THE TRELLIS PAPERS

This is a series of working papers initially derived from a project designed to introduce Second Cycle students to research. TRELLIS is an acronym for "Teaching Research in English-Language Literatures, Intermediate Stage". The project seeks to build links between research carried out at postgraduate and professional level and the kind of research-oriented work that is offered to First Cycle students. It includes a series of seven sessions -the *TRELLIS Seminar*- which has ben running in the Department of English at the UAM since 2002.

The overall goal of these sessions is twofold. On the one hand they aim at laying down a practical base for research. Eight critical texts from different research areas (history of science, linguistics, postmodernist fiction, fairytale, medieval epic, medieval narrative construction, anthropology, thematics) are studied and commented in depth for their special contribution to literature studies; these all touch broad, mostly interdisciplinary, mostly historical concerns. Attention is paid to argument construction, use of data, and layout. There is also some coaching in library and web searches and use of source materials.

On the other hand, the seminars concentrate on issues at the intersection between canonical literature, popular culture, and folklore. Because this intersection appears to view only when researchers take up a global perspective, when they engage a *field theory of text*, the three domains under scrutiny have occasionally been referred to as 'the Field triangle', and the term may continue in use so long as we remember that it is not meant to be exhaustive and that other areas of interaction will be found to exist in the textual Field.

Among other tasks, and as part of their training, each participant in the TRELLIS Seminars is asked to prepare and deliver a 20-minute talk before a mixed audience. So far, papers have dealt with problems of narrative structure, evolution, thematics, and so on in such areas as cartography, videogames, myth, epic, fairytale, ballad, popular music, medieval romance, children's literature, film, comix, advertising, and others. It is the result of these talks that the present series was initially designed to publish.

Meanwhile, however, the project goes on and the 'trellis' concept has outgrown its original intention and now has the full function suggested by the word: an interlace of efforts which, in bringing together various types of research at different levels of complexity, seeks to reinforce and disseminate results, thus hoping to create a feedback loop throughout the three Cycles. One practical aim is to provide a flexible, reasonably speedy method of publication by editing each paper independently — though the possibility that some of these materials may eventually be collected in book form on thematic or other criteria is not to be ruled out.

The TRELLIS Papers will accordingly edit a variety of materials that will include not only the results of the TRELLIS Seminar but also work presented by contributors to the *Liminality Seminars*, as well as other relevant work.

Three points need to be made here. First, the primary objective is to make available to the Department various types of work carried out in it. Second, quality is a must in any paper submitted for inclusion in the series. Third, submissions to *The TRELLIS Papers* will be expected to conform to the editorial policy outlined in the second number of the series. This is not a matter 'for the editors to sort out'; on the contrary, it is an intrinsic responsibility of researchers to ensure that their work complies with some widely accepted set of conventions. The instructions provided in *TTP 2* are in agreement with international practice.

THE EDITORS

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The Lure of the Limen

An Introduction to the Concept, Uses and Problems of Liminality

1. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

A research project titled "Systemic Analysis of 'Marginal' Literatures" (1994-97) gave the initial impetus for our research on liminality. Whereas our initial goal was a theoretical exploration of the phenomenon of non-canonical literatures, we gradually came to the conviction that "marginal" was too misleading a term for our purposes, and decided to take up the anthropological concept of liminality and explore its implications. The result was a monograph, *Margins and Thresholds*, which the newly-created The Gateway Press published in 2000. The Liminality Seminars, launched in the Spring of 1998, were a second offshoot of this interest. Since their inception, and with unavoidable gaps and slacks, they have faithfully carried out the function of providing a forum for debate, acting as a sounding-board for ideas, and -when a new project, "Threshold and Text", was launched in 2000- yielding feedback for our work. We feel that the time has come for at least some of the results of these seminars to appear in print.[1]

