

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

Shu-chuan Yan

Department of Western Languages and Literature  
National University of Kaohsiung  
E-mail: yannest@nuk.edu.tw

### **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

---

Received February 15, 2006; accepted November 15, 2006; last revised October 23, 2006

Proofreaders: Jeffrey Cuvilier, Yi-wei Yin, Kuei-feng Hu, Min-Hsi Shieh

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

Recent scholarship on cartography has expanded our understanding of connections between mapping and forms of nationhood in diverse ways. Postcolonial cultural critics and geographers, for example, have dwelt upon the cultural and geographical dimensions of maps and mapping by examining how the spatial variation of culture develops meanings for people during the imperial age. It is often assumed that the process of mapping is central to the very constitution of culture and civilization, and that the map, an index of politics, helps conjure up images of place and space as ideological landscapes embodying the power relations between nations. And yet, no discussion of maps and mapping would be complete without an exploration of their relationships to knowledge and power. David Turnball, for one, regards the map as “a metaphor for knowledge and also as a major means of knowledge representation in a wide array of cultures” (1989: v). The map is a metaphor not only for the territory it represents but also for the culture that creates it. The connection between “the power to map” and “the power to control” is thus revealed. A similar argument is supported by Denis Cosgrove who claims that mapping “was figured as a form of literacy, a sign of civilization; it was . . . restricted to a fairly closely defined form of knowledge collation and archiving” (1998: 8). Jeremy Black in turn points out that “[t]he atlases of the [nineteenth century] were nationalist, imperialist, and didactic, with a clear emphasis on territoriality” since “[t]he political agenda of the nation state was matched by a cartographic style that stressed . . . territory . . . separated by clear linear frontiers” (1997: 67-68). In a sense, atlases contain political and imperial subtexts that need to be read with care.

The idea of the map as a nexus of knowledge and power is most fully interpreted by John Brian Harley, who emphasizes that maps are more than skillfully constructed artifacts with geographical outlines—they are potent agents of governments and tools of propaganda. Equating mapped geography with the representation of national power, Harley asserts that in European

history, atlases not only codified a much wider range of geographical knowledge but also sharpened Europeans' perception of their cultural superiority (1989: 292). To highlight the nature of maps as instruments of power, he further argues that "[a]s much as guns and warships, maps have been the weapons of imperialism." As communicators of an imperial message, "[m]aps were used to legitimize the reality of conquest and empire. They helped create myths which would assist in the maintenance of the territorial *status quo*" (1989: 282). In other words, "[c]artographers manufacture power: they create a spatial panopticon, and it is a power embedded in the map text" (2001a: 165; see also Joyce, 2002: 159). As such, cartography can be treated as a discourse or a form of language, and maps as texts to be read and deconstructed.

In reading maps alongside accounts of Harley, we may capture several important map characteristics. To read the map as a text is to claim its readability and therefore the textualization of maps helps construe an imperial geography. To probe deeper into the cartographic representation of empire in Victorian Britain, however, I argue for a consideration and analysis of the nature of maps as visual and narrative texts, of their connection with knowledge and power, as well as of their authority within culture. To what extent, for example, can maps be seen as visual and narrative texts that replicate and illustrate empire in a variety of ways? How far do they participate in dominant ideologies? How do maps and mapping shape the Victorians' seeing and knowing through their visual/graphic communication? Do they accurately and objectively present the information? To answer these questions, the first two sections of the paper will formulate an understanding of developments in the production of geographical knowledge, focusing specifically on how maps worked and how they were consumed in Victorian popular culture. The map-as-educational-tool-discourse in this instance provides a convenient vehicle for investigating the ideological dimensions of geographical education and cartographic literacy. In addition to creating a visual and textual cartography of the nation, maps are also "texts of pleasure"

(Wood, 1987: 26, 28), which, as we shall see, reflect as much the relationships between representation, pleasure and fantasy.

In order to better understand the formation and nature of the British Empire, 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.<sup>1</sup> Novels, as many have noted, contain and convey imperial messages; they embody the ideological justification of empire as well. Of particular interest is Edward Said's discourse on culture and imperialism, which provides an important stimulus for studies of the intimate relationship between novel and empire. Said points out that most cultural historians and literary scholars have failed to remark "the *geographical* notation, the theoretical mapping and charting of territory that underlies Western fiction" (1993: 58). The function of space, geography and location is frequently overlooked because we think of the novel's plot and structure only. We would not have had the outlook of empire itself without considering the process of "the production as well as the acquisition, subordination and settlement of space" (Said, 1993: 216). And yet, we can find in novels plenty of geographical references that are often a source of inspiration and reflect prevalent ideas concerning charting and mapping parts foreign at the time. The novel itself makes constant references to the imperial experience and therefore creates "structures of feeling" that "support, elaborate, and consolidate the

---

<sup>1</sup> The expansion of empire that occurred during the Victorian period cannot be understood by literary mappings only. It exists, too, in other popular cultural vehicles such as music, art, magazines, newspapers, and advertisements. However, literature has remained the most popular form for the promotion of imperialist ideology. Of key interest is the writers' use of mappings as a kind of propaganda to build cartographic literacy in the educated population. The link between literature and cartography, therefore, illustrates how a specific structure of feeling comes into being in the imperial age. Such a collective consciousness not only makes visible the convergence of map-making and literary creation in the context of Victorian cartographic practice but also helps readers understand the cultural and historical context of literature.

practice of empire” (Said, 1993: 14). The allocation of spaces around the world underlies all characteristics of empire and subsequently the sense of the enlargement of the world creates “imaginative geographies” in most Westerners’ minds—the world is divided geographically in the imperial imagination.

It is in this light that I attempt to investigate the Victorian engagement with imperial boundaries through cartographic discourse that informs the novel. I maintain that the novel and the map, two apparently disparate cultural productions, share one thing in common: like the map, the novel is a form of textual cartography that participates in evolving imperial culture and articulates a language of imperial power. Thus, making a connection between mapping impulse and literary imagination in the novel may allow us to visualize the British Empire more spatially and dissect the imperial context more fully. Through literary mappings, we can see clearly how geographical knowledge is structured by power, and how power is represented in maps. Taking Charles Dickens’s *Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit* as a starting point, and moving through works by Elizabeth Gaskell and Joseph Conrad in their chronological order, I explore how these Victorian novelists place imperial frontiers on their literary maps, as well as how they turn the so-called *terra incognita* into bounded territories.<sup>2</sup> As we shall see, they constantly use the blank areas on maps as an area for fantasy—the

