1870 Education Act “stimulated publishing activity to serve the newly created market for working-class school texts,”⁴² the multiple editions of the primers support the argument that this market was already established well before midcentury. For our purposes, thinking more broadly beyond the high imperial period as well as beyond the walls of elite educational institutions makes sense in contextualizing the audience and the heretofore-unrecognized widespread impact of the geography primers.

Moving the critical horizon of imperial studies in general has also provoked discussion among postcolonial scholars. Edward Said’s voice joins the chorus of those beginning to look beyond the high imperial period. Said maintains that though most historians mark the beginning of the age of empire at 1878 with the scramble for Africa, “we can locate a coherent, fully mobilized system of ideas near the end of the eighteenth century, and there follows the set of integral developments such as the first great systematic conquests under Napoleon, the rise of nationalism and the European nation-state, the advent of large-scale industrialization, and the consolidation of power in the bourgeoisie.”⁴³ In short, there are persuasive reasons to look beyond the period of high imperialism for answers about the ways in which child readers were introduced to their empire. Yet the primers, which were a critical tool in stimulating the machinery of the imperial enterprise, have been absent from the historical record. I argue that their absence has been a deliberate omission rather than an oversight, and this omission is rooted in several causes: the enduring popularity of the Romantic movement and its backlash against professional women writers of didactic fiction that occluded the one hundred years of geography primer writing, which did indeed underwrite the goals of imperialism by transmitting its ideology to several generations in different social classes; the prevailing notion that imperialism was not wedded to the curricula until the high imperial period in which elite public schools circulated these texts; and, finally, the professionalization of geography as a discipline that was the province of traveling men.

The final argument connects to Gillian Rose’s remarks in the epigraph, in which she characterizes geography as a discipline that has been

historicized as masculinist. This is part of a larger ideological clash identified by feminist critics as one in which women have struggled for legitimacy and validation in the face of disciplinary commitments to traditions that, in the words of Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter, “have consistently undermined women’s claims to know.”⁴⁴ The question has long troubled feminists: within a masculinist paradigm, how can women find the tools to articulate their subject positions?

Historically speaking, long-held binaries such as cartographic historian Matthew Edney’s assertion that “geographical (and exploration) narratives were universally the products of male writers, whereas a significant portion of the travel literature was written by and for women” have effaced women’s production of geographic texts and active participation in the imperial project.⁴⁵ Women simply have not been written into the history of geographic study, and when they do appear, it is as genteel travelers rather than geographers. Though some of the women discussed here did have the opportunity and the means to travel—Mary Martha Sherwood (*Introduction to Geography*, 1818) accompanied her husband’s regiment to India, Hariette McDougall (*Letters from Sarawak*, 1854) traveled to Malaysia with her minister husband, and Anne Keary (coauthor of *Early Egyptian History*, 1861) went to Egypt on an excursion to recover her health—they did not identify as travel writers, a move that indicates that these writers wished to foreground their socially sanctioned service to child readers rather than their experience as traveling women.⁴⁶ For the most part, however, the primer writers who spent their lives producing sometimes a book a year did not travel to the sites they describe in their texts; instead, their work was academic and intellectual, rather than experiential. They cobbled together the accounts of male travelers and explorers, rendering these accounts accessible and educational for their child audiences, supplementing this material with their own opinions, drawing comparisons between different cultures, and using metaphors and analogues from English domestic life to explain complex concepts such as imperialism, colonial rule, and racial supremacy.

Though their work did require considerable reading, research, editing, and framing (the archives at the British Library even indicate that Barbara Hofland applied for a reader’s pass), primer writers are not part of the history of geography as an academic discipline. Even feminist geographer Cheryl McEwan, whose work on women travelers in West

