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Not Another Book About Landscape

Sarah Wylie Krotz

Mapping with Words. Anglo-Canadian Literary Cartographies, 1789-1916. University of Toronto Press \$65

Reviewed by Claire Omhovère, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3, EMMA

Mapping with Words rests upon the geocritical axiom that literary representations of space modelize the world they unify and render intelligible through the features they select, organize and invest with aesthetic value. After D.M. Bentley and Misao Dean who have preceded her in this direction, Sarah Wylie Krotz demonstrates that for the Anglo-Canadian writers of the nineteenth century, poeticizing the world was equivalent to cultivating it. Yet, if her study qualifies as literary geography, it is not owing to the landscapes her selected sources made memorable, but rather because of the mental maps their authors elaborated to navigate the spaces that were opening as Canada was moving from the age of exploration to the age of surveying and settlement.

The corpus spans the period that extends from the British acquisition of New France, as portrayed in Thomas Cary's *Abram's Plains* and Adam Hood Burwell's *Talbot Road* (Chapter 1) to the poetic and territorial negotiations informing Duncan Campbell Scott's "The Height of Land," another long poem penned during the drafting of Treaty 9 (Chapter 5). The central chapters give pride of place to other locodescriptive genres such as the sketch in Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* (Chapter 2), Catharine Parr Traill's botanical charts (Chapter 3), and the travelogue with George Monro Grant's *Ocean to Ocean* (Chapter 4). Wylie Krotz devotes her concluding chapter to David Thompson's extraordinary accomplishments as an early explorer, cartographer and historian of the American Northwest. The book also includes a beautiful appendix comprising ten of the historical maps on which the author relies to illustrate the affinity she posits between textual and geographical mapping.

Although her analysis is indebted to the conceptual reversal Baudrillard initiated when he argued that the map precedes the territory, Wylie Krotz remains on the safe side of the *ut pictura poesis* principle in much of her close-reading. The linearity she spots in Cary's and Burwell's heroic couplets reflects more than it initiates the ordering of colonial space contemporaneous to their composition (41). Her response to Scott's poem, in which the "uneven rhyme pattern catch[es] something of the rugged, asymmetrical beauty of the

Precambrian Shield” (139), also supposes an analogical coupling between text and reality that diverges from the modelization maps usually privilege.

More convincing are the irregularities of the terrain Wylie Krotz’s colonial text-maps strive to cover and, sometimes, unexpectedly enhance. Grant’s account of the Northwest, for instance, erases Aboriginal traces when the land is viewed from a distance, but the Indigenous toponyms that intrigue him, with the stories embedded in them, occasionally cause his mapping to shift and reveal an unexpected sensitivity to the plight of First Nations people. Wylie Krotz’s valuable analyses of scale variations in Moodie’s sketches and of Traill’s views on Indigenous ecology are just as effective in their refreshing of accepted views regarding Canada’s colonial literature.

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