---

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to the imperial nation, Dickens and Conrad were able to cross borders and traveled to various outposts of empire. Yet unlike these contemporary male writers who had direct experiences of empire overseas, Gaskell could only play the part of an armchair traveler and a shop-floor customer by reading travel writing and consuming colonial products. Although she was an enthusiastic traveler in Europe, Gaskell never visited the exotic land such as India, Australia, Africa, or the Pacific like most traditional British women did. It can be said that the exercise of imagination was most crucial to Gaskell’s pursuit of imperial geographies—her understanding of far-off lands was conceptual, rather than physical. For more details, see Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* (1993) and Winifred Gérin, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Biography* (1976).

exotic land is a theater for dreams of empire and adventure and also, a playground where they can indulge themselves in many different kinds of western fantasy. But sometimes their gaze contemplating the world outside of the imperial nation tends to create the stereotype of an empty frontier that is blank or to display a space that is geographically incomplete. “Silences” appear on maps as a result—some areas on maps are blank or filled with monstrous things due to political, cultural, or social pressures on the mapmakers. “Silences” in this instance represent direct subjectivity, and the map itself fails to assume the objective form of knowledge.<sup>3</sup> To quote Simon Ryan, the cartographic representation of the unknown as a blank “does not simply or innocently reflect gaps in European knowledge, but actively erases (and legitimizes the erasure of) existing social and geo-cultural formation in preparation for the projection and subsequent emplacement of a new order” (1994: 116). A reconsideration of the map in terms of its cartographic emptiness or silences, therefore, may suggest a more complex reading of written texts for embodied spatial concerns. By using the mapping imagery, a key term in current discourse, it is likely to see how cartographic representations of empire in the Victorian novel create a powerful stock of public images of foreign territories that help consolidate the process of imperial rule. By situating maps within the broader realm of literary texts, we may better understand the ways in which different cartographic representations influence the very conception of empire.

## I. Geographical Knowledge and Imperial Power

The pursuit of geography became increasingly important in the nineteenth century that witnessed the rise of the British Empire as the world’s preeminent imperial power. Exploratory travels,

---

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Harley (2001b: 83-107).

overseas expansion as well as commercial and colonial development were all vital to the extension of geographical knowledge. The production of geographical knowledge in Britain extended as countless *terra incognita* lured a number of Britons to go out to empire, cross national boundaries, and take down their frontier experiences. As a well-known geographer Reverend J. Goldsmith described in the Preface to *A Grammar of Geography: For the Use of Schools with Maps & Illustrations* (1850), geographical knowledge was extended “by the discovery of numerous islands in the Pacific, now colonized by British subjects; by the growth of the U. S. America, which annually usurp a further portion of Indian territory; and by our acquisitions on the continents of Africa and Asia.” In Goldsmith’s words, geographical investigations encouraged British venture into the unknown world and justified colonial conquest. Geographical inscription accordingly became an essential part in shaping the imperial power’s world vision.

Although geography grew with the overseas expansion of empire, its status was rather low in the early and mid-nineteenth century. By that time, geography had not been recognized as a university discipline in Britain (Smith & Godlewska, 1994: 7).<sup>4</sup> Interest in geography, however, expanded and flourished with the popularity of children’s books about geography and this was reflected in the system of popular education. A great number of geography books were intended for young persons to gain a perspective on the world by means of instructive games, questions and answers, or globes and maps. Following the tradition from pervious years, geography during Queen Victoria’s reign was taught as an adjunct of other disciplines as well.<sup>5</sup> Training in

---

<sup>4</sup> The marginalization of geography in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge prompted the Prince Consort, who was elected Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, to deplore in 1848 that “geography, modern languages, the history of art, aesthetics and other subjects” did not form courses of study for Cambridge undergraduates (Gilbert, 1972: 13).

<sup>5</sup> In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, formal teaching of geography



geography consisted largely of learning by rote the names of places and products, and the use of the globes and storybooks (Gilbert, 1972: 128-138). The lessons geography could teach were timely and useful; they usually formed part of the common background of ideas and beliefs about the world. While boys and girls were separated and taught different subjects at school, instruction in geography was nonetheless a basic curriculum for both of them. In particular, geography was part of middle-class girls' education and the use of the globes was commonly taught. However, such elementary knowledge was constantly considered as an accomplishment or ornament that might be "useful" in attracting a husband (Purvis, 1989: 72). William Butler, a teacher of writing, accounts, and geography in ladies' school, thus stated that "the utility of geography has been universally admitted, and that science now forms an essential branch of female tuition" (qtd. Vaughan, 1972: 129). Butler's remarks invariably brings into our attention that geography, as a "polite subject," was one of the branches of feminine education.

We may recall, for example, *The Old Curiosity Shop* in which Charles Dickens alludes to Miss Sophia Wackles's small day-school for young ladies, where the instruction in geography is designed as a basic curriculum. We may also recall Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in which the author recreates her experience of learning geography by portraying the title character's schooldays at Lowood Institution, a charity school for orphans.<sup>6</sup> In *Vanity Fair* William

---

was only found in the relatively small number of schools such as "commercial schools (which prepared boys for trade), mathematical schools (which continued to teach navigation and 'use of the globes' for boys intended for the sea), academies for young ladies and the dissenting academies" (Maddrell, 1995: 162).

<sup>6</sup> Brontë received her early training in geography at a school for the daughters of clergymen at Cowan Bridge. The curriculum included "history, geography, the use of the globes, grammar, writing and arithmetic, all kinds of needlework, and the nicer kinds of household work" (Gaskell, 1997:50). Brontë's childhood education provides an evidence of how geography was deemed necessary for the school curriculum in early nineteenth-century

Thackeray in turn describes the advertisement of geography and the use of the globes as a principal subject at Miss Pinkerton's academy for young ladies. Also interesting is *Punch's* cartoon of "The Modern Governess: A Young Lady's Idea of the Use of Crinoline!" in February 1861, which illustrates an aspect of geographical education for children (Figure 1). The crinoline is a subject of much satire in *Punch* magazine, but the cartoon of "The Modern Governess" humorously anticipates a new use for the undergarment. To help children envision a much wider world, the governess uses the crinoline as a substitute for a map to describe Britain's spatial relationships with other countries: the hoops or stays (another form of longitudes and latitudes) in the skirt help bind or contain the world defined on the fabric and also, constitute alternative geographical knowledge. The crinoline in this instance is not a passive reflection of a female body only, but an educational tool and means of visual/graphical communication for describing spatial relationships in the classroom. Viewing the map as an educational tool, then, makes it possible to analyze the authority of mapping within culture and deepen our understanding of the role of the map.

