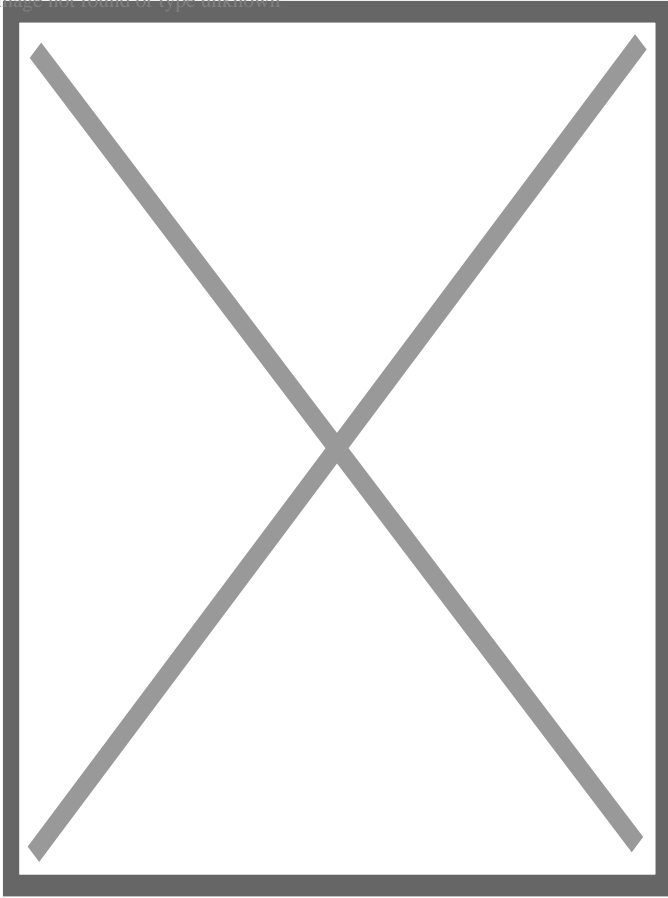


Margaret Mackey. *One Child Reading: My Auto-Bibliography*

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Margaret Mackey. [*One Child Reading: My Auto-Bibliography*](#). Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2016. xvi, 567p., ill. ISBN 9781772120394. CAN\$ 60.00.

One Child Reading opens with a striking black and white photograph of a young child intently immersed in an open book while stirring something in a pot on the stove. The child's eyes are firmly on the page of the book, not on the hand wielding a wooden spoon. The text on the right-side page indicates that the child in the photo is the author. "All sighted readers will recognize the invisible dotted line that connects my eyes to the words and images on the page. That virtual line, that indefinable connection between abstract representations and the live imagination of an interpreter, is the subject of this book" (3). As a reader, my reaction to this image is a visceral connection to what takes place in the photo. Without having experienced this exact scenario in my own life, I know what it is to be so lost in a book that mundane everyday activities fade away. It is a powerful way to begin this unique journey of one reader that, paradoxically, could be the story of all readers.

What Mackey does in this book is extraordinary. She attempts not to recreate her own history with reading via memory alone, which would not be possible, but to re-examine the books, magazines, radio programs, music, and other media that formed the infrastructure of her young life in order to recall “her own past sensations that [she] initially filtered into the stories in order to make them breathe for [her]” (7).

Mackey grounds what she refers to as her “project” in theories from reading studies, education, cognitive and neuroscience, memory, feminism, media studies, literary studies, adaptation studies, and “of great importance” geography and mapping. She adapts a framework originated by Kevin Lynch to analyze cities to map her journey with literacy.

The illustrations, which the author uses to enhance understanding of her text, include images of the pages from books she read as a child, photographs of her family and herself, their homes, the city in which she grew up, music sheets, advertisements from magazines, toys and games from her childhood “in short, a wealth of pictures of material objects to serve as additional evidence.

The obvious limitation of this study is that it centers on a particular person. Given the enormity of the project, it is hardly likely that it can easily be replicated with other individual readers, nor does Mackey expect it. However, the value in her work is the understanding that every individual’s literacy is grounded in that individual’s own particular experience and geography or, as she says, “Reception is always and necessarily earthed” (507). Her argument, quite simply, is that we all have bodies in which we learn literacy; everyone is geographically located. So literacy, be it reading, listening, or viewing, always takes place in an embodied situation. While readers have unique experiences of literacy, they also experience universal ways of literacy.

In the Foreword, Roberta Trites quotes James Joyce: “In the particular is contained the universal” (vii). This perfectly describes what Mackey achieves in *One Child Reading*. It is both an important addition to our understanding of how reading and other literacies contribute to children’s development and the culmination of a scholar’s lifetime of research on reading.

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