2. SOME BASIC CONCEPTS

> [T]he problems of *evolution* are not limited to *literary history*. Questions concerning changes in the mutual relationship between the individual arts also arise, and here the scrutiny of *transitional regions* is particularly fruitful; for example, an analysis of a transitional region between painting and poetry, such as illustration, or an analysis of a *border region* between music and poetry, such as the romance.
>
> Finally, the problem of changes in the mutual relationship between the arts and other closely related cultural domains arises, especially with respect to the mutual relationship between literature and other kinds of verbal messages. Here the *instability of boundaries*, the change in the content and extent of the individual domains, is particularly illuminating. Of special interest for investigators are the *transitional genres*. In certain periods such genres are evaluated as extraliterary and extrapoetical, while in other periods they may fulfill an important literary function because they comprise those elements which are about to be emphasized by belles lettres, whereas the *canonical literary forms* are deprived of these elements. Such transitional genres are, for example, the various forms of *littérature intime* -letters, diaries, notebooks, travelogues- which in certain periods (for example, in Russian literature of the first half of the nineteenth century) serve an important function within the total complex of literary values (Jakobson 1935:45).

What makes this passage so relevant to us is the number of key notions it contains that reverberate in contemporary research on liminality. Some of the basic terms here (in italics) are commented on below.

2.1. In *the history of fiction*, the Picaresque appears as one missing link between medieval romance and modern novel — not quite the latter, no longer the former; as such it affords much light on the *evolution* of narrative forms. But adopting this view entails looking at the Picaresque not as a closed, self-contained genre but as a stage in an ongoing process of change. The historical outlook renders every event a stage, every text a nexus.

2.2. Change involves difference, difference does not always mean change, as it is not only the province of history but occurs synchronically as well. The crucial term here is "variation". A fairytale always exists as an open-ended set of variants which differ, by much or little, among themselves at any given time: only variation, and hence difference and hybridity, make transformation possible. To Jakobson's examples of non-historical *transitional regions* we may add such hybrid forms as the comics, straddling the line between narrative and painting; film, between theatre and novel; visual poetry, between text and image; the ballad, between music and poetry. The emergence and evolution of these genres and media is made possible by the existence of variation and blend mechanisms on the synchronic plane.

2.3. Synchronic and diachronic variation, in turn, creates *instability of boundaries*, giving borders a peculiar plasticity; they weaken, shift, break down, arise, contract, expand. And this mercurial fluidity of borders forces us to question the received identity of the things they define.

2.4. Given this wavering quality of borders, genres arisen in-between more solid fields or periods would well deserve the label *transitional*; but the definition of this term clearly depends on (changing) critical attitudes. Until the 1960s, Gothic fiction was deemed a transitional genre in histories of Anglo-American literature, thought at best to pave the way for the work of Scott or Poe.[2] Seen in another light, however, not only can Gothic be said to have ushered various genres into existence (historical novel, detective- and science-fiction) over the last two centuries, but also to constitute the spearhead of the very enduring genre of horror fiction. The 'extraliterary' and 'extrapoetical' features that would mark it out as 'transitional' remain a matter of critical debate. The 'transitional' lies, at least to some extent, in the eye of the beholder.

2.5. Criticism, teaching, anthologies do delimit the value of given texts. Whereas our culture seldom applies the term "literature" to documentary or epistolary genres, it currently defines the North-American literature of the 17th and 18th centuries (but not of the 20th century) largely by just this *littérature intime*: chronicles, letters, journals, travel-books.[3] On the other hand, the 18th-century concept of literature did include many of these but not, for example, in any obvious way, the novel (Eagleton 1983:17). Such boundary-shifts invite us to question our received ideas of literature and genre (2.3-4): our definition of 'the literary' has lately expanded in some directions, contracted in others — definitions being, after all, historical constructs, not immutable truths.

2.6. Our received ideas of literature include the concept of *the canon*. The word designates those works of a literary tradition which are thought worth preserving as its proud heritage; this conceptualization usually entails a despective view of other texts as being poor-quality and ephemeral — 'non-canonical'. Over the last forty years, however, a debate has raged concerning the relationship between canonical and non-canonical (often referred to as 'marginal') genres, as well as regarding the very nature and validity of the literary canon. Once again, what obtains here is a problematic, and shifting, boundary.

