

Mapping Knowledge and Power: Cartographic Representations of Empire in Victorian Britain

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine how cartographic representations of empire in Victorian Britain created a powerful stock of public images of foreign territories that helped consolidate the process of imperial rule. To probe deeper into the formation of the imperial nation, I argue for a consideration and analysis of the nature of maps as visual and narrative texts, of their connection to knowledge and power, and of their authority within the culture. Maps are textualized for reading so as to invite further reflections on the ideological dimensions of cartography and nationhood. The first two sections of the paper provide an outlook on how maps worked and how they were consumed in Victorian popular culture and also, investigate how the process of mapping reflects the state of cultural and imperial activity and contributes to the vision of the British Empire as a result. The third section of the paper looks at the ways in which maps and mapping add a further dimension to studies in literature, the novel in particular. Taking Charles

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Dickens's *Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit* as a starting point, and moving through Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in their chronological order, I explore how these Victorian novelists turn the so-called *terra incognita* into bounded territories. Taken together, then, making a connection between mapping impulse and literary imagination in the novel may allow us to visualize the Empire more spatially and dissect the imperial context more fully.

Key Words: empire, maps, culture, novel, the Victorian period