

## **Expanding the Border: Transgressing and Traversing Borderlands in Anglophone Media Through the Ages**

The world becomes understandable and classifiable to us through borders that indicate difference, be it political, social, cultural or geographical. While the current political and cultural trend tends towards weaponizing differences and fortifying borders, it is of utmost significance to conserve the notion of the threshold as multifaceted and broad. Rather than clearly marking stark differences, borderlands should be understood as contact zones to be interacted with and traversed. They are liminal places of leaving one area without crossing into another yet. The question arises if one has to move out of the borderland or can prevail in the state of inbetweenness and how those instances are performed. While borders are often used to demarcate and control, by traversing into a borderland they become fluid and allow us to question preexisting constructs in order to transgress them. Accordingly, rather than remaining static, “thresholds turn inward and become flexible; [...] they move, contract, expand, and overlap; and [...] they never stay put and can appear anytime and anywhere” (Calvo 283). How, then, can borderlands be conceptualized as variable spaces of transition? How are borderlands represented in Anglophone literature and culture and why do they still constitute productive frameworks in cultural creation?

Traversing into borderlands can include a physical movement of the body as in *Peter Pan*'s Neverland as a threshold between child- and adulthood or Hugo's tea room in TJ Klune's *Under the Whispering Door* as a borderland between life and death from which one inevitably has to advance. A transgression into borderlands can also occur in the mind as socio-political borders are traversed, for example through migration and identity navigation in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* or challenging gender constructs in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*.

Topics should focus on anglophone literature or media and may include but are not limited to:

- Transgressing Geographical Borders
- Political / Social / Cultural Transgressions
- Sci-Fi and Fantasy
- Medieval, Renaissance, Postcolonial and Contemporary Narratives
- Audio-Visual Transgressions of Borders

We welcome any unconventional interpretations of these guidelines. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the organizers.

The conference will take place on **July 31 and August 1, 2026**, at the **University of Bonn**. We cannot provide funding for travel arrangements or accommodation. Presentations should be 20–25 minutes in length. Please send your abstract (300–500 words) as a PDF file to [cschwall@uni-bonn.de](mailto:cschwall@uni-bonn.de) until April 30th including your full name and university. All proposals will be reviewed and the selected will be notified by mid-May.

This conference is organised by Elisabeth Brendes, Charlie Schwall and Tabea Wiegand from the Department of English, American and Celtic Studies at the University Bonn.

### **Works Cited**

Calvo, Ana M<sup>a</sup> Manzanás. “Borderlands.” *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Geographies*, edited by Neal Alexander and David Cooper, Routledge, 2025, pp. 282–91.