

**INSIDE OUT: WOMEN NEGOTIATING, SUBVERTING,
APPROPRIATING PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACE**

Teresa Gómez Reus and Aránzazu Usandizaga, eds.

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Teresa Gómez Reus and Aránzazu Usandizaga's collection of essays forms part of *Spatial Practices: An Interdisciplinary Series in Cultural History, Geography and Literature*, published by Rodopi and edited by Robert Burden and Stephan Kohl. *Spatial Practices* includes contributions on spatial studies from different disciplines: literature, cultural history, cultural studies, geography and literature, with the aim of showing the ways in which spaces and places are connected to the construction of identity and cultural meanings. The first volume of the collection, *Landscape and Englishness*, edited by Robert Burden and Stephan Kohl in 2006, is a compilation of essays that analyse some of the spaces that have been influential in the construction of Englishness. This first volume was followed in 2007 by Christoph Ehland's *Thinking Northern* (Volume 2) and Elizabeth Jones' *Spaces of Belonging* (Volume 3). The former is a collection of essays that centres on issues of regional identity formation in Northern England and the latter is a book that investigates the interconnections between geography and literature in the study of questions of space, place and identity and applies them to the analysis of French life writing texts.

Gómez Reus and Usandizaga's *Inside Out* is the fourth volume of the collection and continues the thematic trend of the previous book by analysing, in this case, British and American literary representations of women's relation to public and private spaces. Gómez Reus and Usandizaga's collection was followed, in the same

year, by Paul Newland's book *The Cultural Construction of London's East End*, which focuses on the ways in which the East End has been created and re-created in novels, poetry, films and television shows. In 2009 three other books have been released: Catrin Gersdorf's *The Poetics and Politics of the Desert*, a text that studies how the desert has been connected to the construction of images and concepts of America; Rusell West-Pavlov's *Space in Theory*, a theoretical approach to the works of French thinkers Kristeva, Foucault and Deleuze on the concept of space; and, finally, Alexandra Ganser's *Roads of Her Own*, a study of the spatial discourse in American women's road narratives.

In *Inside Out: Women Negotiating, Subverting, Appropriating Public and Private Spaces*, Gómez Reus and Usandizaga have succeeded in bringing together a wide array of scholarly voices and essays on the portrayal of women's engagement with space. Contributors from America, Australia, Great Britain, Spain, Switzerland and Greece approach the concepts of public and private space, and the manners in which this traditional spatial divide has influenced women's social positioning. Through the analysis of literary texts produced by British and American modern and contemporary women writers, the contributors observe the oversimplifications that have often accompanied debates around the relation of women to private and public spaces, and illustrate the complexities and ambiguities that arise in dealing with women's experiences in space.

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The book is composed of sixteen essays expertly divided into six thematic blocks that guide the reader through different spaces where women's presence has conventionally been denied, obliterated or deceptively inscribed. The first two blocks of the collection, entitled respectively "Early Escapes into Public Spaces" and "Women on Display", cover the spaces of the sick-room, the Turkish bath, the East End of London during the later decades of the Victorian period, the Victorian drawing-room, the public depiction of women on trial, and the representation of the female body as a public space during the American Gilded Age. These essays reverse the dichotomy of public/private and inside/outside by showing instances of public activities held in private spaces while at the same time unearthing the experiences of early women (both real and fictional characters) in public spaces. Such experiences paved the way to twentieth century women's increasing access to public spaces. The writers explored in the six essays that form these two first sections include Harriet Martineau, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Lady Esther Stanhope, Julia Pardoe, Octavia Hill, Beatrice Webb, Mary Augusta Ward, L.T. Meade, George Eliot, Edith Wharton, Gertrude Atherton and F. Tennyson Jesse. The third block, "Approaching the City", explores the trope of the flâneur in three essays and deconstructs it not only in terms of gender specificities —by providing examples of female flânerie in the writings of Eliza Lynn Linton, Ella Hepworth Dixon, George Paston and Dorothy Richardson—, but also puts an emphasis on

the need to acknowledge race, class, culture and ethnicity as mediating factors. This is highlighted by the analysis of instances of flânerie in colonial women writers such as Janet Frame, Doris Lessing or Jean Rhys. Ranging from theoretical debates and traditional views of the flâneur, as described by Walter Benjamin's *One Way Street and Other Writings* (1979), to feminist analysis of women walking the streets as flâneuses as in Janet Wolff's essay "The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity" (1985), Elizabeth Wilson's "The Invisible Flâneur" (1992), and more recently, Deborah Parson's *Street Walking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (2000), the essays of this section problematise the private and public divide by showing cases of women negotiating a sense of space in the public sphere.