3. RITES OF PASSAGE AND LIMINALITY

3.1. "Liminality" is one word to identify the principle behind all these phenomena. The term was originally given its current technical value by anthropologist Arnold Van

Gennep in his ground-breaking study of ritual. He identified a set of rites he called *rites de passage* which are universally performed on the occasion of a large variety of 'transitions' (departures, returns, birth, puberty, marriage, death, and so on); he discovered one structure which seems to govern rites of passage everywhere, and broke it down into three stages, to which he assigned corresponding types of ritual:

> I propose [...] to name *preliminary rites* the rites of separation from the ordinary world, *liminal rites* the rites performed during the marginal stage, and *postliminal rites* the rites of incorporation to the new world (Van Gennep 1909:27; my translation).

The three stages shape a process. Detachment from one's customary environment takes place in a ritual manner; one then is, while in a state of isolation, guided by ceremonies or subjected to tests; one's eventual return to the familiar world is again governed by rituals. It is part of the theory both that such transitions *change* the individual, the world, and/or the relation between them, and that they must occur gradually so as to forestall the confusion produced by sudden ontological shifts. Inspired by Émile Durkheim, Van Gennep offers a binary model of reality, with some manner of 'door' allowing access from one side to the other:

> the door is the bourne between the alien world and the domestic world when we deal with an ordinary room, between the profane world and the sacred world when we deal with a temple. Thus to "pass the threshold" means to become incorporated to a new world (ib.: 27; my translation).

The door-model, however, is suitable only to describe certain elementary transitions. This is because the essence of the passage often involves a *sojourn* of some duration on a threshold or in a threshold 'space' (often a march, desert, swamp, forest, and so on):

> Whoever passes from [one territory -*territoire*- to another] thus finds himself, in both a physical and a magico-religious manner, for some length of time, in a special situation: he hovers between two worlds. It is this situation that I am calling a *margin* [...] (24; my translation).

This 'hovering' is of the essence, for the 'margin' is a zone of indeterminacy where old structures and values are suspended or questioned, while new ones have not yet been recognized or adopted. A problem this formulation poses is that of defining the margin, since it is now seen as but another space one can occupy, albeit temporarily, and yet is neither of the two 'territories'.

3.2. The equation between 'situation' and 'margin' at first sight seems an infelicitous rhetorical step, for how can the physical *space* of the margin constitute a *situation*? This misstep may, however, turn out to be only apparent if, as research has confirmed, the 'margin' can be seen as more than a space (3.1) — if we envisage it as a condition rather than a location, as a psychosocial state that individuals find themselves in rather than just a site they occupy. It is then a dynamic, not an inert site; and it is subjective (in another sense than in 2.4), as it depends on individual or intersubjective experience, not on objective fact.

3.3. Research by the LIMEN Group suggests we should distinguish -at least in text studies, where the notion of the margin takes on a very specific meaning- between the metaphors of the *margin* and the *threshold*. The first is the border of the text on the page, beyond which lies nothing. The second is a line or territory between texts, and is itself textual (Aguirre, Quance, Sutton 2000). I will write of 'the liminal' in connection with transitions, and reserve 'marginal' for that which is left aside, the inconsiderable.[4]

3.4. Another anthropologist, Victor Turner, concentrated on Van Gennep's concept of the liminal phase and placed "liminality" squarely on the map in his decisive *The Ritual Process*:

> The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon (Turner 1969:95).

Existing between or outside categories, liminal entities are unclassifiable, "ambiguous and indeterminate", shifty.[5] Against the metaphor of "states and positions in cultural *space*", with its connotations of stability and identity, stands that of "cultural *transition*", designating not just a site but also a period outside the customary. Clearly there is need to include space *and* time in our considerations of the liminal.

3.5. The liminal lies outside structure and hierarchy, is associated with confusion and chaos. Because it flaunts categories, it is equated with the non-rational, the alien, the unassimilable. As such, it is felt to be dangerous, and must be avoided, contained, destroyed. But precisely *qua* unstructured, it may also be a source of renewal. It invites notions of lawlessness, but equally of freedom; appears subversive, but also transcendental or transformative. The morose, naive, inept fairytale hero is to succeed at a task which better-adjusted characters will fail to accomplish; and moping Hamlet belongs beside Cinderella, Ugly Duckling, or Perseus. Literature, folktale and myth, just like ritual, engage individuals in literal and/or figurative passages and put them through the stages of separation, transformation and incorporation to a changed world.