Africa has laid the foundation for rethinking women's imperial roles, contends that nineteenth-century women did not explore, discover, or "play a significant role in the establishment of academic geography."⁴⁷ Male writers did indeed dominate the field in that their contributions were the ones recorded and acknowledged. Popular male writers in England, France, and America such as Pierre Nicolas Langlet du Fresnoy (*The Geography of Children; or, a Short and Easy Method of Teaching or Learning Geography*, 1737), John Newbery (*Geography Made Familiar and Easy to Young Gentlemen and Ladies*, 1748), Abbé Gaultier (*A Complete Course of Geography by Means of Instructive Games*, 1795), Reverend Goldsmith (*An Easy Grammar of Geography*, 1805), and Samuel Goodrich (the named author of the Peter Parley travel series, which was penned by different writers for the Harvey Darton firm) were publishing geography texts during this period; even popular writers of boys' adventure stories such as Captain Mayne Reid (*Odd People: Being a Popular Description of Singular Races of Man*, 1860) and Rudyard Kipling (*A School History of England*, 1911, with C. R. L. Fletcher) also dabbled in the writing of geography books. Adventure writer W. H. G. Kingston even served as secretary of the Colonization Society and wrote manuals on emigration for the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge while writing his popular tales.⁴⁸ Critical focus on these figures, while important and necessary in its own way, has occluded the very real interventions that women geography primer writers made in the teaching and transmission of geography in the nineteenth century.

Part of the reason for this assumption about women's contributions is certainly drawn from the reality of women's exclusion from professional credentialing in their fields of interest, especially in the early half of the nineteenth century. After all, Girton College did not open its doors to women until 1869, followed in 1871 by Newnham at Cambridge and by medical schools in 1876. Women lobbied for medical training by invoking arguments similar to the primer writers; advocates for women's professional credentialing in medicine skillfully framed their claims by emphasizing the important service that these professionals could perform in the empire, in this case, by ministering to women in harems and zenanas. In a publication distributed by the Outline Missionary Series, female doctor and writer Emma Raymond Pitman stated, "No male doctor is called to a case of disease among women; and, confined in the close, unhealthy, dark

Zenanas, and left to the tender mercies of women steeped in ignorance and superstition, there is little chance that a woman's constitution will triumph over acute disease."⁴⁹ Like the primer writers, medical women sought entry into the professional, public sphere by coding their work as socially appropriate service to empire. Yet as Antoinette Burton has argued, Englishwomen's sympathy for their "suffering sisters" was often complicated by their own desire for political power and educational access.⁵⁰

As women's experience in the sciences indicates, higher education and the professoriate did continue to be a strictly guarded male province throughout the nineteenth century; however, as indicated by the very existence of the primers in such large numbers, this lack of access to education and professional membership in academic societies did not foreclose women's participation in the discourse of academic geography. Though these texts have been subsequently devalued, marginalized, and spoken of in terms of service, even by the women who wrote them, instructional writing for children does constitute an academic discourse, albeit not one that is accorded the same level of respect or recognition as material written for older readers. Traditionally the province of women, instructional writing for young children has long been, as Mitzi Myers argues, "undervalued and underutilized, mostly because it is middle-class, domestic women's work."⁵¹

The primers demonstrate that women writers were active participants in an academic discourse that shaped the way children viewed, understood, and mapped the world. Recuperating the primers into the dominant historical record will offer an alternative map for traversing the landscape of nineteenth-century female history. The late-eighteenth-century tensions surrounding women who entered the public sphere as professional writers did not dissolve with the end of the Romantic era and the start of Victoria's reign in 1837; after all, writers as diverse as Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot adopted male pseudonyms when they published their texts. With Victoria on the throne as a powerful visual figurehead of nation, womanhood, and sovereignty, a particularly charged atmosphere was established for debates about the place and role of women in the nation and in the empire. Women's roles and the representation of their duties shifted during the period in which the primers were written. From Coventry Patmore's *Angels in the House* or John Ruskin's *queens of the hearth* to the incendiary Pankhursts campaigning for women's suffrage and the Girton graduates who challenged the

intellectual superiority of their male counterparts to the bicycle-riding New Women at the close of the century, this was a time period in which the domestic lives of women were a public concern. Though I am collapsing these disparate events here into a seemingly smooth trajectory during which generations of women struggled to make advances in social and political life, my intention is not to oversimplify the complicated interplay of cultural forces; instead, I would mark how such familiar historical landmarks provide a context for the discourses surrounding women's work, place, and duties to their families, the nation, and the empire. These events provide helpful signposts for considering the fraught subject position of the women who produced primers throughout the nineteenth century.

