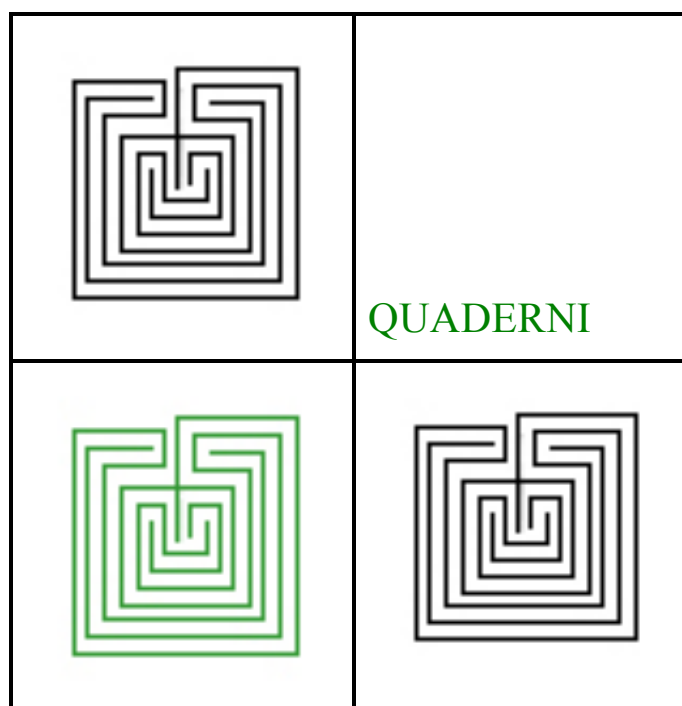


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# CONTACT ZONES

CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC AND LITERARY  
CONNECTIONS IN ENGLISH

edited by Maria Micaela Coppola,  
Francesca Di Blasio, Sabrina Francesconi



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## INTRODUCTION

This volume critically explores the contact zones between cultures, literatures and languages from theoretical, methodological and thematic perspectives. In «Arts of the Contact Zone», Mary Louise Pratt uses the concept of the contact zone «to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other».<sup>1</sup> Drawing from Pratt's seminal paper, we interpret contact zones as comprising transcultural and interdisciplinary spaces that reflect the multifarious and «liquid»<sup>2</sup> dynamics characterising contemporary societies.

This volume is made up of a network of factual, metaphorical, and intersemiotic contact zones and bridges. Putting together these two concepts, we aim to emphasise, on the one hand, the sites of contact and their borders and, on the other hand, the sites of connection and connecting movements. Susan Stanford Friedman's definition is consistent with this perspective:

Borders have a way of insisting on separation at the same time as they acknowledge connection. Like bridges. Bridges signify the possibility of passing over. They also mark the fact of separation and the distance that has to be crossed.<sup>3</sup>

Not only do we focus on the way in which texts, genres, languages, cultures, media, and disciplines relate to each other, but also on the multidirectional crossings and movements that connect them.

Ultimately, cultural, literary and linguistic contact zones lead to limitless processes involving the re-conceptualisation and re-

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<sup>1</sup> M.L. Pratt, *Arts of the Contact Zone*, «Profession», 91 (1991), pp. 33-40, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2000.

<sup>3</sup> S. Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1998, p. 3.



configuration of individual, social, and cultural events through the application of cross-disciplinary theories, methods, and tools.

This critical perspective guides the very structure of this collection, in its single contributions and as a whole. This same principle informed the *Cultures, Literatures, and Languages in the Contact Zones* seminar, held in May 2017 at the University of Trento, which inspired this volume. Scholars representing the cultural, literary, and linguistic branches of the Italian Association of English Studies (AIA) were invited to critically explore the contact zones in-between cultures, literatures and languages, and their border-crossing dynamics. The seminar and this volume form part of the same project, in which nationally and internationally experienced researchers have worked alongside Ph.D. students, for whom the AIA seminar was designed and tailored. We profoundly believe in the cultural and critical value of this inclusive experience, which allows us to constructively question the borders between research areas and levels of research experience.

