

Introduction

Subversion and transgression are by no means fixed concepts that remain unchanged in universal contexts. While in their basic understanding both are underpinned by the existence of boundaries, such as those dictated by law, religion or politics, they go against normative limitations and destabilize them either by explicit violation or implicit sabotage. The almost symbiotic relationship between prescribed standards and acts of transgression reveals tensions that underlie cultural conventions, social habits or economic assumptions, and brings to light the duality of the world and human nature. Interconnections between literature and transgression as well as subversion are deep-seated and, ironically, time-honoured through the acceptance of once anarchic or revolutionary writings into the canon. Positioned relationally, literary texts always refer to values and hierarchies while the language of literature, as an act of organized violence, undermines habitual thinking and human longing for permanence and stability. Subversive desires which work through theme, genre or language, challenge dominant discourses, oppose the tyranny of finite ideologies and redistribute power.

The third volume in this series explores, contests and celebrates these entanglements between literature and violations of power. Transgressive in its own right, it goes beyond the boundaries of genres, languages and cultural contexts, and offers analyses of diverse texts, from Middle English theatre to contemporary American fiction. In an anti-transgressive vein, however, the contributions are grouped in three categories unified by generic commonalities and are arranged thematically rather than chronologically.

Transgression and subversion in play and performance are focal points of **Part One, Reading Subversion and Transgression in Drama**. Essays collected in this section tease and tame issues of law and justice, geography and politics, as well as natural thought and science in dramatic writings spanning the period from the late Middle Ages to the early twenty first century. Gender as an important conceptual field of cultural, social and philosophical rebellion often underlies the texture of several contributions in this part.

Discursive determinants of gender roles are discussed in Estella Ciobanu's "Staging Transgression Stories in the Later Middle Ages: Divine Fiat, Truth and Justice in the N-Town Play of the Annunciation." Using theoretical perspectives of Michel Foucault, Lorna Weir, Diane Prosser and Michel de Certeau, Ciobanu investigates the transgressive nature of the Annunciation play in the N-Town cycle. She argues that the pageant exposes the working of the Christian truth regime and enhances the power of the authoritarian system by staging authorized divine transgression. Tomasz Wiącek's "Legal and Social Discourse of

Matrimony in Selected N-Town Cycle Plays” continues the theme of the legal, cultural and theological power of the Annunciation pageants. Wiącek views these plays as an attempt to solidify the legal status of marriage by transgressing, and then upholding, the sanctity of the union between Joseph and Mary, and stresses the exemplary nature of subversion that serves to reinforce Christian dogma.

Although placed in a different context – that of the pre-revolutionary Continent – law and order is also explored in Lucía Bodas Fernández’s analysis of Friedrich Schiller’s debut play, *The Robbers*. Her essay, “Freedom above the Law: Friedrich Schiller’s *Die Räuber*,” is particularly interested in the noble criminal who, by resisting the dominant system, exposes the oppressive nature of the enlightenment. Bodas Fernández uses Hammer and Hart’s Gadamerian literary hermeneutics to present the Schillerian critique of the ethics that challenges the autonomy of an individual.

In his “Geographic Transgression and Epic Theatre: The Subversiveness of the Pastoral Idyll in Edward Bond’s *Lear*,” Andreas Schardt counters claims that the pastoral has lost its appeal and postulates that it has become a subversive space which offers a perspective on the predicament of modern life. Schardt investigates those elements that encompass both the pastoral mode and the epic theatre in Bond’s *Lear*, arguing that the two enhance the subversive and transgressive nature of the play. Geographical dislocation that endeavours to overthrow cultural assumptions is also explored in Michał Lachman’s article, “Seeking out Strangeness: Tony Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul*.” Lachman reads the re-discovery of identity by Kushner’s characters as a sign of cultural transgression which is made doubly difficult by the obduracy of the Western mind-set. His search for the everyday and the ordinary discloses the power of the individual who battles – and, ostensibly, wins – with hegemonic discourses, narratives and ideas. In “The Silencing of Dissent: Harold Pinter’s Bleak Political Vision,” Paulina Mirowska demonstrates Pinter’s apparent lack of belief in any lasting and meaningful transpositions of power. She highlights inherent inequalities of power depicted by the dramatist and shows that Pinter’s humour, although theatrically effective, is by no means light as it uncovers the ever-present oppression of sociopolitical structures.

The duality of the physical world and the relativity of human contact are at the centre of Jadwiga Uchman’s “Quantum Mechanics and the Relativity of Human Identity: Tom Stoppard’s *Hapgood*.” Her analysis of Stoppard’s fascination with physics identifies contradictions and tensions in a world that is split and dichotomous in its basic principle, exposing the fluidity of human nature. Science, or more specifically mathematics, also has a special place in Tomasz Wiśniewski’s interrogation of Complicite’s 2007 production, “The Mathematics in a Dramatic Text – *A Disappearing Number* by Complicite.” Wiśniewski delves into correlations between mathematics and literature, and

postulates that the force that drives them both is that of the imagination. His discussion of the play-text reveals intersemiotic aspects of dramatic writings, highly important in Complicite's theatrical practice.