Though effaced from the historical record for all the foregoing reasons, the primers bring new and exciting opportunities to scholars of nineteenth-century history, women's studies, geography, and postcolonial studies. Because they are written for children, the texts preserve, suspended in amber, the values and beliefs of their culture written in clear, urgent, and direct terms for children to learn. These texts, after all, were *teaching* tools. As M. Daphne Kutzer notes in her study of imperial fiction, children's texts "help [to] acculturate children into society and to teach them to behave and believe in acceptable ways."⁵² Though the primers do not explicitly urge readers to pick up a rifle or scout civil service positions in the outposts of empire, they do articulate a set of persuasive beliefs about empire, nation, and colonization. The readers might not have been aware of the effect of their childhood reading on their adult beliefs and actions, yet these texts, like others written for children, are "key agents of socialization [that] diagram what cultures want of their young and expect of those who tend to them."⁵³ As part of the ideological machinery of empire, primers fostered a sense of belonging to an imagined community and constructed a system of privilege within that community. Scholars and critics should credit the writers with having the self-reflexivity and the sense to realize the cultural import of the work they had undertaken. After all, the epigraph Maria Edgeworth chose for her child-rearing guide *The Parent's Assistant* (1792), which she coauthored with her father, Richard, was a line from Aristotle: "All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth."⁵⁴ For primer writers and the consumers of their texts, nothing less than the fate of the British Empire was at stake.

Locating the Primers in Cross-Disciplinary Terrain

Analyzing the primers in a careful, thorough, and rigorous way requires the best tools and insights from a variety of disciplines. My aim is to locate these texts at the intersections of ongoing critical conversations in the fields of literary studies, postcolonial analysis, women's studies, children's literature, geography, and nineteenth-century history. Dismissing them solely as geographic texts that taught specialized knowledge about climate and latitude forecloses the meaning these texts had to the women who wrote them, the children who read them, and the specific historical circumstances that shaped their production. Looking at these texts as works that are only important to geographic studies means losing the opportunity to consider that the tools and terms the writers employed were historically specific productions reflecting the social codes of the culture in which they were developed. Furthermore, the texts are not confined to exclusively geographic subject matter but often range far afield to discuss topics such as religion, race, customs, and the proper motivations for imperial governance. In writing about empire, the texts are implicated in the transmission and growth of a multifaceted enterprise, itself the intellectual property of no particular discipline.

Indeed, contemporary geographers have come to see their field as one with important connections to the work of other disciplines,⁵⁵ and recent critical work has begun to acknowledge the heterogeneous nature of the geographic discipline at the end of the eighteenth century as well, representing it as a field spanning cartography, topography, surveying, and navigation, as well as adventure narratives, notes for scientific meetings, and journalistic accounts.⁵⁶ This wide range of materials has opened up what Felix Driver calls an “unsettled frontier” of texts that fall outside the traditional boundaries of scientific treatises and veer toward accounts of adventurous travel and scientific exploration.⁵⁷ It is worth noting that many nineteenth-century explorers wrote fiction as well as exploration narratives; in classrooms, educators supplemented the transmission of imperial ideology and science with a dose of fiction because it had the benefit of serving, as J. S. Bratton says of young people's fiction, “as a vehicle for ideology.”⁵⁸

As a result of these convergences and blurred distinctions between texts, I approach the primers as important to the making of cultural history

and imperial propaganda, a distinction in line with Paul Carter's critical approach to making a "spatial history" of Botany Bay: "It is not the geographer's space, although that comes into it. What is evoked here are the spatial forms and fantasies through which a culture declares its presence."⁵⁹ For my purposes, the "spatial forms and fantasies" that Carter identifies were the rhetorical tropes instituted, evoked, and reinforced for child readers from their basic nursery primers to their thick schoolbooks, which describe the work of empire and its agents in greater detail. Geographers such as Carter are not the only ones who have begun to work beyond the bounds of their specific disciplines. Scholars from literary studies, anthropology, gender studies, history, and postcolonial studies are part of a critical groundswell in which texts are being assessed within a wider critical matrix to comprehend their broader cross-disciplinary significance.