3.6. Liminality thus interests those concerned with the study of borders, interstices, missing links; it is a dynamic concept associated with conflict, hybridity, blend, pollution; with chaos and creation; with fluidity of identity or of meaning; with the unstable or the unsettling; with transgression, subversion, or transcendence. And it is a sufficiently abstract concept for use in disciplines which include ritual, cultural and literature studies.

4. APPLICATIONS

One way to show the strength of the notion is to consider the number of current scientific concepts which can be integrated into the liminality model, and the many areas to which it is applicable.

4.1. *The Numinous.* Theologian Rudolph Otto (1917) coined the word "Numinous" to identify that which by definition lies beyond our rational, moral conceptions: the awesome, the awful, 'the wholly Other'. The term is useful -in preference to the more religious "sacred"- where a neutral word is desirable or where the non-rational element is to be stressed. In literature it has proven of much use in e.g. the analysis of horror fiction (Aguirrre 1990). It strengthens that binary view which students of religion since Durkheim have entertained about the moral cosmos (3.1). Picturing the rational and the Numinous on opposite sides of a 'threshold' comfortably highlights the contrast between them — yet, paradoxically, it reveals an unsuspected difficulty as to the precise use of Otto's term: where does the one end, the other begin? Is it truly possible to define the boundary between them?

4.2. *Instability.* Relevant to this problem is that 'instability of boundaries' Jakobson alluded to (2.4): the limen is not fixed but alters (2.5), even as it is a site for all kinds of alterations in the objects that occupy it.[6] Though "instability" is a privative term, it is not to be taken as a necessarily negative one but should be understood also to designate a quality of the flexible, the rich, the dynamic. This means that part of the dynamics of the limen (3.2) consists in its displaying a potential for contrary values: it is ambiguous.

4.3. *Le fantastique.* According to Tzvetan Todorov (1970), ambiguity is the essence of the fantastic. This 'genre', as he calls it, obtains at the moment of hesitation between a natural and a supernatural explanation of events. Our decision to understand the events we read of as natural will place the narrative in the genre of the uncanny, while reading them as requiring a new understanding of the laws of reality will assign it to the genre of the marvellous. The fantastic is thus a highly unstable genre, and exists only provisionally since most texts that build on ambiguity will resolve it before the end.[7] Given its volatile existence -as enduring only as the hesitation lasts-, it is safer to assume that the fantastic constitutes a mode rather than a genre; but the concept remains important for literary study, and liminality is central to its definition.

4.4. *Postmodernism.* Ambivalence, too, is a liminal phenomenon. If in ambiguity one sense cancels the other, in ambivalence they coexist and the subject wavers between them or embraces both. A natural extension of this is polyvalence, which connotes a potential for different (two or more) values. Only polyvalence makes both deviance and versatility, both mutability and difference possible (2.2). If postmodernist fiction relishes the creation of multiple worlds,[8] word-play and polyvalent language (McHale 1987), it, too, can be said to engage the concept of liminality.[9]

This creates a difficulty. It is hard to conceive, in our *spatial* representations of the threshold, how the limen -which by definition divides or joins *two* spaces- can be situated at the intersection of two *or more* sites, as entailed by the concept of polyvalence. What exactly is liminal in the postmodernist text? Perhaps at this point we approach a metonymic understanding of the limen; here it is not the line itself that matters but some of its properties. If we posit a plurality of worlds in some kind of interaction each of them will be less than fully solid, will exist only par rapport with the others; this problematizes the value of all, with each proposing itself as 'real' without quite managing to convince us of its full reality. In this light, the universes constructed by the postmodernist writer

are liminal in that each is unstable (4.2), less-than-fully-itself, a thing-on-the-edge. This conclusion, to be sure, amounts to a rejection of the binary model (3.1, 4.1).

4.5. *Heteroglossia*. Polyvalence leads us to Bakhtin's (1975) view of the novel as containing a multivocality of meanings in interaction when not in conflict. But though most conspicuous in the novel, *heteroglossia* is in the final analysis a property of discourse itself. This makes discourse an open, unresolved, dynamic event which, instead of multiple worlds, displays a multiplicity of voices: another variation on the unstable text.[10]

4.6. *Paratexts*. Genette (1987) notes that a text is always 'surrounded' by auxiliary textual items which belong and yet do not belong in it. Title, epigraph, prologue, notes and so forth are *paratextual* elements which lie at the edge of the work yet condition its reception and interpretation. The 'thresholds' of the text, then, mediate between reader and work by providing keys to its meaning (Bredendick 2004b).

