TRANSITIONS SEMINAR NEWSLETTER 17

Bimonthly, edited by M. Aguirre

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The *Transitions Seminar* is a permanent initiative set up in 2019 by the LIMEN Research Group. It convenes approximately on a bi-monthly basis, online since 2020. It provides a forum for debate on liminality and related issues, and a research-training ground for PhD candidates, as well as functioning as a venue for the current *Transitions Project*. It is linked to The Gateway Press and the websites *LIMEN & TEXT*, *The Northanger Library*, and *The Janus Gate Project*.

http://www.limenandtext.com/rst.html
http://www.limenandtext.com/index.html
https://northangerlibrary.com/
http://janusgateliterature.com/

1. Two forthcoming events
2. Notes, Queries, Responses
3. Publications relevant to liminality studies

1. TWO FORTHCOMING EVENTS

I.

Celia Marqués Amorós
(Independent scholar)

'Driving on a Road of Heartbroken Uncertainty: What the Limen Brought Together in a Eurovision Song'

on December 10th
at 10.30 a.m. (CET), via Teams
(A link will be provided a few days before the seminar)

ABSTRACT

Liminality has proved a fertile concept for text analysis. Yet this powerful tool is not without dangers. It might be tempting to either see liminality everywhere or to consider that branding something as liminal is self-sufficient or that it makes something positive or negative in and by itself. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics establishes that you can predict the function of a text from the forms it uses, and, vice versa, that you can anticipate the linguistic forms a text will use when you know its function. SFL shares this pursuit of the bond between linguistic form and purpose with Austin and Searle's "speech act" and "speech event" notions. When we analyse the pop song *Calm after the storm*, by The Common Linnets, in search of its speech act, we find heart-broken uncertainty depicted as a limen that calls for a liminality model without which the expressive meaning and artistic value of the song would be lost. But an unframed listing of liminal elements might be equally pointless. I would like to propose that a systemic functional approach and the use of Speech Act Theory might be useful in framing the relevance of liminality in line with the purpose and function of a communication act.

II.

Parisa Delshad Rezaee
(University of Salamanca)

'Captured *en Passant*: Realism and the Limits of Representation in Mediations of Europe's Southernmost Borders.'

on FRI, January 24th at 10.30 a.m. (CET), via Teams

(A link will be provided a few days before the seminar)

ABSTRACT

This paper pursues a two-fold aim. On the one hand, it examines how European media represent the borders of the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, alongside their portrayal of migrants arriving at these two European land borders with Africa. On the other hand, it problematizes the issue of representation by focusing on the author's forthcoming documentary film about these borders.

The first part of the paper centers on stories about stunted passage to form a literary-analytical framework. Focusing on the arbitrariness of the border, it takes as its point of departure the nineteenth-century German novella *Michael Kohlhaas* (1810). The story is based on the chronicles of a sixteenth-century horse dealer and is catalyzed by his stumbling upon a hitherto-nonexistent border on his usual way to an animal fair to sell his horses. Similar to other works by Heinrich von Kleist, such as *The Marquise of O* (1808), literary representation and the limits of realism are essential to this canonical story's position on the border between history and literature. Precipitating the events that bring about Kohlhaas's downfall, the border is also central to J. M. Coetzee's "interpretive translation" of Kleist's story in his *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983). Here, too, the border that marginalizes and invisibilizes is resisted in the protagonist's inexhaustible movement in spite of the barriers along his long walk to return to his mother's home in Cape Town in the middle of a civil war. Both stories serve as allegories for the complexities of human response to systems of control, epitomised in the border. Coetzee's story is not only similar to Kleist's as he makes his Michael trespass empty houses, duck through the fences, and entertain the impossible idea of "spending a life driving stakes into the ground" (Coetzee, 1983: 97), but it shares Kleist's concern with representation. His protagonist worries about the gap that remains "when he tried to explain himself to himself"; "a hole, a darkness before which his understanding baulked, into which it was useless to pour words" (Coetzee, 1983: 110).

The question of representation will be followed in an exploration of the contemporary issue of borders in the cities of Melilla and Ceuta. Often described as the "gateways" to Europe, these cities are also spaces where migrants both face violent and inhumane treatment from border security forces, and also exercise resilience. The second part of the paper will thus explore how these two cities embody borderland liminality, illustrating borders not merely as geographical markers but as forces integral to the identities and fates of those who cross them. More importantly, the lens of migration, border politics, and the human condition will be applied to these spaces that host migrants *en passant* to underline the limits of representation and the challenges of capturing immigrants on film. The preliminary conclusions of the paper suggest that passage itself becomes a reflection of the border's role in shaping human lives. This underscores how the representation of migration must confront not only spatial divisions but also the deeper representational challenges articulated in literature, where borders similarly test the limits of mimesis and narrative control. Ultimately, borders emerge as sites that echo the literary tension Kleist and Coetzee explore between reality and the elusive capture of its meaning.

Keywords: Border; Ceuta and Melilla; Representation; Kleist; Coetzee.

