

# **Feminist Geography and the Cityscape in Neo-Victorian Literature**

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## **Abstract**

Feminist Geography is a relatively new discipline within Human Geography that undertakes the study of space, place and gender as scholars try to work out how these categories intersect in the production of social identities by bringing together three main issues, namely; the spatialising of identities, the contextualising of the meaning of place to gender and the intersection between gender and other socially constructed categories. Consequently, female subjectivity is a key concern for feminist geographers as they address issues related to woman's consciousness—how she perceives her own role, and how that role contributes to her identity and meaning. In this paper, I propose that Feminist Geography, as a separate discipline, sets a context-specific framework for research looking into issues concerning place, space and gender. As Kofman and Peake have demonstrated “[Feminist Geography] explore[s] the nature of gender relations, the construction of femininity and masculinity and the relationship between patriarchal and class structures in time and place” (314). Similarly, feminist geographer Doreen Massey draws a parallel between spatial control and social control of identity highlighting how “the limitation of women's mobility in terms both of identity and space, has been in some cultural contexts a crucial means of subordination. Moreover the two things – limitation on mobility in space, the attempted consignment/confinement to particular places on the one hand, and the limitation on identity on the other – have been crucially related” (179). Taking this as a starting point, my aim is to analyse neo-Victorian contestations of the public/private dichotomy where space is a central constituent in the formation of female identity rather than being a mere backdrop. By taking a closer look at the re-imagination of female urban characters I will attempt to demonstrate how, on the one hand, they trespass imposed spatial limits, and on the other hand, challenge gender roles by inverting the public/private ideology of separate spheres. As Pollock remarks, “[public] territories of the bourgeois city were however not only gendered on a male/female polarity. They became sites for the negotiation of gendered class identities and class gender positions” (70). Accordingly, neo-Victorian novels contextualise gender issues in urban spaces to explore the social construction of space and gender. Taken this, I propose that women's presence in the streets defied the limitations that

were imposed by patriarchal normativity and developed, what Parsons refers to as, “a particular mode of female urban vision” (6). By drawing on the work by feminist geographers, I hope to prove how Victorian women managed to destabilise the public/private dichotomy and assert an alternative female identity to the one inscribed by the Victorian cult of domesticity. Subsequently, I will explore how the spatialising of female identities is portrayed in neo-Victorian literature as mobility and agency converge within the subjective experience acquired through participation in the public sphere to negotiate independence as well as public and private spaces.

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### **Keywords**

Feminist Geography, Spatialising Identities, Gendered Spaces, Neo-Victorianism, Public/Private Dichotomy

### **Works Cited**

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