Quite a few popular geography books, on the other hand, emerged to quench readers' thirst for an understanding of the world as the institution and professionalisation of geography took place in Britain after 1830. Those books had one thing in common: they all encouraged geographical readers to start with the British isles and to work out from "the relatively known to the unknown" so as to see themselves as different from the rest of the world (Maddrell, 1998: 92)—there were enduring images of other peoples and other cultures evoked in geography books. Moreover, it was assumed in nineteenth-century Europe that geographical knowledge was the key to imperial power and the pursuit of geography played a fundamental role in ordering the knowledge of the world. The construction of geography was said to reflect the power and desire



Figure 1 "The Modern Governess: A Young Lady's Idea of the Use of Crinoline!" (1861).

to domesticate the distant land for European self-esteem. According to Lesley Cormack, “the study of geography provided a means of self-definition for the English people, encouraging them to categorize people from foreign locales as the ‘other,’ as well as providing ‘normal’ English standards against which the ‘other’ could be judged” (1997: 12-13). At this point, the practice of geography is central to our understanding of how the frontier experience occurs and how savagery and civilization, nature and culture intersect with each other. Through the medium of geography books, the image of England as the imperial center of world politics and trade is forced upon the reader’s mind. The study of geography thus manifests a national and cultural arrogance and creates geographical images, stereotypes and myths at the same time.

The prominent role assumed by geography in establishing the concept of empire in most English minds is specifically seen through geography school texts and in popular books about travel and adventure. In addition to being an outlet for the transmission of geographical ideas and dominant ideologies, geography textbooks in some way function to represent and glorify the supremacy of empire. One such example is Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters* in which Mrs. Gibson recalls the nineteenth-century imagery of Africa by saying that “Africa is not merely an unhealthy—it is a savage—and even in some parts a cannibal country. I often think of all I’ve read of it in geography books, as I lie awake at night” (1987b: 551). Terms such as “unhealthy,” “savage” and “cannibal” reveal Mrs. Gibson’s bias against Africa and more, stress the binary opposition of civilization and savagery/cannibalism. Mrs. Gibson’s imperialist ideology is suggestive of the myth of British power and knowledge. The image of Africa can be said to arise from the meeting of the imperial center with geographical “others,” cannibals or savages within her own imagination. As such, Mrs. Gibson’s description indicates her desire to trace cannibals, man-eaters or anthropophagite over the blank spaces on colonial maps. And yet, her remarks have a further

implication in that they imply racial stereotyping was widely disseminated through school texts and other books prepared for education or amusement in nineteenth-century England. Up to a point, then, Mrs. Gibson's perception of the civilized/barbarous dialectic supplies a telling example to illuminate the characteristics of geography books. Her case, too, indicates the close tie between the promotion of empire and geographical education that comes to provide an ideological foundation for underpinning of a wider world: school geography texts help facilitate the "domestication" of foreign lands and their people by bringing the world back home.

## II. Cartography and Empire-Building

As cultural texts and the medium of empire, geography books asserted Britain's world hegemony—geographical discovery, supremacy over the seas, imperial trade with the non-European world—by means of words, maps, and globes. Nevertheless, as ciphers of geographical understanding, maps and globes articulated symbolic meanings in other ways during the imperial age. They helped provide an outlook on the world, shaped British people's seeing and knowing, and served as a way of ordering knowledge of the world. As is well known, Europe's encounter with its "Others" began with Europeans' exploratory travels by land routes to the East and by sea across the Mediterranean and into the Atlantic. The development of navigational aids and the skills of mapping had a great impact on the cross-cultural encounters (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1999: 95). Ever since John Harrison invented the chronometer in 1761, longitudes have been calculated more precisely. The production of maps and globes accelerated with scientific exploration, with trade and with conquest in the Victorian period—the mysteries of empty seas and unexplored regions faded away as British people began to inscribe their names on the earth.

In the history of Britain, the image of the globe was always

associated with the imperial power's claim to distant lands. Such a global image was not a standard symbol of imperial authority only. The globe, as a miniature representation of the earth, was also fundamental in producing British people's geographical perception of the world. Charles Tennyson Turner's poem "Letty's Globe" reflects exactly a traditional Victorian idea about the use of the globe. As Turner wrote, the globe was used to facilitate a little girl's geographical understanding of a larger world:

When Letty had scarce pass'd her third glad year,  
 And her young artless words began to flow,  
 One day we gave the child a color'd sphere  
 Of the wide earth, that she might mark and know,  
 By tint and outline, all its sea and land.  
 She patted all the world; old empires peep'd  
 Between her baby fingers; her soft hand  
 Was welcome at all frontiers. How she leap'd  
 And laugh'd, and prattled in her world-wide bliss;  
 But when we turn'd her sweet unlearned eye  
 On our own isle, she raised a joyous cry—  
 "Oh! Yes, I see it, Letty's home is there!"  
 And, while she hid all England with a kiss,  
 Bright over Europe fell her golden hair. (1969: 60)

James Wyld's "Great Globe" (1851), one of the products inspired by the Great Exhibition, also illustrates how cartographic knowledge was produced and consumed during Queen Victoria's reign (Figure 2). The Globe "stood for ten years in Leicester Square: it was sixty feet high, designed to be viewed from within, its inner surface painted with the physical wonders of the world" (Whitfield, 1994: 122). Overall, by showing the world's major geographical features, the "Great Globe" asserted the power of the imperial nation and stimulated a popular sense of geographical excitement at the time. However, in the modern age, the image of the globe itself is reduced to "logoization" and becomes an index of the social/cultural dynamics of globalization.

Similarly, a map meant more than its literal representations of

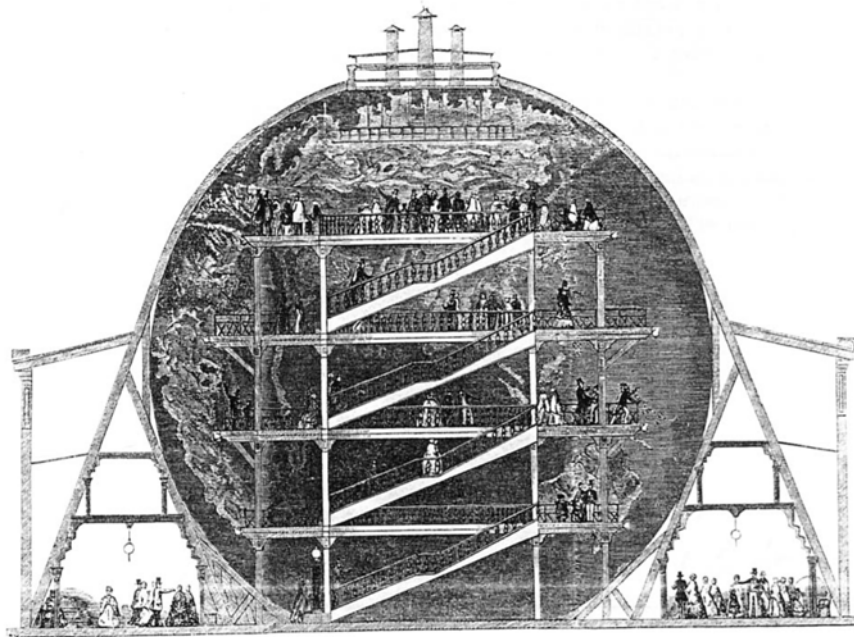


Figure 2 Wyld's "Great Globe"(Sheppard, 1966: 43).