The three essays included in the fourth block, "Conquering the Spaces of War", offer insight into women's public presence and participation during World War I. Through the analysis of Edith Wharton's and Vera Brittain's literary testimony of war in *Fighting France* and *Testament of Youth*, respectively, and through the personal war journal of May Sinclair, the essays reveal the spatial opportunities that the disruption of the traditional social order gave women at the time, as well as the scant attention that has been given to women's recording of the war. The fifth block entitled "Transformations in Nature" includes two essays that investigate women's solitary encounters with natural spaces and their literary portrayals in both contemporary and late eighteenth-century American writings through the analysis of the work of Gretchen Legler in the case of the former and Romantic women's literature in the case of the latter. In the last section of the collection, "Negotiating the city", the public space of the city is further explored in the first essay, which deals with the poetic production of Adrienne Rich. In it, this traditional male space is deconstructed and presented as a locus of possibility and inscription for women. Likewise, the second essay of this final section places an emphasis on the need to assess the significance of spaces that have conventionally been devalued such as the suburbs and domestic spaces, by means of an analysis of Eavan Boland's poems on domestic interiors and marginalised Dublin areas.

Inside Out thus celebrates a diversity of approaches to women's relation to public and private space that is strengthened by the fact that, in addition to providing analyses of literary inscriptions of space in different genres and discourses, some essays in the collection also examine the ambivalent relation that women writers have established with the real spaces where they were located. Such is the case of Valerie Felhbaum's study of journalists Ella Hepworth Dixon and George Paston, Teresa Gómez Reus and Peter Lauber's analysis of Edith Wharton's experiences of war, Laurel Foster's essay on May Sinclair's recording of the war, and Stephen Hunts' revision of Mary Robinson's, Charlotte Smith's, Helen Maria Williams' and Mary Wollstonecraft's personal engagement with natural spaces.

Inside Out engages in an interdisciplinary discussion with critical work on space by social theorists and feminist geographers who defend a view of space as a social construct that is inscribed with meanings that are not innocent or arbitrary but the product of specific social constructions. It then moves on to apply those debates to the analysis of literary works. In this connection, the collection makes appropriate use of previous critical work on space such as that of early thinkers like Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1964) or Michael de Certeau's "Walking the City" (2001) and more recent ones such as Michael Keith and Steve Pile's *Place and the Politics of Identity* (1993), Gillian Rose's *Feminism and Geography* (1993), Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose's *Writing Women and Space* (1994), Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift's *Thinking Space* (2000), Mona Domosh and Joni Seager's *Putting Women in Place* (2001), or Joan Scott and Debra Keates' *Going Public: Feminism and the Shifting Boundaries of the Private Sphere* (2004), among others.

The essays included in *Inside Out* prove inspirational, for they depart from the traditional idea of a division into private and public spheres and the gender segregation that was enforced by such division in order to subvert it and show its inadequacy for accounting for the historical and social circumstances of women. The collection provides examples of how women have found fissures into public space and outside the spaces in which they have socially been placed and confined. The initial remarks of the editors on the need to blur the differences between public and private spheres and the final idea, explored in the concluding remarks by Janet Floyd, of turning "inside out" traditional assumptions connected with the terms *public* and *private*, frame the theoretical interests of the essays that form this collection. *Inside Out* contributes to dismantling traditionally constructed beliefs about women's positioning in space and reveals the connections, interactions and intersections that are established between the public and the private divide, thus disclosing its fluidity. Hence, the collection offers thought-provoking examples of private and public spaces where both public and private activities are embedded. Traditional private spaces such as the ballroom or the bed-sitter room become ambivalent spaces that can be used as public locations, while at the same time the street or natural environments turn into private spaces of mental and physical shelter.

The essays in Gómez Reus and Usandizaga's book apply spatial theory and feminist geography to literary studies to show the connections between them and provide a grounded, innovative analysis of the codification of space by women in literature. In this sense, the collection opens up room for debate that enriches academic thinking on literature as a discourse that reshapes our understanding of space and spaces. Following French thinker Henri Lefebvre's conceptual triad, put forward in his book *The Production of Space* (1991), the essays in this compilation point clearly towards the importance of "conceived space" as a way of producing and

changing “lived space”. *Inside Out* exemplifies how through the symbolic space of literature women may escape the confines in which social conventions have placed them, and, in turn, provide alternative ways of imagining space, and contribute to the transformation of spatially constructed meanings.

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