



# Imaginary Empires

Women Writers and Alternative Futures in Early US Literature

**MARIA O'MALLEY**

In *Imaginary Empires*, Maria O'Malley examines early American texts published between 1767 and 1867 whose narratives represent women's engagement in the formation of empire. Her analysis unearths a variety of responses to contact, exchange, and cohabitation in the early United States, stressing the possibilities inherent in the literary to foster participation, resignification, and rapprochement.

New readings of *The Female American*, Leonora Sansay's *Secret History*, Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*, Lydia Maria Child's *A Romance of the Republic*, and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* confound the metaphors of ghosts, haunting, and amnesia that proliferate in many recent studies of early US literary history. Instead, as O'Malley shows, these writings foreground acts of foundational violence involved in the militarization of domestic spaces, the legal impediments to the transfer of property and wealth, and the geopolitical standing of the United States. Racialized and gendered figures in the texts refuse to die, leave, or stay silent. In imagining different kinds of futures, these writers reckon with the ambivalent role of women in empire-building as they negotiate between their own subordinate position in society and their exertion of sovereignty over others.

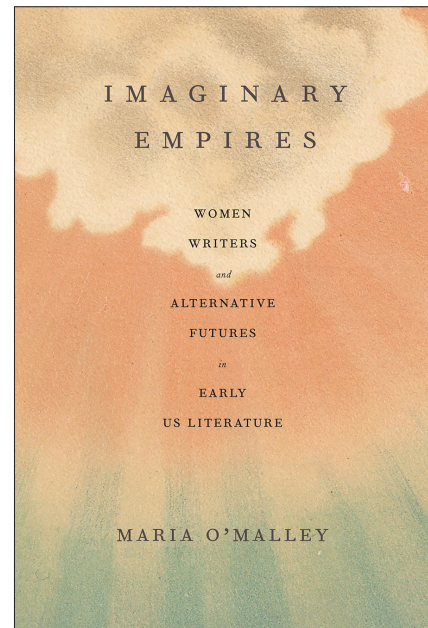
By tracing a thread of virtual history found in works by women, *Imaginary Empires* explores how reflections of the past offer a means of shaping future sociopolitical formations.

**MARIA O'MALLEY** is professor of English at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, where she teaches American literature. She coedited *Beyond 1776: Globalizing the Cultures of the American Revolution*.

## PRAISE FOR *IMAGINARY EMPIRES*

"This book is an important contribution to the expanding field of research about the ways women participated in the work of empire-building in early America. The chapters are engaging, providing nuanced readings of a range of texts as well as strategies for thinking about how women authors and characters proffered alternative futures for the United States."—**Mary McAleer Balkun**, author of *The American Counterfeit: Authenticity and Identity in American Literature and Culture*

"Maria O'Malley sees women writing a different kind of history, one that remembers rather than represses the founding violence of America, and then imagines a future beyond that reckoning."—**Gretchen Murphy**, author of *New England Women Writers, Secularity, and the Federalist Politics of Church and State*



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