A burgeoning critical tradition of cross-disciplinarity means that scholars have begun to reject the silo model in which each specialty jealously guards its own stores from outsiders. As knowledge rapidly becomes more networked and interconnected, scholars can begin to glimpse heretofore-unseen links, resemblances, and continuities between disciplines that have traditionally been housed in different libraries, buildings, and colleges on the same campus. The alternative to the silo model is characterized by an approach that focuses not on disciplinary boundaries but on a disciplined methodology.⁶⁰ Critical voices behind the gates of disciplines such as anthropology and postcolonial studies have been calling for an end to what Clifford Geertz terms the "borders-and-territories map of modern intellectual life."⁶¹ Additionally, the advent of feminist pedagogy, with its emphasis on connection and collaboration, offers similar guiding strategies for this project, urging the widening and extending of the critical fields in which texts can be made to matter. Finally, postcolonial analyses have shown the usefulness of studying the links between science, propaganda, the law, and literary studies in understanding the ways that race and privilege are socially and discursively constructed. Edward Said has asserted that the "tendency for fields and specializations to subdivide and proliferate" is actually "contrary to an understanding of the whole, when the character, interpretation, and direction or tendency of cultural experience are at issue."⁶² Understanding the character of imperialism as a cultural experience requires a nuanced, multiperspectival approach, balancing issues of subjectivity, readership, and tropes of professionalism

in scientific and pedagogic discourse. A combination of these different critical tools allows me to consider the primers from different perspectives, to establish their importance in various contexts, and ultimately to argue for their significance in different overlapping areas of nineteenth-century life and twenty-first-century scholarship.

In addition, the overlapping and open approach of contemporary critics' work is remarkably consistent with the complex, varied, and contextual negotiations of the primary sources I am working with here, and in many ways the primers themselves, both in their subject matter and in their approach to it, have dictated my cross-disciplinary approach. Because they did not have access to professional credentials in geography, primer writers were free in a sense to blur the lines among scientific facts, adventurous fiction, personal opinions, and religious dogma within their texts.⁶³ The structure of these texts varies from formal school textbooks (for example, E.R.'s *Geography and History* and Barbara Hofland's *Africa Described*) to question-and-answer dialogues between mothers and children about particular regions (for example, Lucy Wilson's *Fruits of Enterprize*, A Lady's *Geography in Easy Dialogues*, and Mary F. E. Boscawen's *Conversations on Geography*) to narrative journeys around the world (for example, Priscilla Wakefield's *Traveller in Africa*, Charlotte Yonge's *Little Lucy's Wonderful Globe*) to general comparative sketches that were often topic-based studies of climate, dress, or manners (for example, Mary and Elizabeth Kirby's *World at Home*, Priscilla Wakefield's *Sketches of Human Manners*, and Anne Jane Cupples's *Our Parlour Panorama*). Though the primers often drew from the same source materials (the firsthand travels of male scientists and adventurers), each woman writer framed her text in her own particular way. Yet when the primers are considered side by side, discursive patterns begin to emerge; this is where the tools of literary analysis become important to the study of these texts.

Though distinct in its method of inquiry from geography, the discipline of literary studies has much to offer as an approach to studying these texts. An analysis of the way these texts were written and structured as well as the narrative voices in which the writers addressed readers reveals that these women spent comparatively little time *locating* territories, concentrating instead on the hermeneutic move of *positioning* them in relation to England, Britain, Europe, and the established colonies. The emphasis on position rather than location indicates that the primers are not simply

parroting facts about place but are engaged in representing these places within a meaningful framework of imperialism through which children could come to recognize their own small island as a mighty empire entitled and even morally beholden to rule the rest of the world.

Mapping the Route: The Itineraries of the Chapters

The primers written by women during this period reflect both their conflicted subject position and their domestic expertise. The writers map the concepts of nation and empire onto a domestic setting familiar to their readers and to themselves. By positing relationships among nations and peoples in terms of the family, and by situating the empire as a global home requiring good management, cleanliness, thrift, and discipline, primer writers at once explained nation and empire to their readers and exemplified how their particular knowledge base and gendered skills in the household could be usefully extrapolated to the imperial sphere.