4.7. *Intertextuality*. If paratexts constitute 'intratextual' thresholds, Kristeva (1967) warns us that no text stands by itself but interrelates with others from which it derives part of its meaning. This casts doubts on the autonomy and uniqueness, even on the received identity of textual constructs, and, as in the cases of heteroglossic discourse and postmodernist narrative, makes the liminal -the interdependence among fictional worlds, texts or voices- a crucial object of study.[11]

4.8. *Traces*. A sign always contains a *trace* of other signs, an absence by virtue of which meaning is referred (and deferred) to other signifying systems (Derrida 1987);[12] as the chain of signifiers regresses indefinitely, at no point can it be said that 'the buck stops here', that such-and-such is the original (or the final) language-independent signified. If so, all signs, all texts exist 'on the edge' (4.4) and have a liminal status.

4.9. *Excluded Middles*. That current criticism grows wary of binary systems can be seen in its preference for polyvalence (4.4), multivocality (4.5), intertextuality (4.7), but also in its rediscovery of the *tertium quid* betwixt-and-between conventional oppositions. Whether this be Homi Bhabha's (1989) 'Third Space', the Black Atlantic of the African diaspora (Gilroy 1993), the no-man's-land (Benito 2004), or that Third Nation on the Mexico/US border (*El País* 2004), our critical establishment seems bent on positing a liminal zone where binary oppositions are transcended and "rendered fluid and makeshift" (Sutton 2002:3).

4.10. *Liminal sites*. Our past literatures, too, have often resorted to spatial metaphors of rich liminal value: the medieval *locus amoenus* and the Garden of Delights are privileged sites outside common experience. So are Eden, the Land of Cockaigne, More's Utopia.[13] Specific literary genres, too, have created their own threshold symbols: the Forest in the medieval romance, the sea in the Irish *immrama*, the haunted castle in the Gothic novel, the Frontier in the Western.

4.11. *Liminal characters*. Not only sites, but also a range of literary figures merit the label "liminal". The hero of myth and folktale (3.5) but also of epic, saga, adventure novel or Western, often half-human or half-civilized (like the protagonists of George Stevens' and John Ford's films *Shane* and *The Searchers*), dares to leave his familiar world and to

cross over into the Numinous, the marvellous, the alien. But outlaw, monster, barbarian, pirate, mulatto, trickster straddle like him the line between races, between orders, between human and Other: their role as mediators (or else as disruptors) is a function of their liminal nature.

4.12. *Processes*. Nor should "liminality" be restricted to static place, character or situation: processes and evolution, too, are issues to which this concept is relevant (2.1). Thus, studies of genre-formation and modification can benefit from a liminalist approach (Ellis 2004); so can studies of cultural relationships between social groups wherever conflict, negotiation and exchange occur. This is because both the passage, understood as a three-stage event, *and* the middle stage itself have a processual character (2.2, 3.4).

4.13. *Interfaces*. The area of interaction between systems is another instance of liminal dynamics. Relevant fields here include the contact zone between genres or media (where innovation is most apt to occur); Gothic fiction, which shares in several poetics (prominently those of the 18th-century novel, the medieval romance, and the folktale); or the interface between the physical and the virtual realities (Broadhurst 2004).

4.14. *Inflection*. A word affected by declension, conjugation, mutation or vowel-gradation turns out to be a word-paradigm: lexical items actually consist of (more, consist *in*) a number of variations (2.3). Linguists speak of "inflection" here, and we may broaden the term to cover cases where not only a word but also a text exists as a group of variations. Folktale or ballad are never more than a set of performances or tellings (2.3); *Hamlet* exists for us in three, rather different printed versions; *The Postman Always Rings Twice* has been filmed half a dozen times. As a matter of fact, inflection touches all literary texts, since they are always subject to modification or manipulation; indeed, it is through some rewritten form that we most commonly encounter them, and *rewriting* -translation, commentary, digest, concordance, critical edition, historiography, anthology- is now a major issue in literature studies (Lefevere 1992). All such 'inflected' *limina* call for an investigation into the properties of an object which consists in several versions of itself.[14]

