



Universität
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Research Project

Locating Gender in Space: Emily Dickinson's Conception of Gender

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In my dissertation project, I want to explore the ways Emily Dickinson defines, locates, reshapes and forms new concepts of gender and her own identity as a woman. As Dickinson's poetry is characterized by her use of spatial language, I am especially interested in how she uses this language productively to escape patriarchal structures and to grant herself and women in general room beyond confinement and social and cultural definition.

Emily Dickinson is deeply engaged in mapping new spaces that accommodate a different female identity than the one prescribed by her society and culture. My thesis is that Dickinson not only exaggerates and over fulfils the norms as expected of a woman and thus exploits and emphasizes them, but also reshapes the space ascribed to women and even goes beyond, locating female identity in a new territory. The form this new gender identity takes is a playful inversion of conventional patterns but results in neither a wholly dis-gendered nor in-between poetic I. Rather, Dickinson employs deviating voices at the same time and thus constitutes a paradoxical female subject that empowers and incorporates positive characteristics of femininity.

Dickinson's favourite geometrical form is circumference. When defining concepts, she draws a map, thereby creating limits dividing the area her subject takes into an inside and that which lies beyond the line. During the course of the poem, Dickinson typically expands the space within the lines, pushing the limits of her subject further into the territory beyond and blurring the lines between inside and outside. Her spaces are abstract, strangely limitless and ambiguous in their dimensions. She thus invents a paradox space outside the conventions of dualism and dichotomies, placing the immense within the small and vice versa. By exploiting norms to the absurd, Dickinson locates female identity at the same time within her own culture and outside of it. Her space is, I argue, precisely the paradox space Gillian Rose aims for as a new medium of representation for female identity in *Feminism and Geography. The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (1993). Spaces, according to Rose, are equally structured through discourse as all other aspects of culture. As two dimensional models are inadequate for mapping the complex dimensions of identity, Rose pleads for the use of spatial images that allow for difference and therefore constitute a paradoxical geography. This paradoxical kind of mapping allows for conceptualizations of identity as being simultaneously at the centre and the margin, being at once inside and outside of a certain space.

Keywords Emily Dickinson, gender and space

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