In my investigation of the work that primers do, I shift between a close reading of the writers' literary techniques in these initial chapters and, in the later chapters, an analysis of the stakes of their claims for feminist geographies and postcolonial theory. This means reading both the dominant historical narratives espoused by the primers and the multiple and competing histories of marginalized peoples that have not been privileged. Though the primers do not privilege these alternative histories, this does not mean that traces of these narratives are not still present within the dominant imperial discourse. For instance, I show how critiques of indigenous peoples as lazy or unenterprising may in fact represent narrative opportunities for scholars to recover evidence of resistance to imperialism preserved and circulated (ironically enough) through the very channels that transmitted its ideologies. This is a strategy that Said calls "contrapuntal reading," in which scholars can reread the cultural archive "with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts."⁶⁴

In all of these chapters, I present a range of examples from several primers, while closely reading episodes from two or three. Though there are disadvantages in covering such a range of material over a long period of time, only through such an approach do the discursive patterns of the genre as a whole begin to emerge. As Richard Phillips states,

“comparative research can illuminate processes that may not be visible within individual places, and also position those places within a wider framework, charting dispersed and connected political histories and geographies.”⁶⁵ In chapters 1 and 2, I examine in detail the use of domestic tropes employed as structuring devices in the primers. This provides an introduction to and an analysis of the common rhetorical flourishes in the primers from 1790 to 1895, with particular emphasis on the first half of the century. Chapters 3 and 4 shift from a focus on the rhetorical strategies deployed in the primers to an examination of what the authors are doing below the surface of their texts as exposed in moments of disruption; these narrative moments reveal traces of other agencies as well as sublimated critiques of imperial closures with stakes for women’s history and postcolonial studies. Ultimately, these two chapters explore whether resistances to imperial hegemony on the part of the writers and the colonized subjects whose stories they insistently included can be retrieved from these texts. The final chapter suggests links between the primers and the work of first-, second-, and third-wave feminism, the problems of globalization, and the work of postcolonial scholars.

In chapter 1, “The Dysfunctional ‘Family of Man,’” I begin by discussing the trope of the Family of Man invoked in the primers; this rhetorical device was employed to posit strategic relationships and resemblances among nations in the early nineteenth-century primers by E.R. (*Geography and History*), Priscilla Wakefield (*A Family Tour through the British Empire and The Traveller in Africa*), Barbara Hofland (*Panorama of Europe and Africa Described*), Jehoshaphat Aspin (*Cosmorama*), and Mary Anne Venning (*A Geographical Present*). The persistence of the Family of Man model continued in the midcentury texts of Favell Lee Mortimer (*Near Home*) and Mary F. E. Boscawen (*Conversations on Geography*) and in the late-century primer of Annie Wright Marston (*Children of China*). Using the Family of Man trope, primer writers were able to present child readers with an accessible vision of power and authority through the domestic frame of the family in which the government of unruly children was handled by a firm but fair mother country. What is significant about the use of the Family of Man model is that it responded to debates in the pre-Darwinian period between monogenists who believed in a single origin for humankind and polygenists who relied on separate origins to support their theories of racial supremacy. The primers’ adoption of

the Family of Man metaphor, while infantilizing those dubbed as colonial children, nonetheless proposes a system of imperial governance founded in an acknowledgment of shared humanity and responsibility, a possibility that has not received critical attention and requires consideration of the ways in which gender inflected these writers' representations of imperial peoples, space, and cultural practices.

The infantilization of non-European peoples was deeply problematic; however, informed and contextualized by the eighteenth-century vision of the child as a site of perfectibility and potential that could be actualized through rational and sustained education, the Family of Man model begins to look surprisingly more progressive than the racial discourse of its day, and as primers were quick to point out, it offered a way for primer writers to differentiate the kinder, more beneficent imperial practices of the English from those of their European rivals. As mother country, England was responsible for fostering growth as well as administering discipline. This model is ultimately different from the lucre-driven colonialism that the primers represent the other European nations as engaging in. These European rivals are unsuccessful in their colonial enterprises because they do not conciliate the indigenous peoples properly as members of the family. Primers further undercut these rivals by claiming resemblances between European rivals and the non-Europeans they purport to govern. The genealogy of this Family of Man is also carefully drawn in the primers. Whereas the British are depicted as following in the cultural tradition of past empires such as Greece, Rome, and Egypt, they do so with strategic differences, most notably because of their Protestantism; Britain's judicious colonial management is also sharply contrasted with the greedy imperial practices of the Spanish and the Dutch, thereby marking the British as the ones most morally fit to rule.