the features of countries, lands or rivers in Victorian Britain. It functioned as a projection of imperial power, and stressed the Victorians' fascination with exotic cultures and their power to map, conquer the world. In the early history of maps, map-making was inseparable from the development of landscape painting. The first printed maps appeared in Europe in the 1470s, whereas maps came into widespread use in England during the Tudor period (Harley, 1983: 22). Afterwards cartographic practices began to have an impact on the process of empire-building. Along with the census and the museum, the map served as three institutions of power (Anderson, 1991: 163-164). Concerning the significant meaning of maps and mapping, Bill Ashcroft and others have also observed:

Both literally and metaphorically, maps and mapping are dominant practices of colonial and post-colonial cultures. Colonization itself is often consequent on a voyage of “discovery,” a bringing into being of “undiscovered” lands. The process of discovery is reinforced by the construction of maps, whose existence is a means of textualizing the spatial reality of the other, naming or, in almost all cases, renaming spaces in a symbolic and literal act of mastery and control. (1999: 31-32)

Maps in this sense take on a particular significance: they become graphic tools of colonization as well as mimetic representations of imperial power. This was made clear much earlier in William Ewart Gladstone’s (four-time prime minister of Britain) remarks concerning British attitudes to the Victorian Empire: “we feel proudly when we trace upon the map how large a portion of the earth owns the benignant sway of the British crown, and we are pleased with the idea that the country which we love should so rapidly reproduce its own image . . . in different quarters of the globe” (qtd. Shaw, 1969: 83). Clearly Gladstone’s argument is a classic representation of the myth of British greatness. In his thinking, the distance between “the British crown” and other portions of the earth can be measured by the finger and thumb on the map, and this inevitably indicates the geographical reach of national power. Gladstone’s account, so to speak, neatly sums up the connection between maps, colonial knowledge, and imperial power.

In these terms, we may regard map-making as a major signifier of territorial ambition due to its connection with land and empire. It can be a symbolic icon of power, continuing to shape the production and consumption of geographical knowledge. To put this another way, maps shape the way in which the colonial state images and imagines its dominion. Anthony Trollope’s 1859 travel book *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* is exemplary in this respect. While recollecting his trip to Jamaica, Trollope wrote: “If we have young friends



whom we wish to send forth into the world, we search the maps with them at our elbows” (1999: 99). Map-searching, as Trollope described it, was associated with empire, a space of adventure where many British young men could make careers. Later the overseas experience in Cuba also prompted Trollope to think: “The world is wide enough for us and for our offspring, and we may be well content that we have it nearly all between us” (1999: 137). Trollope’s optimism here may well have been based on the fact that the Victorians were haunted by the potential of the exotic land. Thanks to British rule around the world, the children of empire were empowered to travel and subsequently created an imperial enterprise of myths and fantasies, knowledge and power.

Another amusing example of the cartographic representation of empire is the “Crystal Palace Game” (1854), a map inspired by the 1851 Great Exhibition. The Game itself was designed as a world-map and aimed to encourage people to embark on a “VOYAGE ROUND THE WORLD—An entertaining excursion in search of knowledge, Whereby GEOGRAPHY IS MADE EASY” (Figure 3). All of the countries in the world are colored and numbered for game-players and the geography of the British imperial enterprise is presented by the Game in a graphic way.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the map is both educational and entertaining. Although Britain is geographically small, the geographical information transmitted through the Game claims the supremacy of the Empire and its control of trade routes, resources and foreign territories. We can notice two drawings of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and the Crystal Palace on upper right/left corners of the map predominantly feature the

---

<sup>7</sup> According to Peter Whitfield, the “Crystal Palace Game” map was edited by Smith Evans, who often published maps of the world’s shipping routes and commercial resources. The map was a celebration of Victorian culture, reinforcing Britain’s image of herself as the focal point of the contemporary world (1994: 122).

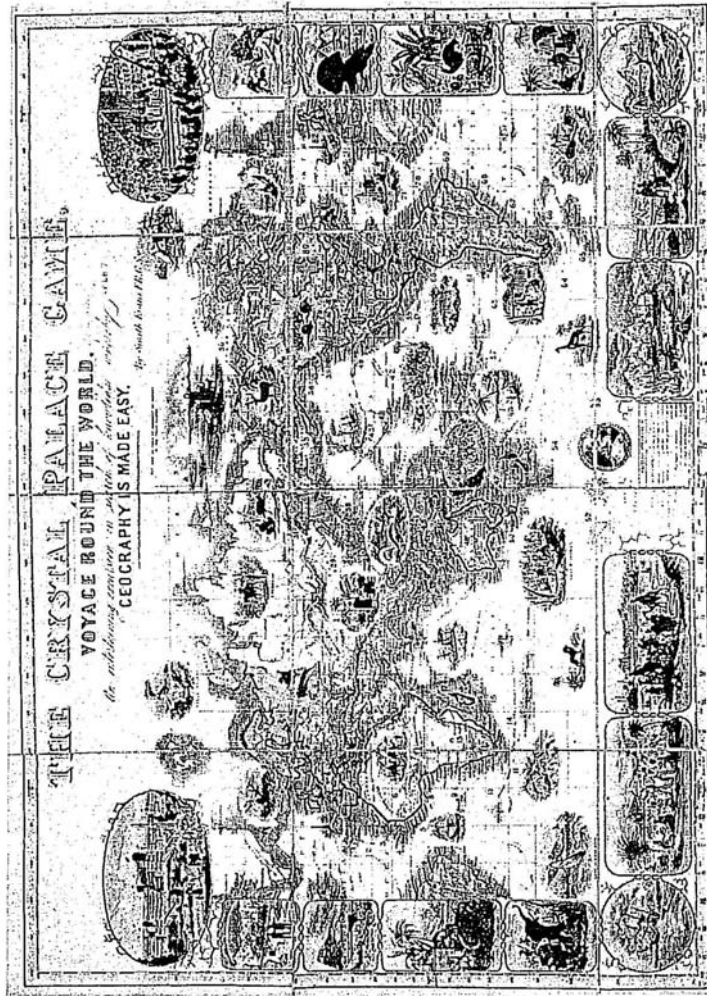


Figure 3 The Crystal Palace Game (1854). Copyright©British Library Board. By permission of the British Library. (Maps. 28. bb.7)

