

At The Margins: Liminality, Otherness, and Transgression across Texts and Media

Giuseppe Capalbo

(Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata, IT)

C. Bruna Mancini

(Università della Calabria, IT)

Elisabetta Marino

(Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata, IT)

According to Julian Wolfreys, transgression “is the very pulse that constitutes our identities, and we would have no sense of our own subjectivity were it not for a constant, if discontinuous negotiation with the transgressive otherness by which we are formed and informed. Identity must needs believe in its own stability for the conventions of transgression to apply” (Wolfreys 2008, 1). In other words, transgression becomes intelligible only once identity categories (e.g. class, disability, gender) are socially constructed as stable and clearly delimited. It is precisely against these perceived boundaries that the individual may experience the impulse to cross, disrupt, or inhabit the threshold between categories.

And yet, in her 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Judith Butler had already identified the critical operation that must follow from such a recognition: “What is the means by which we come to see this delimiting power, and what are the means by which we transform it?” (Butler 2006, xxiii). Once we recognise the codependency between cultural intelligibility and transgression, we must therefore take a step further and examine the way(s) such delimiting power is constructed and, possibly, questioned. Following Butler, in this stage it is pivotal to understand that these two



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movements take place within the same field of discursive practices, whether directly or symbolically, where the 'symbolic' should not be understood as a mere abstraction but as a mode of power that may be "more effective because it doesn't appear to be an exercise of power" (Mooney and Evans 2023, 16).

In this light, if language becomes what Nicoletta Vallorani has otherwise defined as a 'practice of signification' (cfr. Vallorani 2016, 36), it comes as no surprise that literature and culture offer fertile ground for investigating the dynamics of oppression and liberation. Taking its cue from the previous issues of *Margins/Mares/Margini*, which explored the multilayered concepts of 'margins' and 'marginalities', this issue focuses on the linguistic, literary, and cultural processes through which people are turned into 'liminal' and 'other' beings¹, as well as on the ways in which texts and media can both represent and challenge these phenomena.

In line with these premises, the issue opens with a set of theoretical reflections on liminality, deviance, and reading practices (Del Zoppo), before moving through a series of diachronically organised explorations of literary marginality: from King Arthur (Bria) to Shakespeare (Ciutacu), Middleton, and Rowley (Continisio), passing through Percy Bysshe Shelley (Luciano), Abdulrazak Gurnah (Brazzelli), and Pedro Lemebel (Barretta). These contributions show that processes of othering – and the responses they generate – are inherent to the very experience of literature and can be analysed from a variety of perspectives (e.g. ecocriticism, queer theory, postcolonial studies). The essays that follow are grouped thematically, shifting the focus from literary texts to media and audiovisual discourse (Magazzù, Ilkal, Imbri, Sileo), and then to performance and digital spaces (Ferrari, Cotoc and Radu, Capalbo).

¹ One might also recall Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), in which he exposes the physical and discursive practices through which the colonised – defined as 'the other man' – and the coloniser himself are turned into animals (cfr. Césaire 2000, 41).



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The reviews selected for publication further confirm the conceptual framework at the core of the essay section, moving from theory to practice across different historical moments and cultures. They engage with questions of geo-spatiality (Igneo), borders, boundaries, and frontiers (Perillo), while also addressing Southern feminism (Frandina) and queer bodies (Maio). The issue closes with Elisabetta Marino's interview with Susan Caperna Lloyd, an Italian American artist whose work occupies an interstitial space between literature and visual culture, text and photography.

What emerges from such a wide range of literary, linguistic, and cultural analyses is precisely the multiplicity that Julian Wolfreys evokes when he refers to the "various transgressive departures borne out of the singular structural manifestation of an otherwise 'combinative infinity'" (Wolfreys 2008, 12). The essays collected in this issue show that transgression does not follow a single trajectory, nor does it operate through one privileged medium, genre, or historical moment. Rather, it takes shape through a plurality of textual, visual, and performative practices that expose the apparent stability of social and cultural categories. In doing so, they recall the image of the 'network of roots' offered by Dean Atta in *Person Unlimited: An Ode to My Black Queer Body* (2024): "I contemplated how these trees might also be entangled underground, connected by a network of roots and mycorrhizal fungi in the soil, communicating and cooperating in ways humans fail to fathom" (Atta 2024, 247). Similarly, while pursuing distinct aims and employing different methodologies, the contributions gathered here remain coherent, invisibly connected by the subterranean networks of liminality, otherness, and transgression.

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Bio-bibliographical notes

Giuseppe Capalbo holds a Ph.D. in English Literature from the University of Rome Tor Vergata (Italy). In June 2022 he received a fellowship from the Warburg Institute (University of London, UK) to attend the course *Decoding the Renaissance*. He has conducted research on corporeality in modern and contemporary Anglophone fiction at the Bodleian Library (University of Oxford, UK) and presented at national and international conferences. His research interests include representations of the body, *fin-de-siècle* literature and culture, gender, queer, and disability studies.

Email address: capalbo@lettere.uniroma2.it

C. Bruna Mancini is Associate Professor of English Literature and Culture at the University of Calabria and Member of the Board of the Italian Association of English Studies. She is interested in Translation, Gender, and Spatial Studies. Her essays focus on the gothic, city and monstrosity, space/place and narration. She published *Sguardi su Londra. Immagini di una città mostruosa* (2005), *Spazi del Femminile* (2020), *Violenza di genere in "Orlando" di Virginia Woolf* (2023). She also co-edited (with David Punter) *Space(s) of the Fantastic. A 21st Century Manifesto* (Routledge, 2020). She is co-director of the series *Margini* for the Publishing House Mimesis and co-directs with Elisabetta Marino and Robert T. Tally Jr. the online journal *Margins/Marges/Margini*. She is a member of the Editorial Board of *Textus, English Studies in Italy*.

Email address: bruna.mancini@unical.it

Elisabetta Marino is Full Professor of English Literature at the University of Rome Tor Vergata. She is the author of four monographs: a volume on the figure of Tamerlane in British and American literature (2000); an introduction to British Bangladeshi literature (2005); a study on the relationship between Mary Shelley and Italy (2011); an analysis of the Romantic dramas on a mythological subject (2016). In 2006 she published the first Italian translation of poems by Maria Mazziotti Gillan. Between 2001 and 2023 she edited/co-edited fifteen collections of essays and a Special Forum of *Journal of Transnational American Studies* (2012). She co-edited two special issues of *De-Genere. Journal of Postcolonial, Literary and Gender Studies* (2022; 2026), and she acted as guest editor for a special issue of *Journal of American Studies of Turkey (JAST)* focused on Italian American material culture (released in 2023). She has translated *Parkwater* by Ellen Wood, for the first time in Italy.

Email address: marino@lettere.uniroma2.it