4.15. *Summary*. The Numinous, the fantastic, the polyvalent, the Excluded Middle can be viewed as so many tokens of the liminal. Heteroglossia, intertextuality, interface and evolution appear as different kinds of threshold-interaction. The Forest, the Garden of Delights, the haunted house, the Frontier are liminal sites in our literatures. Both the hero and his adversary straddle the line in folklore, epic and adventure narrative. Genre formation and modification fall squarely within the scope of liminalist inquiry. The strength of the concept is shown by the unity it brings to a heretofore complex and heterogeneous field. There remains, of course, to formulate the theoretical framework that must account for these and other phenomena in a unified perspective while respecting the specificity of each.

4.16. *The theory*. As a theoretical tool, liminality enables us to identify sites, objects, characters, events, texts whose main trait is precisely that they refuse definition, classification or analysis within more conventional frameworks. A theory of liminality should help us to understand textual aspects that might otherwise remain invisible or elicit confusing explanations. From previous work by the LIMEN Group (see Appendix 3), the following would seem to be among the basic properties of the limen, and will have to

be taken into account in the construction of a theory of liminality; needless to say, the list is tentative, and not exhaustive:

1. The threshold is betwixt-and-between X and Y, both X and Y, or neither X nor Y
2. It challenges the Law of the Excluded Middle; it proposes itself as a *tertium quid*
3. It is "a place that is not a place" (Turner), "the new, neither the one nor the other" (Bhabha)
4. It is ambiguous, ambivalent, polyvalent, equivocal, paradoxical, contradictory, all-embracing
5. It exhibits properties different from those of ordinary space
6. Being a frontier, it generates change; or it is itself a changing site
7. It displays a concentration of meaning; or it is conspicuous for its meaninglessness
8. It is unstable, hence unreliable
9. It may exist as a multiplicity of versions of a text; hence it challenges fixed notions as to the stability of texts or of the single author
10. It may therefore consist, not in the line between versions, but in the unstable or 'dynamic' space shaped by a plurality of versions
11. It is a site of power: the occupants of or passengers through the threshold are liable either to take this power upon themselves or to be subjected to it. It may be that in the liminal regions there is -paradoxically- no middle way
12. Being charged with power, it is apt to be a site of numinosity, of promise and danger
13. Conversely, qua unstable, it is open, hence exposed, hence particularly vulnerable
14. It can be either subversive or transcendental
15. It opens up (or shapes) new universes

5. PROBLEMS

I hope to have shown that the usefulness of the concept calls for a theory of liminality. Things are not so simple, however, as the conceptualization of the limen poses a number of very real problems.

5.1. To begin with, the Frontier (4.10) requires us to think of the threshold *either* as a line *or* as a territory. The Forest of Adventure can be an intermediate zone between ordinary space and the Other, *or* itself the Other side. Either possibility subverts the binary model (4.1, 4.4): the first requires us to view the threshold as a third space; the second prevents us from reducing the Other to a second category in simple equilibrium with 'our' side. Several visual models can be proposed here which might turn out to be mutually incompatible:

a) the linear or door-model (3.1), where advance involves crossing the threshold and entering the Other side. Religious individuals may touch a conventionally sacred element attached to the door on entering or leaving home; heroes may have to overcome a threshold guardian; and so on;
b) the territorial model, practical in those narratives of adventure where the hero's advance takes him *into* the threshold rather than across it;
c) the spiral model, suitable at least to a description of rites of passage (3.1): initiands return to the ordinary world but, through their passage, do so changed, or else their world undergoes a transformation, so that the rite of incorporation does not bring them back to their starting-point but to a new situation;
d) on the analogy of the ever-shifting line at the intersection between land and sea, I have proposed a 'shoreline-model' (Aguirre 2004) to account for the phenomena of polyvalence or inflection (4.4, 4.12).

5.2. These and other problems in identifying the nature of the limen suggest that spatial models might not suffice to account for purely dynamic processes (Ellis 2004). Then again, our problem may consist in finding a model that will cover both spatial and processual liminality.

5.3. There is also the difficulty of handling ambiguity and polyvalence as intrinsic features of the limen (4.4), as well as the issue of whether we can develop a manifold model to replace or subsume the binary one.