glorification of the British regime. While codifying a wider range of geographical knowledge, the map, an ideological justification for the British appropriation, also promotes an imperialist vision: the world map supplies visual evidence of imperial power and serves to shape the Victorians' perceptions of foreign lands. Furthermore, the most salient feature of the non-European world may be the representation of indigenous peoples and animals (imagery of primitiveness and savagery), which, as we can see, stand in sharp contrast to British civilization. The mapmaker does not erase the native presence: peoples of the non-Western realm are allocated a marginalized space outside the imperial metropolis. An imperial ideology is articulated in the graphic images on the map: we can perceive the British need to define themselves as an imperial nation in comparison with other peoples. In short, the Crystal Palace Games brings to our attention the general ideology of cartographic decoration that serves to symbolize the acquisition of overseas territories. The Game itself constructs a dichotomy of center and margin, homeland and hinterland and meanwhile illuminates a key aspect of how the Victorians trace geographical peripheries on the colonial map.

### III. Mapping Impulse and Literary Imagination

Using the post-colonial cultural criticism for the basis of my discussion, I have described the ways in which the cartographic practice reflects the state of cultural and imperial activity in the previous sections. Maps and mappings have been discussed in order to investigate how frontier experiences occur as well as how they invite the Victorians' cartographic fantasies and shape their collective vision of other territories. Such background information indeed provides a point of entry for studies of the Victorians' ongoing fascination with the edge of the world. This section provides an overview of literary texts that span the time period from the 1840s to the late 1890s, arguing that the interrelations

between cartography and empire can clearly be seen within the texts themselves. I have chosen *Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Mary Barton*, as well as *Heart of Darkness* as my primary literary texts for good reasons. Each of these novels can be looked upon as the dialectic between home/center/metropolitan and away/margin/hinterland, allowing the reader to see exactly how authors like Joseph Conrad, Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens use cartographic vocabularies and imagery to express their sense of the British Empire and of how the imperial frontier is brought into Victorian consciousness and experience. Taken together, then, a consideration of the Victorians' cartographic engagement with foreign territories in the Victorian novel through literary mappings may invite further reflections on the representation of the British Empire, the common imaginings of the "Other" as well as the production of imaginative knowledge linked with imperial power and cultural superiority.

Charles Dickens's *Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit* is one illustration of how maps offer a means to excite English people's romantic geographical imagination. The major concern of the novel is "English life and manners" (Sanders, 2003: 25), but in the middle part of the novel the English landscape shifts into the exotic setting of America. The title character (a student of architecture and later a pioneer in the American West) travels to America with the hope of buying a lot in the idyllic surrounding American settlement of Eden. As we are told, Martin's face grows "radiant" (Dickens, 1998: 294) when he thinks of settling in the Valley of Eden, which, for him, is an "earthly paradise" (Dickens, 1998: 313), an imagined land with career opportunities. The English man's imagination is most at work when he looks at the map "with the consciousness of being a landed proprietor in the thriving city of Eden" (Dickens, 1998: 309). His gaze contemplating the world across the Atlantic creates the stereotype of an empty frontier and at the same time proves fascinating and seductive (Figure 4). This sort of cartographic fantasy indeed becomes an affirmative ideological act of colonial promotion in

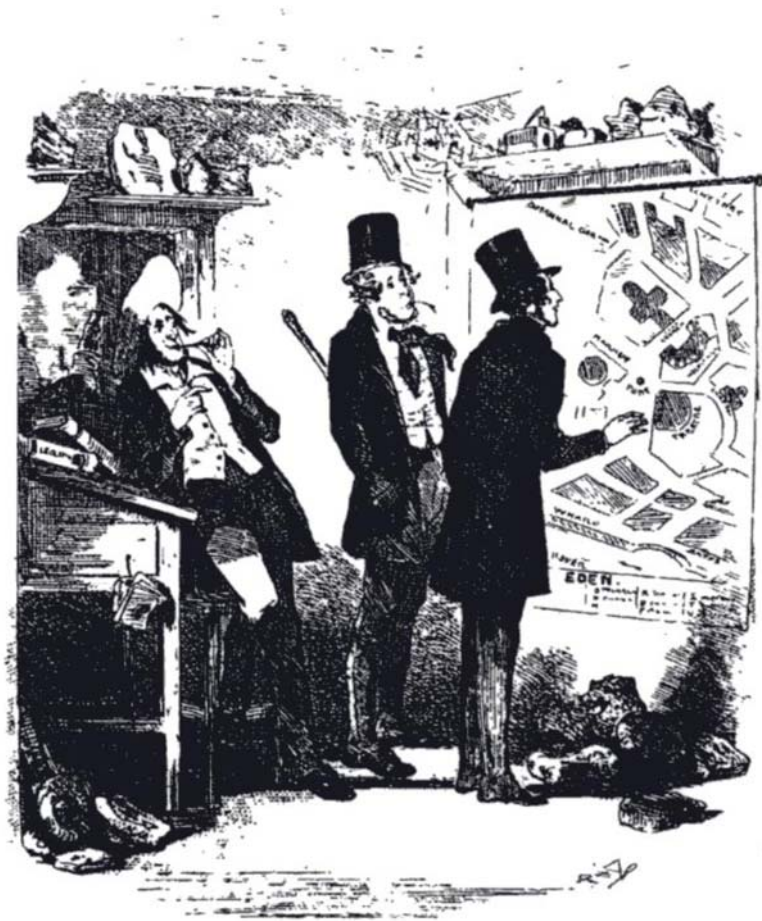


Figure 4 Illustration from *Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit* (Dickens, 1998).

that the map of Eden conjures up the image of virgin land, spawning larger-than-life legends about America. It is at this point in the novel that one can best trace the map's psychological impact on a young man and also, consider how the frontier experience occurs afterwards. On arrival, however, Martin finds that he has been seduced by the map, just like other settlers—he is merely an owner of a swampy wasteland. The young man's disillusionment with America is revealed when he notices "the monotonous desolation of the scene" that appears to be "the grim domains of Giant Despair" (Dickens, 1998: 325). When the exotic landscape is constructed, the young man begins to feel distracted—he is unable to perceive the sense of freedom and excitement that overseas travel entails. Thinking that the primitive land is most unpicturesque, he is unwilling to identify with the imperial frontier he encounters. In the case of the English young man, the American West becomes the "Other" which denotes a kind of geographical difference: it is a place of suffering, pain and unhappiness. Finding only sickness and misery in America, Martin finally returns to England with his servant Mark Tapley. When they catch sight of their homeland on the ship, they find: "A year had passed. . . . It seemed to them a dozen years. . . . In health and fortune, prospect and resource, they came back poorer men than they had gone away. But it was home. And though home is a name, a word, it is a strong one; stronger than magician ever spoke, or spirit answered to, in strongest conjuration. (Dickens, 1998: 471)" With their homecoming, both Martin and his servant reveal their identification with the "native ground," which is not only familiar and exciting, but also very different from the world across the Atlantic.