In chapter 2, "Place Settings at the Imperial Dinner Party," I begin by identifying and analyzing the preoccupation with consumption in geography primers written throughout the nineteenth century. This preoccupation is consistent with a taxonomic impulse to tabulate, control, and clarify data in tables and hierarchies, especially through the trope of the imperial dinner party represented in midcentury primers by Favell Lee Mortimer and Sarah Lee. In this representational device, European nations are invited to bring their national dishes to a feast; the quality and quantity of these dishes establishes each nation's place in a hierarchy

of providers. These feasts are notable not only for who serves the main course (England) but also for who is invited to participate in the international fellowship. The cuisine of non-European countries does not merit a place at the table, because (the primers argue) these non-Europeans are not skilled at locating nourishing, wholesome food or of partaking in moderation. Using descriptions of diet and consumption practices, primer accounts effectively plot nations according to how these practices cause them to differ from English ideals of moderation and taste. Primer writers link the practices of overindulgent or improper consumption to the satisfaction of other licentious appetites of the flesh and a subsequent breakdown of the family structure. The focus on consumption allowed primer writers to extrapolate their domestic authority and expertise to the imperial sphere.

The proper flow of food nourished the empire as it consumed the resources and energies of the colonial world. As domestic agents, women could manage and regulate consumption, preventing a reversal of the flow of power along the food chain in which the eaters would themselves be eaten. Primer writers positioned the cannibal as a polarized domestic doppelganger that not only rendered the male body vulnerable to counter-invasion but also demonstrated that the domestic interface of cooking and eating could figure as a potentially threatening site of exchange. This coded and focused anxiety about the cannibal reveals a deeper concern about the practices of imperial governance and the possibilities of dangerous insurrections and instabilities in the colonies that could undermine the metropolitan center. The discussion of cannibalism in the primers may be read as evidence not of material indigenous practices but of the moveable feast of imperial ambitions. This chapter juxtaposes the imagined hungry cannibal with the orderly consumption of the European bodies politic assembled at the imperial dinner party. Primers discussed in this chapter include Priscilla Wakefield's *Traveller in Africa* (1814), Mary Anne Venning's *A Geographical Present* [1817], Mary Martha Sherwood's *Introduction to Geography* (1818), Barbara Hofland's *Africa Described* (1828), Favell Lee Mortimer's *Near Home* (1849) and *Far-Off* (1852), and Mary Hield's *Glimpses of South America* (1882).

In chapter 3, "Terra Incognita," I move beyond a discussion of the work the primers ostensibly do in their use of discursive analogues and domestic metaphors such as the Family of Man and the imperial dinner

party, which they deployed to explain the function and structure of imperial power. The facility with which they adapted texts for child readers from a variety of sources including travel narratives, missionary accounts, and other geography texts points to the fact that primer writers were conscious of the power and importance of language and were adept in its use. If we acknowledge the deliberate editorial and textual choices these writers consciously made in framing their texts, then we must also be prepared to recognize the undercurrent of frustration that exists beneath the surface of many of these texts. This chapter shows how these women writers' texts bear traces of this process of negotiation between gender and authority, nation and empire: the texts gloss geography and travel as gendered experiences, contrast the stasis of women with the mobility of male travelers and writers, and emphasize the role mothers play in rearing the future empire builders.

These women were by no means politically radical, so the subterranean traces of discontent and frustration over their limited roles urges us to rethink the terra incognita of nineteenth-century womanhood, agency, and autonomy. For women during the early part of the nineteenth century, Linda Colley notes, “[b]eing a patriot was a way of claiming the right to participate in British political life, and ultimately a means of demanding a much broader access to citizenship.”⁶⁶ The fact that participation in the imperial enterprise offered women a means of engaging in professional, remunerated work makes the presence of disruptive moments even more interesting. Within these moments, primer writers call attention to the gendered limitations that preclude them from the kinds of firsthand experiences enjoyed by their male traveling counterparts. In calling attention to the limitations on their texts, primer writers are also covertly acknowledging and challenging the limits that bind their gender. Though the texts they wrote ultimately buttress imperial power, these moments of disruption are intensified in moments of showcased dialogue between mothers and sons regarding geography and travel.