5.4. We thus see that the threshold is an area of turbulence whose definition cannot be constructed in the ordinary terms of critical discourse.

5.5. It is, furthermore, an area which, precisely because it is not located and cannot be identified, may be read either as a utopian space of promise or as a threatening power bent on 'invading' ordinary space. Science-Fiction has often literalized this 'invasion' of the human world by a liminal force — often one paradoxically created, tapped or raised by human endeavours. Classic cases here would be the scientific experiment that backfires and overwhelms the planet; the invasion of the body-snatchers; or Borges' story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius". Such texts strongly confirm that the liminal is fraught for us with both allure and disquiet.

5.6. This wealth of examples brings out one further danger, that of making the whole literary universe *liminal* (cf. 4.7, 4.8, 4.14): for when we reach this point the concept of liminality becomes useless: covering everything, it distinguishes nothing. There must be some way of *demarcating* the threshold.

5.7. We therefore face problems of theorization and model-construction, ambiguity, inconsistency between spatial and processual models, problems of identification and definition of borders and, so, of phenomena which until now seemed safely stable. Recognition of the limen amounts to the opening of the proverbial can of worms, or perhaps of a Pandora Box: once opened, there is no way to contain the forces it releases.

5.8. Lastly, and in spite of all these difficulties, it is important not to foster a mystique around the concept of liminality. If we are to discuss it we should do so not through hazy or 'poetic' language but in terms criticism can sanction, even if they ultimately enforce a reconsideration of current critical conventions.

Notes

1. This article is an expanded version of a talk delivered in the Liminality Seminars on 28 February 2005. The various appendices list the major results of the LIMEN Group to date.

2. The current view remains ambiguous; although much serious critical work is being devoted to Gothic, little (or nothing) of this genre makes its way into standard anthologies, or into courses concerned with the literary Canon.

3. In contemporary anthologies, the early North-American literature is also defined by other kinds of texts not usually acknowledged into the 'Canon': sermons, speeches, Indian folktales, and so on. On the concept of the Canon, see below.

4. A transformation of the one into the other is not excluded. The liminal can -perhaps must- become the stereotype, the marginal can be, and often is, dynamicized.

5. From her study of social and symbolic structures, anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966) reached an additional conclusion: whatever cannot be accommodated within standard classifications, whatever belongs in the interstices, society tends to construe as a source of danger or pollution. The interstice, too, is liminal 'space'.

6. In 2001 the generic title of the "Postgraduate Programme in British and North-American Literature" in the Department of English Studies at the UAM was changed to "Unstable Identities: Contemporary Approaches to British and North-American Literature", to reflect the fact that, however different our various lines of research might be, they converged on this growing preoccupation with variability, change, and the relativity of definitions and identities at all levels.

7. Though some instances of the contrary would be found in Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, or Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*.

8. By means of forking paths, chinese-box patterns, recursive structures, mise en abyme, the play within the play, and other construction devices.

9. Might we not discern in our postmodernist culture a liminal bent, a propensity to recognize and explore thresholds, perhaps an awareness of its own liminal condition (a condition which we who pursue liminalist studies might be both bringing out and reinforcing)?

10. A phenomenon not dissimilar from heteroglossia obtains at the linguistic level in individuals and societies: as linguist David Crystal (2000:44-5) points out, "there are good grounds for conceiving the natural condition of the human being to be multilingual". See below under "inflection".

11. Texts have also been denied autonomy on other grounds. They are not finished constructs but exist in different versions both simultaneously -different editions or translations- and historically -different stages in the process of composition, with successive contributions by friends, colleagues, editors, plus revisions and new editions by the author- (Stillinger 1991).

12. The Spanish *traza* is a glaring mistranslation, as well as a pitiful gallicism. *Traza* means "guise", "manner", "aspect", not "trace" in any of the French or English senses of the word. Spanish *huella* ('footstep', 'track') or *rastro* ('track', 'path', 'spoor') would do a much better job here.

13. Not just in literature, either: the New World was conceived from its discovery as a paradisal land of plenty. America (as seen by other cultures) was, perhaps still is, a liminal site.