By introducing American episodes to his English readers, Dickens seemed to recall the former colony he visited in 1842. Like his fictional character Martin, Dickens's view of America changed from admiration to disappointment. For Dickens, as for many of his contemporaries, America held a fascination: it was "the land of the future" (Heineman, 1992: 83), a New World which

was opposed to the Old. In this case, Dickens's initial reaction to America and its inhabitants was favorable. After his American trip, however, Dickens found only his distaste for the American life style, which was largely a consequence of personal disappointment, newspaper abuse, invasion of privacy, and the vexed questions of an international copyright (Stone, 1957: 469).<sup>8</sup> Thus, in *Martin Chuzzlewit* Dickens creates a satiric rather than a realistic portrait of the imperial frontier. In evoking the atmosphere of the frontier, Dickens draws a stereotyped picture of America as the vacant wilderness that allures and attracts speculators like settlers, proprietors and potential investors to the land. This is the kind of the imperial experience that carries a full weight of significance in most British minds. More importantly, it constitutes a major contribution to our understanding of the dichotomy of fantasy and reality in the British perception of the imperial enterprise.

Martin's cartographic fantasies further invite us to focus on another dimension: maps may represent geographies of fantasy and imagination in Victorian culture as well. Indeed, in the history of early mapping we can find "an overlapping series of fantasies and invention that served to fill the unexplored spaces" (Adams, 1962: 69). The blank areas on the maps aroused people's desire to discover and conquer and accordingly presented a nexus between knowledge and power. "Silences," however, appeared on maps due to the gap between interpretation and reality—the blank spaces were adorned with monsters, mermaids or the monstrous as a result. An interesting example of this is Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* in which the reference to the mermaid reflects a romantic

---

<sup>8</sup> Dickens showed his dislike of America in a letter to John Forster on 15 March 1842: "I don't like the country. I would not live here, on any consideration. It goes against the grain with me. It would with you. I think it impossible, utterly impossible, for any Englishman to live here, and be happy" (1965: 135). In March of the same year, Dickens also wrote to Macready by saying: "I am disappointed. This is not the Republic I came to see. This is not the Republic of my imagination" (1965: 156).

tradition of representing the Pacific, the vast blanks of uncharted waters in popular geographical imaginations. *Mary Barton* has often been admired for the geographical detail of its account of Manchester in the 1840s. A reader has the sense of exploring the city through its very detailed definition of the city streets. What has been less acknowledged is the existence of another “geography” in the novel—the imaginative geography of its repeated references to the world overseas. As Gaskell portrays in Chapter 13 of the novel—entitled “A Traveler’s Tales,” the sailor Will Wilson has recently returned from an overseas voyage and recounts his experience to an eager audience of Manchester residents, the seamstress Mary Barton and the artisan naturalist Job Legh. Using nautical language, Will tells his listeners that his mate Jack Harris has “witnessed” a mermaid off the coast of Chatham Island in the Great Pacific. In Will’s account, the place near the Chatham Island is “a warm enough latitude for mermaids, and sharks, and such like perils,” and the mermaid, “sitting on a rock, and sunning herself,” lives near the land where women go “half-naked,” where muslin is too hot to wear, and where the sea is “milk-warm” (Gaskell, 1987a: 175). Clearly Will is conjuring up the romantic and feminine figure of the mermaid in his mind: the half-fish, half-woman, or the exotic anomaly, is “for all the world as beautiful as any of the wax ladies in the barbers’ shops” (Gaskell, 1987a: 176). Nevertheless, the story about the mermaid combing her hair and holding a looking-glass in the Pacific has more far-reaching implications: it invites us to consider another aspect of Gaskell’s mental map of the world.<sup>9</sup> While Will’s tall tale points to

---

<sup>9</sup> As the sailor recounts how the mermaid makes her first appearance in the milk-warm seawater, a feminine curiosity about the unfamiliar and the remote is aroused. We can have a sense of Mary Barton’s female interest in a wider world through her quick response to the story of the mermaid: the heroine considers the mermaid a sea wonder. Unlike Mary who is preoccupied with Will’s “romance” of the mermaid, Job Legh assumes a skeptical attitude in that it is incredible, not a part of scientific knowledge. The artisan-naturalist tends to evaluate the credulity of Will’s story with his knowledge of natural science. In terms of Job’s and Mary’s different attitudes



the cultural and environmental differences between Britain and the Pacific, the temperate zone and the tropical zone, it is nonetheless suggestive of male erotic desire and deviant sexuality. We can therefore trace a long established link between sexuality and foreign lands to see how the Pacific exists imaginatively in Gaskell's mind.

In mythologies, legends, or stories, mermaids are always symbols of beauty, sexuality and femininity, and usually associated with seafarers' sea-adventures. The same logic can be seen at work in *Mary Barton*: the mythological figure of the mermaid constitutes a major contributor to Gaskell's feminine representation of the Pacific. As the sailor recounts how the mermaid combs her hair with one hand and holds a looking-glass with another near the land where women go "half-naked," sexual imagery is invoked. As in popular travel writing, the English sailor's map of the Pacific is sexualized and feminized. Likewise, in the whale-fishers' desire to capture the sea wonder—"They all thought she were a fair prize, and may be as good as a whale in ready money" (Gaskell, 1987a: 176)—we see power relations between the mermaid and the sailor. As Nicholas Thomas claims in his study of the feminine representation of the Pacific islands, "gender is one of the most obvious and telling means of fixing the differences between Europeans and others" (1991: 74). Therefore, if the mermaid serves as an indicator of the Pacific region, then we can see a tradition of representing other cultures as feminine and primitive, with civilization as masculine and patriarchal. Similar to Christopher Columbus's comparison of the shape of the earth to a woman's breast or Henry Rider Haggard's map of Sheba's breast in *King Solomon's Mines*, the sailor's encounter with mermaids in *Mary Barton* can be said to draw on a long tradition of male travel as a symbolic sexual

---

towards Will's tall tale, we can see a dichotomy of scientific realism (male) and romantic imagination (female), a prevalent Victorian ideology of gender division. The mermaid and the tropical landscape of the Pacific Ocean both draw our attention to "separate spheres" between Mary and Job, and accordingly reflect the British ideology of sexual difference.

adventure.<sup>10</sup> Along with the empty land in the European geographical imagination, the Pacific in the English sailor's mind is perceived as eroticized.<sup>11</sup> By this point, we can have a sense of Will's desire to "feminize" the place where he wants to be. His erotic fantasy may in part suggest the predominance of white, male power through control of an exotic setting.

