

## Preliminaries

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In Ancient Rome the *limes* designated a boundary line or frontier separating the imperial inside from the alien outside, the known and domestic from the unknown and foreign. It is to this political marker, with its ideological determinations, that we owe the term “limit” which this issue of *Word and Text* will set up in a two-way dialogue with what criticism is and does. Whether in literature (in novel uses of language and form) or in other arts more generally, experimental avant-garde creation always endeavours to push ever further the limits of expression, representation, and genericity, to name but these. Likewise, “good” criticism (from Greek *krinein*: to decide) should always seek and decide to renegotiate the limits of interpretation(s), concepts, categories, etc. and, ultimately, thought, even perhaps to the point of undecidability. But how far can it go without overstepping its limits and remit, and crossing over into an alien, inhospitable territory or discipline that could be identified by a different name? Similarly, to extrapolate Ezra Pound's “make it new” principle, according to which “literature is news that stays news”: is the experience - from Latin *experiri*: to try, put to the test; itself related to *peras*, the Greek antecedent of the Roman *limes* - of a redefined threshold or horizon (from Greek *oros*: boundary, limit) always a guarantee of aesthetic quality? But conversely, is the recognition or even imposition of limits, boundaries, demarcation lines, horizons, and suchlike, necessary to ground a critical act of interpretation? The special title *The Limits of Criticism / Critique of the Limits* intends to register these double binds, which the selected contributions have attempted to address from a range of literary-critical, linguistic and philosophical perspectives, across genres and ages, even national boundaries.

Not surprisingly, Derridean deconstruction, with its re-negotiations of the borderline, the parergon, the re-mark, the “law of genre”, etc. will play a strategic role in several essays, as will the more intangible liminalities of Maurice Blanchot's “space”, of literature but also of literary criticism and philosophy. Thus this special issue will look into transgressions between genres and genders (*genre*) in Brooke-Rose's experimental novel *Thru* (Grech), and propose a re-reading of one of Shakespeare's sonnets in step with the double (affirmative, negative) *pas* of Blanchot, via Derrida (Aquilina) - which will in turn be implicitly redeployed as a more choreographic step moving towards architectural spaces in Oțoiu's postmodern novel *Coaja lucrurilor* (Ionescu), and as a different way of (not) communicating “no” in professional context (Măda).

Yet no starting point seemed more appropriate, past this preliminary threshold, than a (re)creative, critical recasting of the epoch-making controversy which in the late 1970s set the agenda - and tone - for questions concerning the ethical relation between criticism or critique and the limits within which discussion or even (mis)reading could be conducted: Jacques Derrida's essay “Signature Event Context” in its 1977 translation into English, followed by John Searle's feisty “Reply”: “Reiterating the Differences” (1977), then by Derrida's own patient, yet sharp rejoinder “Limited Inc a b c . . .” in the same year. Shifting the tone from one of violent academic polemic to a distant but politically friendlier face-to-face, in keeping with Derrida's own wish in his “Afterword: Toward an

Ethic of Discussion” to Gerald Graff's questions some eleven years after the dispute, the joint editors of the issue will revisit some of the ethical stakes of criticism as they emerged then, prolonging but also deflating them through a restaging of some of the more incongruous details (Milesi), as well as offer a more general meditation on whether the (counter-)aporetic imagination will have durably shaped an abiding singularity in literary criticism, and on the endurance of the rhetoric of transgression and liminality in our supposedly “post-theoretical” climate (Callus).

Other essays in this “limited” gathering will foray into cognate theoretical territories, either explicitly or implicitly: the interactive limits between affirmation and judgment in Deleuze and Guattari's re-evaluation of Kantian critique (Tynan); a more “fashionable” twist on period debates - in the distant wake of John Barth's “The Literature of Replenishment” and Jean-François Lyotard's defining essays on the postmodern - in a Modernist inquiry into the critical validity of setting temporal limits between literary epochs, or “what's in a date?” (West); or else the cultural reconstruction of an ideological redrawing of disciplinary and institutional limits between critical trends (Schwab).

More justifiable than perfunctory on that occasion, the Miscellaneous or “Off-limits” section will bring up the rear with a single essay which, though not specifically addressing the thematic focus of the volume, will provide an example of a constructive dialogue between philosophy and literature in the critical reassessment of a literary work (Reichmann and Pellissari).