Primers testing possibilities of women's authority and social roles in political and imperial life include Priscilla Wakefield's *Family Tour through the British Empire*, A Lady's *Geography in Easy Dialogues*, Lucy Wilson's *Fruits of Enterprize*, Barbara Hofland's *Africa Described*, Mrs. E. Burrows's *Our Eastern Empire*, and Maria Hack's *In Land and Ice Deserts*. These primers

consistently stage the mother as interlocutor in imperial dialogue. As seen in the Family of Man model, motherhood played a symbolic role as an analogue for imperial parenting of colonial children. In this chapter, I explore how motherhood figured as a strategy as well as a symbol. Primers acknowledge maternal power and authority both in stooping to educate children and in directing the journeys of children along gendered trajectories. Yet the vision of the self-sacrificing mother breaks down in key moments when these figures are represented as growing impatient with their sons, who will have opportunities for travel that the mothers will not be able to experience.

This represents a challenge to foreclosed readings that interpret agency either traditionally (women fulfilling the domestic duties and the responsibilities of motherhood) or radically (those figures such as the Pankhursts who violently resisted and actively and publicly sought to subvert the patriarchy). As Bat-Ami Bar On argues, the problem with this construal of agency is that it “reproduces a normative dualism that Western second-wave feminists have tried to overcome. They have objected to this obviously masculinist dualism because submissive passivity and agency have been associated with women and men, respectively, and agency has been normatively prioritized.”⁶⁷ Following Bar On’s lead, I argue against a neat distinction in which primer writers can be read as either politically passive and naïve or radically resistant. Rather, I suspect that something much more complex and ultimately messier is going on in these texts. The texts acknowledge problems and point to discontinuities in the imperial enterprise (though their work did endorse it and writing about it did in turn help these women support their families). Simultaneously, however, the texts also contain moments of critique and sympathy with other voices, providing scholars with the opportunity to test the possibilities for alternative routes to women’s agency. These routes have traditionally been seen as proceeding at the expense of non-European peoples; Marilyn Lake refers to this as the “long shadow” that is cast “over twentieth-century feminists’ relationship to the nation.”⁶⁸ While the primers certainly colluded in imperial oppression through the writing of their texts, their texts nonetheless contain liberating possibilities.

As a result of their vexed relationship to the imperial project, women primer writers sometimes challenge the hegemony of imperial mapping in texts that ostensibly seem to support this system. Chapter 4, “Prisoners

in *Its Spatial Matrix?*” demonstrates that primer writers eschew the trope of the blank space that is traditionally invoked in geographic accounts, voyages, and travel texts to ignore, suppress, or negate the presence of indigenous peoples. Primer writers instead present the world as a palimpsest overwritten by imperial inscription. The palimpsest is a rich symbol in postcolonial studies; José Rabasa calls it “an illuminative metaphor for understanding geography as a series of erasures and overwritings that have transformed the world. The imperfect erasures are, in turn, a source of hope for the reconstitution or reinvention of the world from native points of view.”⁶⁹ The selection of a palimpsest model over a blank space model suggests sympathetic awareness of other, effaced systems of mapping. While the erasure of indigenous agency may have been essential to the inscription of British heroic imperial masculinity, imperial womanhood was not necessarily contingent on this erasure. In fact, primer writers relied on accounts of the resistance of colonized peoples to triangulate their own critiques of imperialism.

In addition to the palimpsest model, primers also utilize the discursive trope of the map confrontation; in a series of imagined map confrontations, primers posit the map as a contact zone where colonizer and colonized debate meaning and signification. The resulting primer accounts offer an alternative to the colonizer/colonized binary; in negotiating the sutured imperial accounts and representations of indigenous voices, the primers plot a possible alternative, a “thirdspace” beyond colonizer and colonized. The term is borrowed from theorist Henri Lefebvre’s spatial trialectic, in which thirdspace is the lived space where people act, meet, and make meaning on a daily basis. In theoretical terms, thirdspace is the plane where hegemonic imperial discourse and indigenous voices are edited, reconstituted, and displayed by women writers who endorsed imperialism yet resisted its restrictive closures. The primers present a representational thirdspace where the alternative place knowledge of indigenous peoples survives within the frame of a text written as part of the dominant imperial discourse.