The final three essays in this section are thematically united by their interest in gender and the female experience. Transgressive acts perpetuated by the senses are the main subject of Monika Sosnowska's venture into the world of Elsinore, "Sensory Transgression: Literary Representations of Women's Sight and Hearing in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*." Sosnowska explores the imagery of visual and auditory stimuli in the drama, drawing a parallel between the sensory experience in the play and the textual coding of it. This correspondence reveals gender-based differences in the accessibility to the senses in the early modern period. Dagmara Krzyżaniak's "The Nature of Contemporary Catharsis in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats*..." interprets the audience's cathartic experience facilitated by late twentieth-century drama as a mechanism not unlike that encouraged in psychotherapy and aimed at instigating behavioural change. Based on Carr's play, Krzyżaniak underlines the affective power of contemporary theatre and articulates the need for a re-interpretation of the traditional understanding of the Aristotelian concept. An examination of conservative and revolutionary parody, "Gender/Genre Disruption in Bryony Lavery's *Her Aching Heart*," by Edyta Lorek-Jezińska closes Part One. Lorek-Jezińska considers the role of lesbian drama in reconfiguring the convention of romance and tests its capacity to formulate alternative dramaturgy. She reads binary oppositions, as represented in the play, as an endeavour to stage a woman-to-woman homoerotic bonding that breaks cultural stereotypes attached to same-sex relationships.

Part Two of the volume, **Reading Subversion and Transgression in Poetry**, addresses the transgressive power of verse forms. This section tries to defy fixed meanings in poetic creation and to come to terms with its open-endedness which embraces the multiplicity and depth of meaning. Rory McTurk's article, "Tolkien's *Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*: Creative Drama or Scholarly Exercise?" reads Tolkien's poem as dialogic eddic poetry composed of exchanges between fictional characters, thus resembling drama. McTurk scrutinizes similarities and differences in related verses in Faroese, Middle High German and Old Norse writings as part of his discussion of the textual strategies adopted by Tolkien in *The Legend*. He brings to the fore the conflict between Tolkien's scholarly desires and his creative drive, evident in the structure of the poem. Monika Kocot's "Transgressing the Normative in Edwin Morgan's 'Message Clear'" presents a close analysis of the poem, which she interprets through James Joyce's idea of verbivocovisuality. Kocot looks into the morphodynamics of Morgan's poem and speculates upon the Derridean concept of language seen as a philosophy of living that can be deconstructed and perceived as freeplay.

Part Three, Reading Subversion and Transgression in Prose, focuses on prose writings spanning the period from the late Middle Ages to the final years of the twentieth century. It looks into the texts that are transgressive through their content and through their form or genre in English and American literature, thus bridging the Old World and the New World.

Jacek Kowzan's "The Rite-of-Passage Structure in Medieval and Early Modern Visionary Accounts" examines the transformative experience of visiting the otherworld in pre-modern and early modern writings. Kowzan uses Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner's notion of the rite of passage to propose a reading of religious visions which he interprets as liminal occurrences. Analyzing their internal structure, Kowzan suggests that the transgressive experience of an individual serves a socially important function of consolidating the community. The main interest in Agnieszka Łowczanin's "Damsels and Demons: Transgressive Females from Clarissa to Carmilla" lies in eighteenth-century and gothic fictional heroines whose rebellious nature allows them to gain personal and economic freedom. Łowczanin follows the development of strong, transgressive women who begin to pose a threat to the oppressive regime of Victorian patriarchy. She also investigates the role of sexuality in undermining Victorian male dominance and respectability. In "The Discourse of Orientalism in C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*," Andrzej Wicher uses Edward Said's concept of the other to explore C. S. Lewis's attitude towards the cultures of the East, or, more specifically, the Middle East. Wicher tackles the representation of "things and people" Arabic and Jewish in *The Chronicles of Narnia* in an attempt to untangle the intricate texture of culturally determined stereotypes. Małgorzata Janik's "Subversive Form, Provocative Content and Truth at All Costs: Liberature of B. S. Johnson" provides a survey of literary works of B. S. Johnson. Janik applies the concept of liberature, total – liberated – literature, to discuss his prose writings and draws on the introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?* to give an overview of the development of Johnson's literary career.

Anna Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska's "Smilers, Defilers, Reekers and Leakers"—Dogs as Tools of Subversion and Transgression in Short Stories by Edgar A. Poe, Mark Twain and Ambrose Bierce" centres on the transgressive potential of three satirical texts. Featuring dogs as their main themes, the stories offer, as Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska observes, a commentary on the limits of subversion in Western culture. She argues that the combination of cynicism and idealism, although not always recognized by the authors' contemporaries, manages to engage twenty-first century readers, eager to negotiate the boundaries of their experience. "Great Expectations: Incest and Incompleteness in Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*," Mark Tardi's contribution, focuses on a novel that is transgressive through its violence and explicit sexual content. As Tardi

notes, the effectiveness of the subversive power of the text depends on the emotional energy of the reader, yet the novel's structural inevitabilities and lack of tonal variation undermine the social critique propounded by Acker. The article closing the volume, Katarzyna Więckowska's "Brief Interviews with Liminality: The Case of David Foster Wallace," offers a critical look at the threshold moment in the history of literature. Więckowska examines Wallace's writings as examples of texts that, while described as postmodern and metafictional, seek to overcome the limitations of their own techniques and devices. She unmasks Wallace's attempts to engage critically with the postmodern form and to identify layers of self-awareness underlying his creative work.

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