

Journeys across B/Orders in Canadian Studies

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International Conference

Marburg Centre for Canadian Studies

University of Marburg, Germany

“Borders—lines on a map. Things move across, people too.”
Atwood, *The Testaments* 368

“The experience of the journey is central to literature.
Any text is essentially a journey and a quest.
Roads are ridden or driven along by characters
which embark on journeys from here to there.
Travelling is the opposite of staying put.”
Badulescu

It has almost become a truism that the Covid19-Pandemic has thrown the notion of borders into greater relief once again. While borders between states were closed to people and traffic, the virus was able to transgress geographical and political borders as well as bodily borders, thus not only journeying across borders but also effecting a change in ordering systems and apparently stable orders. Such transgressions, which revealed the vulnerability of b/orders, present an interesting contrast to people’s inability to travel that ties in with the general idea that journeys appear as a dynamic movement, whereas b/orders seem to be stable constructs. In fact, journeys and borders, as well as systems of order, can be considered concepts that determine one another when we regard journeys across b/orders as transgressive movements that highlight the existence of physical as well as conceptual borders. So, while the concept of the border is often understood as a principle imposing and maintaining order, a matter of stability, Johan Schimanski and Stephan Wolfe insist on perceiving the border as “dynamic, a phenomenon constantly undergoing processes of both fixing and blurring” (2017). Moreover, journeys impact on the understanding/self-image of nation and individual, belief in liberal values, human rights, the other and the notion of belonging or the co-dependency between Global North/ South. Therefore, journeys across borders bring about unique narratives and questions.

Borders, as conceptual as well as highly visible lines that structure orders, realms and places, have always been at the heart of political, social or cultural endeavours and struggles. For example, only four years before the pandemic intervened in orders across the globe, borders and ideas of order

became highly visible in migrants' and refugees' attempts to reach places they hoped would provide them with safety from war, hunger, and violence and with a better life. The interplay of bodies and borders in migration or their reciprocal definition and determination highlight how movements produce meaning and raise awareness of material borders and bodies. Such movements raise the question on whether the body of the migrant de/stabilizes the b/order – a question that cannot be limited to geographical journeys but that also includes metaphorical ones (inward/ outward).

Moreover, the legacy of the drawing of borders and establishing ordering systems during colonial times has not vanished from political and cultural debates; a fact that also connects to issues of settlement and land appropriation in Canada, which relegated First Nations communities to specific spaces and thus marginalised them within European ordering systems. The 49th parallel, famously the world's longest undefended international boundary, which divides the USA from Canada, has always been highlighted not only as a political or geographical border, but also a border between systems. Both in recent history (think of the rather recent move to Canada by US-citizens after the election of Donald Trump) and in literature (Margaret Atwood's dystopian novels famously conceptualize Canada as a realm of hope) has this border gained fame. However, borders within Canada, e.g. cultural and linguistic borders and their interplay with order(s), or discourses as ordering principles as employed in and by the media, for instance, are also of interest in this regard and so are boundary lines of social conduct and morals. These became highly visible when, for example, photographs showed the young Justin Trudeau engaged in blackfacing before the election in the year 2019. Thus, even though Canada has internationally been considered a prime example of freedom and multiculturalism, it can serve as a perfect study case with regard to the fragility of b/orders due to its (partially violent) history, its three-partite structures (First Nations, the Anglo- and the Franco-Canadians), its diverse society, its metaphors (the North, garrison mentality, wilderness) and its rich cultural and literary landscape. All these examples allude to the fact that concepts of order and borders are, just like other human categorisations, dynamic and subject to continuous change.

The conference hence pursues an at least twofold objective: On the one hand, it is interested in an exploration of journeys and borders as well as orders (in the manifold sense of the term) and in the interplay of these concepts in Canadian literature, culture and society, for example. On the other hand, it seeks to explore what Canadian Studies is interested in, how it has developed, what challenges it has been met with, who and what is included or excluded – in short: what borders has it travelled across, what journeys has it undertaken in the last twenty years and what b/orders might it cross in the future?