The reference to the mermaid brings to our attention Gaskell's construction of an exotic land in her mind and in part reflects a British conception of unknown regions. The failure of European knowledge appears in the margins and gaps of maps, where uncharted places are populated by cannibals, mermaids, and monsters. The population of certain regions with mermaids or monsters not only points to British people's understanding of other parts of the world but also testifies to their national power and cultural superiority. In this regard, Gaskell's portrayal of the half-fish, half-woman is indicative of the edges and blank spaces of colonial maps and meanwhile registers British imperial fantasies. Like most British people, she tends to use the blank areas on maps as a space for fantasy, trying to locate "otherness" in an exotic landscape. Unmapped territories, as exemplified by the image of the mermaid, are closely related to the projection of empire. The

---

<sup>10</sup> In 1492, Columbus embarked on a journey in search of India. While he reached the Caribbean, Columbus thought it was India and wrote home to say that the earth was shaped like a woman's breast toward which he was slowly sailing (McClintock, 1995: 22).

<sup>11</sup> According to Anne McClintock, there is always a persistent gendering of the imperial unknown: "[a]s European men crossed the dangerous thresholds of their known worlds, they ritualistically feminized borders and boundaries." Women, therefore, served as the boundary makers of empire and through which men oriented themselves in space, as agents of power and agents of knowledge. From a psychological perspective, McClintock also asserts that the feminizing of *terra incognita* points to familiar symptom of male megalomania, paranoia, as well as a sense of male anxiety and boundary loss. For a more detailed account of this topic, see McClintock (1995: 1-24).

“edge” of civilization is marked by the presence of imaginary creatures, as, for example, in Will’s account of overseas voyages.

Joseph Conrad’s representative work *Heart of Darkness*, based on his voyage up to the Congo River in Africa, is a final example to illustrate the interplay of cartography and empire. The novella itself provides a convenient vehicle for understanding an English interest in a wider world. We can notice the ideological dimensions of maps and mapping as we consider the ways in which the main character Marlow responds to the frontier landscape and also, how that response shapes some distinctive images of Britain’s overseas empire. Earlier in the novella, Marlow recalls his boyhood fantasies of adventure as well as his passion for the blank spaces on maps. As Marlow tells his audience aboard the yawl *Nellie* at anchor in the Thames estuary:

Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, when I grow up I will go there. (Conrad, 2003: 108)

Imaginary lines on the map invite Marlow’s geographical imagination and give a form to his worldview, and this invariably suggests the role played by cartographic knowledge in structuring the dynamics of an imperial power. The map of Africa in particular shows vast stretches of blank spaces: Africa in his eyes is “the biggest, the most blank” or “a blank space of delightful mystery—a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over” (Conrad, 2003: 108). On the map of Africa, Marlow finds that “[t]here was a vast amount of red—good to see at any time because one knows that some real work is done in there—a deuce of a lot of blue, a little green, smears of orange, and, on the East Coast, a purple patch, to show where the jolly pioneers of progress drink the jolly

lager-beer.” For Marlow, it is fascinating to look at “a large shining map marked with all the colors of a rainbow” (Conrad, 2003: 110), which reflects a colored patchwork of imperial competition. The color scheme that the map-maker has chosen, in this case, functions as an ideological vehicle of a colonial power and reinforces the colonial theme of the map (Phillips, 1999: 277). Through color coding, imperial nations mark out territorial boundaries and suggest the territorial claims on the African continent. The color scheme, therefore, divides the world into center and margin—though England is certainly at the center. And in so doing, it evokes the image of the map-as-logo: imperial states tend to color their colonies on maps with “an imperial dye” (Anderson, 1991: 175).

It can be noticed that in his portrayal of Marlow, Conrad recalls his yearning for a visit to the Congo River and reflects his desire to explore the uncharted wilderness. In “Geography and Some Explorers” Conrad also refers to his early geographical enthusiasm by describing: “One day, putting my finger on a spot in the very middle of Africa, I declared that some day I would go there” (1924: 271). Imagination is most central to his pursuit of imperial geography:

Regions unknown! My imagination could depict to itself there worthy, adventurous and devoted men nibbling at the edges, attacking from north and south and east and west, conquering a bit of truth here and a bit of truth there, and sometimes swallowed up by the mystery their hearts were so persistently set on unveiling. (1924: 254)

The discovery of a map of Africa in his grandfather’s library in particular constitutes a crucial element in cultivating Conrad’s cartographic literacy. As he recalls this event in his boyhood:

It was in 1868, when nine years old or thereabouts, that while looking at a map of Africa of the time and putting my finger on the blank space then representing the unsolved mystery of that continent, I said to myself, with

absolute assurance and an amazing audacity which are no longer in my character now:  
 “When I grow up, I shall go *there*.”  
 . . . Yes. I did go there: *there* being the region of Stanley Falls, which in ‘68 was the blankest of blank spaces on the earth’s figured surface. (1988: 13)

By all accounts Conrad’s description is typical of its period and expresses Victorian attempts to complete the geographical knowledge of remote regions. The “unsolved mystery” of Africa, in his eyes, becomes an indicator of an enchanting and intriguing place beyond the imperial enterprise. Conrad’s literary mappings, for the most part, convey one important message: the blank areas on the maps arouse the British desire to discover and conquer, and it is primarily by filling in the blanks on maps—along the traces sustained by the culture of exploration—that the British can better understand their spatial relations with others.

This paper has investigated how the Victorians’ cartographic engagement with imperial frontiers enriches their understanding of the expanding world and their place in it in cultural and geographical terms. Maps have been textualized for reading so as to explore their visual and narrative nature, their connection with knowledge and power, as well as their authority within culture. The cartographic impulse, as we have seen in the narratives of Conrad, Dickens, and Gaskell, specifically reveals an ongoing fascination with the unknown: the edges and blank spaces of colonial maps are intimately bound up with British imperial fantasies. The dominant imperial ideology posits other territories “off the map,” but meanwhile the edge of the world serves as an important site for the representation of Britain’s national identity. Geographical territories turn out to be a cultural critical site where we can address issues of cultural differences and spatial hierarchy within the context of Victorian imperial culture. These issues are functional in that they suggest a dichotomy between center/metropolitan and margin/hinterland, a dichotomy that is central to the maintenance of British hegemony over other lands.

