

# The idea of traversing boundaries and borders in ancient literature

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



Despite the idea that literary works stem across a multiplicity of genres and were composed in different time periods, they always seem to have one underlying core: a similar thematic idea or overarching moral of the story. One theme that seems to be the underlying common denominator throughout the assigned texts has been crossing literal and figurative borders and boundaries. In various ancient texts, authors have craftly incorporated the idea of characters traversing boundaries, be it either prominent physical, geographic boundaries or subtle emotional and social boundaries. When such individuals - deemed "border crossers" or "dwellers" - enter into a foreign or uncharted territory, it not only provides insight into their reactions and expectations of the two groups of individuals, it also provides a clear insight into the relationship between distinct groups of people.

When discussing the topic of crossing borders, it is important to identify the specific way in which authors depict the idea of crossing borders in written literature in addition to the positive and negative implications of doing so and the possible dangers involved. The implications of border crossing can also teach individuals about the interactions and relationships between distinct cultures and unique groups of people. The idea of crossing borders does not only stop at transcribed pieces of literature however. In fact, many examples of crossing borders that are demonstrated in ancient texts can also be applied to more contemporary circumstances.

One common way that authors depict their characters crossing borders is by traversing physical geographic borders. In Homer's *The Odyssey* the central

character Odysseus is on an ongoing journey in which he encounters multiple groups of people living on different islands and The Odyssey thus has distinct experiences with each of them. The experiences and actions of Odysseus on each of these journeys goes beyond the superficial meaning of the text and communicates the possible experiences that any individual can encounter when traveling to different regions.

Odysseus' stop-over in the land of the lotus eaters conveys that one of the dangers of border crossing stems from one's high expectations of other societies. The inhospitable and inhumane intentions of the lotus eaters represent a society in which is unwelcoming of strangers. Dissimilarly, Odysseus' travels to the cave of Eileithyia demonstrates a new understanding of what results from geographical border crossing. As Eileithyia is the goddess of childbirth, Homer is implying that the action of border crossing is a means of "childbirth". In this context, the action of crossing physical borders leads to the birth of new tolerances and new acceptances of different groups of people.

Additionally, the crossing of social borders and boundaries is representative of the morals and ethics of a given society at a point in history. In the tale of 1001 Arabian Nights, Sinbad the Sailor converses with Sinbad the Merchant about his fortunes and wealth that he has accumulated over his years of sailing. Though it may not be explicit, Sinbad the Sailor is crossing social boundaries in two ways in this scenario. Sinbad is crossing one social border as he is a lower class merchant by birth who is accumulating immense wealth as a result of internationally trading with other countries, which can

technically allow him to situate himself into an upper class status.

Furthermore, Sinbad crosses another social boundary by communicating with someone that is representative of a lower class than he is: Sinbad the Merchant. In crossing social boundaries in these two forms, Sinbad the Sailor provides the readers with insight into two Arabian values. Sinbad is communicating the importance of trade in Arabian society as it not only acts as a means of cultural diffusion, but also as a means of attaining social mobility. Sinbad also relays the insignificance of a social hierarchy since anyone, in spite of their social status, is able to attain wealth and fortune so long as they are determined to do so.

With regards to a more contemporary idea of crossing social and emotional borders, there have been instances in ancient literature in which females defied social norms and began to express their emotions and thoughts in the form of poetry. In 12th and 13th century Occitania, female poets known as *Trobairitz* began to compose poems, accompanied by compositions of music. Prior to the *Trobairitz*, the main creators of poems and music were the *Troubadours*. One famous *Trobairitz*, known for her *Contessa de Dia*, was the Countess of Dia, who lived in the 12th century. In the *Contessa de Dia*, the *Trobairitz* exposes all of her true emotions without any superficial coverings. By encompassing all of her emotions into this one poem, the countess crossed the boundary of silence to having a voice and being heard. By crossing social boundaries and expropriating the role of the *Troubadours*, the *Trobairitz*' are allowing readers to cross into the psyche of a woman's mind. The crossing of this social boundary is one of the many major

achievements in which women have been able to accomplish over the course of many centuries as it has allowed them to voice their opinions and beliefs, having been given the same respect as a man would. This idea can also be seen in today's modern society as women are beginning to step out of their shells and step into less conventional societal positions in which were only assumed by men at one point in time.

All in all, the idea of crossing borders and boundaries has proved to be crucial when thinking about the possibilities of cultural diffusion, societal integration, and equal societal opportunities. The crossing of a boundary, be it physical or mental, has proved to be essential in some circumstances for the growth and evolution of a region as a whole and in other circumstances for the maturation and development of individuals.