We are interested in exploring complex but important questions from various viewpoints, such as:

- How can we conceptualize b/orders and journeys from different viewpoints? What tensions are evoked by and between these two terms/concepts? What is the relevance of such concepts for different areas of studies?
- How do (literary) texts engage in negotiations of diverse borders on levels of form and plot? How do such literary narratives tie in with other forms of narratives and of discourses?
- How do journeys across b/orders impact on notions of (self-)image and orders, how can we conceptualize and discuss reciprocal influences and diverse (e.g. spatial and temporal) dimensions of border crossings and what are their effects on social and cultural spheres?

- How do notions of order and chaos, of borders and boundaries figure in identity constructions across generations, nations, genders etc.? How do identities relate to b/orders and in what ways do these concepts tie in with identity constructions beyond binaries?
- To what extent can chaos be considered the opposite of order? Can chaos be considered a productive force as well or is it only conceptualized and employed as a threat to established orders in politics and society?
- Where and how did Canadian Studies emerge and where is it going? How did Canadian studies develop in North America, Europe and world-wide? Who and what is in-/excluded (subjects and object of research)? What challenges has it been met with?
- How have relationships between Canada and other countries (and the Commonwealth) developed? How does Canadian studies relate to postcolonial studies?

Taking these questions as possible points of departure, we invite abstracts for papers or proposals for whole panel on diverse topics, which may include, but are not limited to the following:

- b/orders and border crossings in Canadian literature and culture
- the border as metaphor, 'real' and imagined borders
- travel literature and the North
- Re-visiting literary genres and archetypes; the hero's journey
- Ontological boundaries, critical posthumanism and fiction
- Historical journeys and their contribution to the formation of knowledge(s), epistemology and agnotology
- Borderlands, frontier zones, transition zones, and the theme of waiting
- Local voices in border literature, poetry, art, performance
- First Nations and journeys across b/orders
- Appropriation and re-negotiation
- Necropolitics and Necroviolence: Border violence and notions of transgression
- Hierarchical and structural borders; "Natural" borders vs. constructed borders; spatial and temporal b/orders
- Borders and citizenship, identity, belonging, generationality
- Borders and ecology/biodiversity, ecocriticism and cultural ecology
- Refugees'/ immigrants' narratives
- Poetics of ordering space, spatiality and the border
- Borders within nations (states, lands reserved for Indigenous peoples, territories)
- Teaching border narratives, borders and boundaries in the EFL classroom

In line with the interdisciplinary orientation of the Marburg Centre for Canadian Studies, we invite interdisciplinary papers that deal with literature, culture, language, geography, and history, for example, and that employ innovative interdisciplinary approaches.

Please send abstracts for 20-min. talks (300 words max) or proposals for a whole panel (three 20-min. talks) and a short bionote (150 words) in either English or French to boller@anglistik.uni-siegen.de and to walaa.said@staff.uni-marburg.de by 15 January 2022. We also encourage early career scholars to send proposals for full talks or for poster presentations (10 - 15 min). Although we encourage and prefer personal meetings and thus attendance in Marburg, we are also looking into the possibilities for a hybrid format. So please specify if you consider a digital attendance.

The conference includes panel sessions, a round table discussion as well as keynote lectures and a reading by acclaimed author Larissa Lai. Confirmed speakers are Prof. Eleanor Ty (Wilfrid Laurier University) and Prof. Astrid Fellner (Saarland University).

Works Cited

Atwood, Margaret. *The Testaments*. Vintage, 2019

Bâdalescu, Dana. 2012. "Heterotopia, Liminality, Cyberspace as Marks of Contemporary Spatiality"
The Round Table. Partium Journal of English Studies.
[http://www.theroundtable.ro/Current/Cultural/Dana.Badulescu_Heterotopia,Liminality,Cyber
spaceas_Marks_of_Contemporary_Spatiality.pdf](http://www.theroundtable.ro/Current/Cultural/Dana.Badulescu_Heterotopia,Liminality,Cyberspaceas_Marks_of_Contemporary_Spatiality.pdf) [retrieved: 31/10/2016]

Schimanski, Johan, and Stephen Wolfe. *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*. Berghahn, 2017.