## References

- Adams, P. (1962). *Travelers and travel liars 1660-1880*. Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London, UK: Verso.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (Eds.). (1999). *Key concepts in post-colonial studies*. London, UK & New York, NY: Routledge.
- Black, J. (1997). *Maps of politics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Brontë, C. (2000). *Jane Eyre*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1847)
- Conrad, J. (1924). Geography and some explorers. *The National Geographic Magazine*, 45, 3: 239-274.
- Conrad, J. (1988). *The mirror of the sea; and, A personal record*. Oxford, UK & New York, NY: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1912)
- Conrad, J. (2003). *Heart of darkness*. Oxford, UK & New York, NY: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1899)
- Cormack, L. (1997). *Charting an empire: Geography at the English universities 1580-1620*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Cosgrove, D. (1998). *Mappings*. London, UK: Reaktion Books.
- Dickens, C. (1965). *The letters of Charles Dickens*, Vol. 3. 1842-1843. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Dickens, C. (1987). *The old curiosity shop*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1841)
- Dickens, C. (1998). *Life and adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1844)
- Gaskell, E. (1987a). *Mary Barton: A tale of Manchester life*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1848)
- Gaskell, E. (1987b). *Wives and daughters: An every-day story*.

- Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1866)
- Gaskell, E. (1997). *The life of Charlotte Brontë*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin. (Original work published 1857)
- Gérin, W. (1976). *Elizabeth Gaskell: A biography*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Gilbert, E. W. (1972). *British pioneers in geography*. Newton Abbot, UK: David & Charles.
- Goldsmith, J. (1850). *A grammar of geography: For the use of schools with maps & illustrations*. London, UK: Thomas Tegg.
- Harley, J. B. (1983). Meaning and ambiguity in Tudor cartography. In S. Tyacke (Ed.), *English map-making 1500-1650: Historical essays* (pp. 22-45). London, UK: The British Library.
- Harley, J. B. (1989). Maps, knowledge, and power. In D. Cosgrove & S. Daniels (Eds.), *The iconography of landscape: Essays on the symbolic representation, design and use of past environments* (pp. 277-312). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Harley, J. B. (2001a). Deconstructing the map. In P. Laxton (Ed.), *The new nature of maps* (pp. 149-168). Baltimore, MD & London, UK: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Harley, J. B. (2001b). Silences and secrecy: The hidden agenda of cartography in early modern Europe. In P. Laxton (Ed.), *The new nature of maps* (pp. 83-107). Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Heineman, H. K. (1992). *Three Victorians in the new world: Interpretations of the new world in the works of Frances Trollope, Charles Dickens, and Anthony Trollope*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Joyce, S. (2002). Maps and metaphors: Topographical representation and the sense of place in late-Victorian fiction. In R. Maxwell (Ed.), *The Victorian illustrated book* (pp. 129-162). Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.

- Maddrell, A. M. C. (1995). *Geography, gender and the state: A critical evaluation of the development of geography 1830-1918*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oxford University, UK.
- Maddrell, A. M. C. (1998). Discourse of race and gender and the comparative method in geography school texts 1830-1918. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 16, 1: 81-103.
- McClintock, A. (1995). *Imperial leather: Race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Phillips, R. (1999). Colonialism and postcolonialism. In P. J. Cloke, P. Crang, & M. Goodwin (Eds.), *Introducing human geographies* (pp. 277-286). London, UK: Arnold.
- Purvis, J. (1989). *Hard lessons: The lives and education of working-class women in nineteenth-century England*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.
- Ryan, S. (1994). Inscribing the emptiness: Cartography, exploration and the construction of Australia. In C. Tiffin & A. Lawson (Eds.), *De-scribing empire: Post-colonialism and textuality* (pp. 115-130). London, UK: Routledge.
- Said, E. (1993). *Culture and imperialism*. New York, NY: Vintage.
- Sanders, A. (2003). *Charles Dickens*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Shaw, A. G. L. (1969). British attitudes to the colonies, ca. 1820-1850. *The Journal of British Studies*, 9, 1: 71-95.
- Sheppard, F. H. W. (Ed.). (1966). Great Globe. In *The parish of St. Anne Soho: Vol. 33 Survey of London* (p. 43). London, UK: Athlone Press.
- Smith, N., & Godlewska, A. (Eds.). (1994). *Geography and empire*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Stone, H. (1957). Dickens' use of his American experiences in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. *PMLA*, 72: 464-478.
- Thackeray, W. M. (1983). *Vanity Fair*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1848)
- The modern governess: A young lady's idea of the use of crinoline!



- (1861). *Punch*, 40: 52.
- Thomas, N. (1991). *Entangled objects: Exchange, material culture, and colonialism in the Pacific*. Cambridge, MA & London, UK: Harvard University Press.
- Trollope, A. (1999). *The West Indies and the Spanish main*. New York, NY: Carroll & Graf. (Original work published 1859)
- Turnball, D. (1989). *Maps are territories: Science is an atlas*. Geelong, Australia: Deakin University.
- Turner, C. T. (1969). Letty's globe. In G. Macbeth (Ed.), *The penguin book of Victorian verse* (p. 60). Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin. (Original work published 1880)
- Uglow, J. (1993). *Elizabeth Gaskell: A habit of stories*. London, UK: Faber and Faber.
- Vaughan, J. E. (1972). Aspects of teaching geography in England in the early nineteenth century. *Paedagogica Historica*, 12, 1: 128-147.
- Whitfield, P. (1994). *The image of the world: Twenty centuries of world maps*. London, UK: The British Library.
- Wood, D. (1987). Pleasure in the idea: The atlas as narrative form. *Cartographica*, 24, 1: 24-45.

## 帝國、地圖與文化——英國維多利亞時期

顏淑娟

### 摘要

本文探討維多利亞時期的大英帝國如何透過地圖意象，建立自身主體性及呈現其在世界版圖中的文化霸權地位。首先介紹維多利亞時期地理知識的培育和製圖文化的過程，藉以說明地圖並不只是英國人民認識與瞭解世界地理的媒介而已，它同時也是一個海外探險與殖民文化的產物。本文亦透過維多利亞時期另一文化產物——小說，針對狄更斯、蓋斯格爾、與康拉德等小說家所描述的地圖意象，闡釋地域想像與殖民／帝國文化之間的關係，同時進一步瞭解英國人民如何構成「中心」與「邊陲」或「文明」與「蠻荒」的世界地理畫面。

**關鍵詞：**帝國、地圖、文化、小說、英國維多利亞時期