This chapter experiments with an attempt to recover marginal voices from within texts that have a contingent and sometimes-vexed relationship to grand narratives of empire. This process of recovery is critical to the pursuit of postcolonial studies. Richard Phillips characterizes the task of postcolonial geography, for example, as one that must “contest

the assumed passivity of the non-European and colonized worlds, to demonstrate that people and places ‘on the margins’ could also be active, making their own histories, if not of course in conditions of their own choosing.”⁷⁰ Primers offer instances in which the histories of non-European peoples—their resistances, their stories, their frustrations, and their impressions of European colonizers—are preserved and recorded.

As imperial tools, the primers create the imperial world they set out merely to describe. Edward Said notes that such knowledge practices “produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it.”⁷¹ While the primers were part of a tradition and a discourse that fostered imperial subjectivity and privilege, one must also consider the “originality” of the individual authors whose gendered subject positions certainly inflected the work they produced, as is evidenced by disruptive moments in their texts in which sympathy with Others or dissatisfaction with the imperial project is voiced. Challenges to the complexion and the gendering of the “white man’s burden” come from the very channels through which the imaginative construction of empire was transmitted: imprisonment in a spatial matrix may be, at last, primarily a failure of imagination. In other words, by studying the structure and transmission of imperial ideologies, we may be able to free ourselves from its restrictive closures by imagining a space outside the postimperial world we have inherited.

The concluding chapter, “Contextualizing Archival Recovery,” speculates about the consequences of the lost inheritance of women’s writing for twentieth-century modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf and the suffragettes. This chapter connects the twentieth-century concerns about women, space, and agency to the work of nineteenth-century primers. It also identifies the ways in which primer writers saw the connections between the pursuit of knowledge and the production of power. Though primer writers warned readers that those who did not produce knowledge would lose the power of self-representation, these writers’ texts have been effaced from the historical record. I speculate about the connection between knowledge and power in the process of putting together and preserving archives as well as the politics involved in the process of recovering texts, introducing them as subjects of critical inquiry, and relying on them to fill in the blank spaces in the historical record.

The stakes of such a project are critical not only for historians but also for those who study literary texts from the perspectives of women's studies, children's culture, and postcolonial positions of analysis. A thorough understanding of the work these primers do will enable scholars to re-read nineteenth-century texts more productively. From Jane Austen's great houses to Kipling's schoolrooms, the empire was an important part of academic, social, and domestic life across the long nineteenth century, and reading primers back into the historical and literary record will enable us to see these texts within the discursive tradition in which they were written and to examine the ways in which their teachings informed and shaped the literary works of the nineteenth century. As Anita Levy asserts, "the materials of what we now call sociology, anthropology, and psychology compose the field within which fiction must be read."⁷²

In his *Production of Space*, theorist Henri Lefebvre observes, "It is not the work of a moment for a society to generate (produce) an appropriated social space in which it can achieve a form by means of self-presentation and self-representation—a social space to which that society is not identical, and which indeed is its tomb as well as its cradle. The act of creation is, in fact, a *process*."⁷³ The production of imperial space was indeed a process; it required the labor of generations, and future empire builders had to be cultivated and made aware of their responsibilities to this larger system; by the twentieth century, this production had left traces as well as scars in Africa, South Asia, Australia, and the Americas. Geography primers were an important part of this process; they translated a lexicon of imperial privilege, showing their readers how to interpret the known world. The unknown world, as Joseph Conrad's Marlow has famously stated, functioned in the primers as the blank threshold of an expanding empire, the frontier of ambition across which lay opportunity, riches, and the chance to inscribe one's name alongside legends like David Livingstone, Captain Robert Falcon Scott, and Ernest Shackleton.

To live figuratively in the space of the nineteenth century, then, means understanding the political, social, and imperial forces that were brought to bear on the writers who produced imperial discourse in the primers, as well as on the young subjects who read and struggled to assimilate these teachings. The primers capture the sense of the individual's struggle to orient his or her local subjectivity in relation to a global, imperial totality. The geography primers were part of a body of writing

including adventure narratives, missionary treatises, scientific papers, and travel accounts, all of which provided a means of orienting children to this imperial totality and painting a vision of empire in the minds of the very young.