
Emily Dickinson's Border-Crossings

Ursula Caci*¹

¹University of Basel – Switzerland

Abstract

Emily Dickinson defines, locates, reshapes and forms new concepts of gender in her poetry by exaggerating and over fulfilling the norms expected of a woman. Her poems reshape the space ascribed to women, which becomes especially evident when her female speakers cross borders between spaces that are defined as dichotomies and are heavily associated with gendered characteristics. My analysis focuses on border crossings between nature and culture, the private domestic space and the public, and between the realm of life and death, showing how Dickinson exploits the segregation of space along gender lines to point out uneven distributions and that her poetry locates female identity in a new territory. Dickinson relocates the possibility of choice, freedom, and the temporary escape from gender and its restraints at the border that divides spaces like culture and nature in order to portray alternative courses of action and blurred gendered identities. Behaviour prohibited in nineteenth-century Victorian New England like the union with a lover outside of a matrimonial bond becomes possible momentarily when the speakers move close to the margins between life and death. The boundary, or margin in De Lauretis terms, thus becomes a space of possibilities, and the trespassing across it empowers the speakers. In many poems, limits and borders, whether abstract or concrete like the walls that divide the space within a house, become meeting points or offer room for individuality and serve as a connection or passageway to a potential alternative life.

*Speaker