The articulation of the following papers is consistent with the idea of transcultural and interdisciplinary contact zones: literary, cultural, and linguistic analyses are arranged following the dynamics of the border-crossing theoretical premises animating our approach.

In her dense and theoretically insightful opening essay, Carla Locatelli interrogates the concepts of ‘contact’ and ‘zones’ in relation to the epistemology of literature. Literature is seen as a privileged tool allowing for a complex understanding of reality, and as a «‘zone’ in which codes can be radically questioned and transformed» even at a posthuman horizon. Locatelli draws on Derrida, Levinas, Hayles, Deleuze, and Haraway in her exploration of poems by Filipino poet Gémimo Abad and Malay poet Fadzilah Amin to develop her idea of literature as «emphatic epistemology» and «world awareness».

In Stefano Evangelista's «Classical Fragments: The Geopolitics of Desire and Deracination in Nineteenth-Century English Literature», the classical fragment becomes a contact zone not only between past and present, but also «between realism and abstraction». In fact, it acts as a catalyst for our desire to know the past from a position of altered materiality, shaped by the process of 'ageing', thus fostering our imaginative figurations of the past itself. In Evangelista's view, the classical fragment «challenges the present by stretching its imaginative empathy». Drawing on Marguerite Yourcenar's consideration of the classical fragment in *Le Temps, ce grand sculpteur*, Evangelista traces an innovative line of continuity between the Romantic and late-Victorian *Weltanschauung*, leading from Keats's sonnet *On Seeing the Elgin Marbles* to both Walter Pater's essay on Winckelmann and Eugene Lee-Hamilton's poem *Waifs of Time*.

At the crossroads between the neurosciences and theoretical and applied linguistics, Gloria Cappelli's work tackles the role of lexical and pragmatic abilities in learners with dyslexia learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In light of inclusive FL teaching, the paper addresses the link between pragmatic inefficiency and poor vocabulary knowledge, the nature and quality of the organisation of dyslexic people's mental lexicons, and the relationship between pragmatic and lexical skills and reading comprehension.

Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* is a multifaceted text, which in turn narratively represents the multiple facets of human identity. Silvia Antosa addresses the complexity of Kay's novel and of subjectivity by exploring issues such as embodiment, fluidity, and intersectionality within a rigorous and broad theoretical framework. As Antosa claims, *Trumpet* questions normative socio-cultural discourses on identity, and draws attention both to the experience of disorientation or, in Sara Ahmed's words, the 'misalignment' of its transgender black protagonist, and to his/her 're-alignment' strategy.

Eleonora Ravizza's paper focuses on the Caribbean epic *Omeros* (1990), Derek Walcott's postmodern rewriting of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and on the sense of individual and collective displacement and dispossession produced by the experience of exile, forced migration, and diaspora. Ravizza follows the multiple voyages of Walcott's fictional 'I' – across European and American cities, back to his native island, and between the intra-diegetic and the extra-diegetic worlds – as he re-orientes his notion of home, nation and cultural memory, and as he re-positions himself (geographically, linguistically and culturally) within diasporic and hybrid contact zones.

Combining Systemic Functional grammar with the quantitative approach of Corpus Linguistics, Elena Manca's conducts a contrastive analysis of the linguistic and cultural perceptions of 'space' in two corpora of official tourist websites advertising Italy and Great Britain as tourist destinations. In order to explore the ways in which these two cultures express notions of space, the analysis focuses on the use of verb groups in the description of places and tourist attractions, such as parks, cities, and sea.

Michele Peroni's contribution investigates the genre of historical novels about World War I as a contact zone where different disciplines interact and have produced a lively debate informed by historical, literary and sociocultural issues. Focusing on the corpus of historical novels about World War I published between the 1990s and the years preceding the Centenary commemoration, this paper examines the role of literature in creating myths and transmitting the collective memory of wartime events, tackling the relationship between literature and historical discourse.

Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data, collected through semi-structured recorded interviews and a web-based questionnaire, Giuliana Regnoli's paper explores local and global ideologies of cultural contact surrounding accent perceptions in a transient multilingual community of Indian

university students located in Germany. The paper emphasises the transient aspect of the community in regard to the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ sociolinguistic conceptualisation and that attitudinal divergence in the form of dialect awareness within such communities may depend on in-group sociolinguistic affiliations or distance.

The focal point of Mariaconcetta Costantini’s essay is the Victorians’ stereotypical view of France, which was strengthened by most British writers with the exception of the ‘sensation school of fiction’. In the 1860s, sensation novelists such as Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Ellen Wood refused to celebrate English superiority by supporting anti-French prejudices. On the contrary, their works reflect the deep influence of the French cultural system from a biographical, intercultural and meta-literary point of view. Thus, Costantini argues, sensation novels delve into non-binary, ‘chiaroscuro’ Anglo-French contact zones.

Exploring the world of US Underground comix, Chiara Polli’s paper addresses Robert Crumb’s Whiteman’s adventures. Polli conducts both formal and content-based analyses, by integrating the methodological framework of multimodality to address the interaction of visual and verbal semiotic resources, and Greimas’ tool of semantic isotopies to inspect the tension between the protagonist and multifaceted forms of otherness.

Emanuel Stelzer’s «Transformative Touches in Tunis» examines the representation of Tunis as the multicultural hub of Northern African cities in two early-modern English ‘Turk’ plays: Robert Daborne’s *A Christian Turned Turk* (1609-1612) and Philip Massinger’s *The Renegado* (1624). Starting from the assumption that the representation of these cultures in contact is, of course, a Jacobean English construct, Stelzer investigates these plays from the point of view of the sense of touch, considered the most ‘bodily’ of the senses in the Renaissance. His analysis of «the sexual, mercantile, and ethno-religious exchanges involving acts of touching that are either staged or

evoked in the plays» sheds new light on the representation of otherness in early modern literature, culture, and society.

Starting with the notion of skin as the contact zone between the individual body and the outer world, Cristina Gamberi's paper focuses on the use of this corporeal metaphor in Doris Lessing's autobiographical writings, in particular in *Under My Skin*. On the one hand, Gamberi addresses the implications of colonial and postcolonial issues in Lessing's first volume of autobiographies and the way in which the writer manages the contradictions between private story and public history. On the other hand, Gamberi examines the relationship between female subjectivity and women's self-representation.

In Richard Brome's *A Jovial Crew* (1642), Cristina Paravano individuates and analyses the places that allow us to encounter and gain insight into the lives of beggars in seventeenth-century England. In particular, Paravano's paper throws light on Oldrents's shelter, seen as an intercultural, interlingual and metatheatrical contact zone, where alternative social relations, cultural differences, and enriching linguistic exchanges can be experienced, negotiated and investigated.

Addressing Italian L2 courses for refugees and asylum seekers, Carbonara and Taronna's paper seeks to demonstrate that productive ways of constructing progressive, holistic and engaged pedagogy are increasingly necessary. It focuses on the use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in the context of an Italian as a Foreign Language class and on the role that ELF may manifest either as a barrier or as a bridge, thus affecting the relationship between the Italian teacher and the migrant as a learner.

In order to reflect on the figure of the woman reader in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Greta Perletti's paper brings together Pratt's theory of intercultural contact zones and Mikhail Bakhtin's «zone of contact», in which «a struggle against various kinds and degrees of authority» is internalized at the subjective level. Within this theoretical framework, the

woman reader becomes the catalyst for different types of discourse, characterised by different degrees of authority: the physiological and moral discourse at the core of the culture of fashionable sensibility, the medical and philosophical language insisting on female pathology, and the literary discourse to be found in some of Jane Austen's novels. These ultimately challenge authoritative discourse as a form of dialogue and resistance that can trigger «the educational rather than pathological function of reading».

The opening text, by Carla Locatelli, is a tribute to Alessandro Serpieri, distinguished intellectual and prominent scholar. This volume is dedicated to his memory.

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SABRINA FRANCESCONI