2. NOTES, QUERIES, RESPONSES

Transitions and Beginnings

M. Aguirre

This note continues an argument I initiated in the *TS Newsletter* nº 12, having to do with the need to understand 'transition' as denoting precisely the in-between stage in a process, quite apart from its outcome. A problem with the liminality model with its three distinctive stages (pre-liminal, liminal, post-liminal) is its *telic* nature, the fact that it is geared towards an end. This is probably as it should be in the anthropological study of rites of passage, simply because rituals are designed for completion. In the study of literature, however, things are somewhat different. A book will always reach an end, the last page, but not necessarily closure, a resolution. A protagonist may not fulfil his or her mission. A plot need not tie loose ends neatly or at all. While characters find themselves in the middle—in the transition stage—they face options and forces that have to be negotiated, and it is in the nature of negotiation that no single possible outcome, however desirable, is necessary or inevitable.

By the same token, once characters have entered the liminal stage their point of departure is subject to scrutiny, revision, even scrapping; in other words, the transition may redefine its point of departure. For my example I turn to John Donne's 'The Good-Morrow.'[1]

I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I
Did, till we loved? were we not weaned till then,
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the seven sleepers' den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good-morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;
For love, all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres,
Without sharp north, without declining west?
Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

[1] *John Donne: The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971), p. 60.

The poetic voice asks his lover whether, given their discovery of true love, they can abide by a conventional reading of their previous lives. He concludes that, in light of their transformative experience, their entire past counts as no more than, in his first image, a childhood of the soul (lines 2-3); he then corrects this image with another, that of the dream: they were not just immature, they were asleep (lines 4, 7).

Poets had traditionally employed the dream vision topos to construct a threshold chronotope outside ordinary time and space, one in which visions were granted and extraordinary or exemplary things were possible.[2] Donne inverts (or subverts) the convention by proposing that the lovers' previous existence was an insubstantial dream, from which they have now awakened to an absolute reality: their new condition transcends both the temporal ('without declining west,' 'none can die') and the spatial (love 'makes one little room, an every where').[3] Such a description accords well with Turner's definition of the liminal, 'a place that is not a place, and a time that is not a time'; here, however, the liminal is identified not, as Turner has it, with the 'subjunctive'—the potential, the *as if*, the *may be*—but with a stable, *waking* experience. The lovers have attained a plenitude that is not to be confused with an 'arrival': they have accessed one of the many configurations the threshold can morph to: a factual, joyful condition of enduring liminality. In this light, their previous lives are irrelevant to their current state; the middle abrogates the beginning.

In this poem we find a sterling example of my premise: occupancy of the threshold—existence in the transition stage—may trigger a reappraisal of the starting point, the pre-liminal stage. Telic processual models that presuppose fixed points of departure and arrival may prove unsuitable to the analysis of transitions.

[2] Kathryn L. Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1988), 46-52.

[3] This particular manifestation of the limen chronotope involves an everlasting state of wellness in an unchanging environment; related versions are found in the *topoi* of Paradise, the Garden of Delights, perpetual Spring. On these see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (1948; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 186; Howard R. Patch, *The Other World According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: Havard UP, 1950); Jean Delumeau, *Une histoire du Paradis. Le jardin des délices* (Paris: Fayard, 1992).

3. PUBLICATIONS RELEVANT TO LIMINALITY STUDIES

- Johan Schimanski, 'Border Utopias, Border Dystopias,' in *Grenzüberschreitungen und Grenzüberschreibungen in Theorie, Literatur und Kultur*, eds. Vera Faber and Barbara Seidl (Wien: Praesens, 2021), pp. 45-78.

- Johan Schimanski, 'XÉNITEIA/xeniteia,' in *Living Together – Roland Barthes, the Individual and the Community*, eds. Knut Stene-Johansen, Christian Refsum and Johan Schimanski (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2018), pp. 313-22.

- Katherine A. Wilson & Leah R. Clark, *Mobility of Objects Across Boundaries 1000-1700* (Liverpool University Press, 2022; paperback, November 2024).

The following were provided by Francisco Fuentes in his talk 'The Re-Imagined Identity of Diasporic Writers: Coping with a Perpetual Liminality in *https://www.exiledwriters.co.uk/*' on 24 October 2024:

- S. Alkhaled & I. Sasaki (2022). 'Syrian Women Refugees: Coping with Indeterminate Liminality during Forcible Displacement.' *Organization Studies*, 43(10), 1583-1605. https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406211040214

- Nic Beech (2011). 'Liminality and the Practices of Identity Reconstruction.' *Human Relations*, 64, 285–302.

- Samantha A. Conroy & Anne M. O'Leary-Kelly (2014). 'Letting Go and Moving On: Work-related Identity Loss and Recovery.' *Academy of Management Review*, 39, 67–87.

- Jennifer Howard-Grenville, Karen Golden-Biddle, Jennifer Irwin, & Jina Mao (2011). 'Liminality as Cultural Process for Cultural Change.' *Organization Science*, 22, 522–539.

- Christian Garmann Johnsen & Bent Meier Sørensen (2015). '"It's Capitalism on Coke!": From Temporary to Permanent Liminality in Organization Studies.' *Culture and Organization*, 21, 321–337.

- Kamal Sbiri (2011). 'Writing Refugee in the Era of Displacement: Reflections on Poetry.' *Transnational Literature* 4 (1), http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html

- Jonas Söderlund & Elisabeth Borg (2018). 'Liminality in Management and Organization Studies: Process, Position and Place.' *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 20, 880–902.

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