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Review of *The Frontiers of Women's Writing: Women's Narratives and the Rhetoric of Westward Expansion* By Brigitte Georgi-Findlay

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Frontiers of Women's Writing: Women's Narratives and the Rhetoric of Westward Expansion. By Brigitte Georgi-Findlay. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996. Notes, bibliography, index. xx + 349 pp. \$45.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

Georgi-Findlay takes on the seemingly impossible task of synthesizing one hundred years of women's writing about American westward expansion. While focusing each chapter on just a few key texts, she draws widely on the works of Anglo-American novelists, journalists, settlers, travelers, tourists, army officers' wives, missionaries, and teachers, writing about a geographical area extending from Mackinaw Island to Puget Sound to Santa Fe. The author constructs a female counterpoint to male renditions of frontier adventure and conquest, but at the same time explores how white women's cultural practices existed in complicity with American territorial acquisition.

The book's three parts are arranged chronologically and according to narrative type. The first brings together literary and travel accounts about the Midwest from 1830 to 1860, as well as settlers' diaries from the overland trails during this period, examining the works of writers as diverse as Caroline Kirkland, Anna Jameson, and Susan Magoffin. The second part, which concentrates on the years from 1860 to 1890, includes chapters on the narratives of army officers' wives—such as Margaret Carrington and Elizabeth Custer—during the Indian wars, and the works of professional journalists such as Helen Hunt Jackson and Sara Lippincott. The final section, from 1890 through 1930, features the writings of teachers and missionaries on western Indian reservations, including Elaine Goodale Eastman and Mabel Reed.

While I initially doubted that Georgi-Findlay could accomplish much in generaliz-

ing about such diverse types of texts along such a broad sweep of space and time, she does succeed in pinpointing specific and consistent ways in which white women became authors as well as agents of exploitation, especially of Native Americans. She reports her receptivity to the heterogeneity of the texts, although "common tropes and rhetorical gestures that bind women's texts together" do appear. Drawing substantially from the arguments of Annette Kolodny and such literary and comparative theorists of European imperialism and colonization as Mary Louise Pratt and Sara Mills, she offers little that is theoretically new but establishes a similitude between European international and American national imperial practices, especially concerning women's discursive relationship to power, authority, and patriarchal ideologies. Representations of Native Americans comprise a major theme of the book, and Georgi-Findlay argues convincingly that white women's writing served indirectly to encourage larger processes of control and domination, by advocating, for example, "proper" domestic arrangements, and by aestheticizing and feminizing Indian men, which ultimately served to obscure illegitimate, large-scale land dispossession.

In terms of presentation, my only complaint concerns the notes. References to page numbers from primary and secondary sources inconsistently (and even incorrectly) appear within the text, and it is not clear how these references co-exist with the endnotes. The book overall contains few notes for a work its size, which some will find refreshing but others frustrating.

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