TRANSITIONS SEMINAR NEWSLETTER 24

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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/

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1. FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Within the scope of the *Transitions Seminar*, fifth series (2025-26), the following talk will be offered:

Manuel Aguirre

will speak on

"Liminal Paradise:
Wholeness, Edges, and Margins in Medieval Depictions of Eden"

on FRI, February the 20th
at 10.00 a.m. (CET), via Teams

(The talk will last some 40 minutes, to be followed by Q&A.
A link will be provided a few days before the talk).

ABSTRACT

From a given vantage point, a threshold may be said to occupy a *centre* in space and time. On the evidence of both *mappae mundi* and written texts, the talk will explore the medieval narrative of Paradise as a liminal site that enjoyed a central position in the cosmos, and will argue that this narrative was endowed with a Bakhtinian 'chronotope of the threshold.' This chronotope was manifested in a variety of peculiarities that characterise Paradise as an 'inflected' domain, a site of ambivalence, contradiction and paradox—indeed, in the Rees-Turner formulation, 'a place that is not a place, and a time that is not a time.' It will be argued that the instability of this threshold site was congruent with a holistic view of the cosmos; but that, in the growing rationalism of the late Middle Ages, instability was increasingly read as inconsistency, and accordingly Paradise came to be relegated to the margins and eventually to be dismissed from maps of the Earth. This historical loss of centrality will be viewed as proof of the mercurial nature of the limen, which can not only change but be displaced and, at the extreme, vanish from view (while, at the other extreme, it may become omnipresent, witness that sinister instability that dominates the world in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*). This talk is part of the LIMEN Group's latest research project, outlined here below.

2. A NEW RESEARCH PROJECT

The LIMEN Research Group has launched a new project, *Forms of the Threshold Chronotope: A Liminalist Study of Speculative Fiction*. The general goal is to conduct a limited number of case studies in the field of speculative fiction (Gothic and horror, science-fiction, fantasy and related genres) in order to examine the structure and dynamics of various chronotopes of the threshold and to deal from a liminalist perspective with some of the problems posed by Bakhtin's concept: doesn't the very notion of chronotope (timespace) contradict our most basic intuitions about limina as dimensionless? Rees and Turner's synoptic definition of the limen as 'a place that is not a place, and a time that is not a time' makes the contradiction explicit in the form of a paradox; how do we handle it in the study of specific texts? How do we reconcile the threshold's heterogeneous manifestations in texts, genres, media and disciplines? Must we posit a multiplicity of mutually irreconcilable limina? The following research areas are contemplated at present:

1. The Genre of Architectural Fantasy
2. Threshold Landscapes in the work of Ursula K. Le Guin
3. The Limen Chronotope of the Victorian Haunted House Short Story
4. Cartographies of Paradise
5. Spacetime in Epic and Fantasy

As regards 3., a monthly, online seminar has been initiated to study the genre of the Victorian Haunted House Short Story. Its purpose will be to outline the specific threshold chronotope that, it is hypothesised, underlies such narratives, and to propose a model for their study. Anyone interested in taking part is welcome to write to manuel.n.aguirre@gmail.com for details.

3. TO-DO THINGS

Further talks in the *Transitions Seminar* are invited over the next few months. Prospective speakers are requested to pass their title, abstract and a preferred date and hour to the Newsletter's editor with sufficient anticipation. A selection of talks will be published in our growing series *The TRELLIS Papers*.

4. PUBLICATIONS RELEVANT TO LIMINALITY STUDIES

- Sally Bushell, James Butler, Duncan Hay, Rebecca Hutcheon and Alex Butterworth (2021). 'Chronotopic Cartography: Mapping Literary Time-Space,' in *Journal of Victorian Culture* 26:2, 310–325 doi: 10.1093/jvcult/vcab004

- Sally Bushell (2021). 'Chronotopic Cartographies: An Emerging (Processual) Method for Literary Mapping,' recorded presentation, 27 January 2021, https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/Chronotopic+CartographiesA+An+Emerging+%28Processual%29+Method+for+Literary+Mapping/1_qogihem0

- Anne Reff Pedersen (2009). 'Moving Away from Chronological Time: Introducing the Shadows of Time and Chronotopes as New Understandings of "Narrative Time",' in *Organization* 16:3, pp. 389-406, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Examples-of-chronotopes-and-part-chronotopes_tbl2_247747501

- Petra Eckhard (2011). *Chronotopes of the Uncanny: Time and Space in Postmodern New York Novels: Paul Auster's* City of Glass *and Toni Morrison's* Jazz. New York: Transcript Verlag.

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