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[Home](#) > [CUNY Graduate Center](#) > [Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects](#) > [488](#)

[< Previous](#) [Next >](#)



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Standard Deviations: Genre, Gender, and the Cartographical Imagination in Popular British Literature, 1830-1880

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Abstract

While cartography is understood to undergird the spatial interventions integral to Victorian reform in areas such as sewerage and housing, little critical attention has been paid to the influence of cartographical discourse in itself, rather than through its concrete products, as a force that fundamentally altered nineteenth-century conceptions of self, other, and environment. *Standard Deviations* fills that gap, studying the changing parameters of spatial epistemology by monitoring expanding and contracting definitions of bodily deviance across four generic modes historically associated with the nineteenth century: detective, sensation, and domestic fiction, and the household management guide. Altered perceptions of spatial reality and possibility result in altered definitions of deviance, and those definitions in turn manifest in generic innovations. The texts considered here outline a dilemma: the tension between scientific and personal, imaginative mapping practices. As Chapter One shows, *Martin Chuzzlewit* delineates Charles Dickens's engagement with the issue of accurate spatial perception, particularly in the urban milieu. For Dickens, mapping is freighted with ethical cargo, so that accuracy of vision is equated with moral sight - the science of cartography - and imaginative modes of mapping suggest ambiguity. Dickens employs detective fiction to discipline his imaginative; thus cartographical discourse and generic conventions develop symbiotically. Chapter Two continues the exploration of deviance within the urban context in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, a meditation on the over-determined status of middle-class female bodies. Collins's streetwalking character is illegible because she harbors too many possible identities (wife, servant, prostitute, criminal, victim). Chapters three and four demonstrate the influence of cartographic discourse on the domestic, an area coded by the Victorians as separate, yet highly permeable. Household management guides were verbal maps that employed cartographical strategies in order to subject domestic space to discipline and regulation. Such texts and domestic fiction show the development of a semiotic system based on spatial integrity - a

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place for everything, and everything in its place - that led to cultural obsession with a particular type of deviance: bad housekeeping.

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