14. Characters, too, may be 'inflected'. The 19th-century theme of the Doppelgänger relies on a demonic version of personality-inflection; Gawain often stands for Arthur; the Loathly Lady appears repulsive and beautiful by turns.

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Appendices

1. THE PROJECTS

Systemic Analysis of 'Marginal' Literatures (ref. PB93-0242), from June 1994 to May 1997. Directed by Manuel Aguirre, funded by the Dirección General de Investigación Científica y Técnica (Ministry of Culture). Exploring 'marginal', popular, uncharted genres and themes, its major breakthrough was published in Aguirre, Quance, Sutton 2000 (see Appendix 3).

Threshold and Text: Development of a Theory of Liminality Applicable to the Field of Literature Studies (ref. BFF2000-0093), since January 2001. Directed by Manuel Aguirre, funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology. Aside from theoretical aspects of the threshold, this project continues earlier concerns and studies folk and medieval narrative structures, collage, visual poetry, African-American literature, Gothic and horror fiction, the theme of Sovereignty, and others.

2. OTHER INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN AROUND THE ISSUE OF LIMINALITY

A) *The Liminality Seminars* (since May-June 1998), an informal series of lectures and debates for colleagues and research students, conceived as a back-up for the "Threshold and Text" project (see Appendix 1).

B) *The International Seminar on Liminality and Text*, a biennial event. Four encounters have so far taken place (for results see Appendix 3):

- 15-16 March 1999 *A Place That Is Not A Place*
- 2-3 April 2001 *Betwixt-and-Between*
- 24-25 March 2003 *Mapping the Threshold*
- 14-15 March 2005 *The Dynamics of the Threshold*
- Scheduled for March/April 2007 *Liminal Poetics* (provisional title)

C) *The Foundation Literature Seminars* (since 2000): an introduction to practical research for First Cycle students, its central concept is the 'triangle' resulting from the interface between canonical literature, popular culture, and folklore.

D) *The TRELLIS Seminar* (since November 2002): a concentrated 7-session event designed as a theoretical introduction to research for Second Cycle students, it includes as part of its goals a 20-minute talk which each participant is expected to deliver in the *Foundation Literature Seminars* (see (C) above).

E) THE GATEWAY PRESS: founded in 2000 by Manuel Aguirre, Esteban Pujals and Isabel Soto, it is the first independent academic press publishing in English in Spain. It currently edits a collection, *Studies in Liminality and Literature* (four volumes issued so far: see below), and *The TRELLIS Papers*.

3. BOOKS RESULTING FROM THESE INITIATIVES

1) Manuel Aguirre, Roberta Quance, Philip Sutton 2000 *Margins and Thresholds: An Inquiry into the Concept of Liminality in Text Studies*. Madrid: The Gateway Press (*Studies in Liminality and Literature 1*). ISBN84-607-0901-9.

2) Isabel Soto (ed.) 2000 *A Place That is Not a Place: Essays in Liminality and Text.* Madrid: The Gateway Press *(Studies in Liminality and Literature 2*). ISBN 84-931843-0-6.

3) Philip Sutton (ed.) 2002 *Betwixt-and-Between: Essays in Liminal Geography*. Madrid: The Gateway Press (*Studies in Liminality and Literature 3)* ISBN 84-931843-1-4.

4) Nancy Bredendick (ed.) 2004 *Mapping the Threshold: Essays in Liminal Analysis*. Madrid: The Gateway Press (*Studies in Liminality and Literature 4*). ISBN 84-931843-2-2.

5) Ana Manzanas and Jesús Benito (eds.) 2005 *The Dynamics of the Threshold*. Madrid: The Gateway Press (*Studies in Liminality and Literature 5*). In preparation.

6) Valerie Henitiuk *Embodied Boundaries: Images of Liminality in a Selection of Women-Authored Courtship Narratives*. In preparation.

7) Manuel Aguirre *The Thresholds of the Tale: Liminality and the Structure of Fairytales*. Under review.

4. MAJOR ARTICLES

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Isabel Soto 2002 "The Border Paradigm in Cormac McCarthy's *The Crossing*", in *Literature and Ethnicity in the Cultural Borderlands* (ed. Jesús Benito and Ana M Manzanas). Amsterdam: Rodopi, 51-61.

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