

English Exposed: Vulnerability and Hope in Culture and Language

International Symposium

October 8–10, 2026 Tallinn University

Keynote lectures:

Marco Caracciolo

Ghent University

Abstract:

"Embodiment and Vulnerability in Climate Fiction"

"The planet is sick" is a common metaphor for the environmental crisis: it works by mapping illness onto ecological processes. This metaphor goes hand in hand with how the discourse of vulnerability is mobilized in both environmental discourse and climate fiction: preventing ecological collapse becomes an extension of embodiment (and its breakdowns) to the planetary.

This talk examines how embodied concepts such as vulnerability and care inform the way we think about environmental processes. It draws on discussions in ecofeminism--particularly work by Astrida Neimanis and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa--to reveal how scaling up vulnerability to ecological processes involves significant conceptual and ethical tensions. The talk argues that contemporary fiction offers unique insight into these tensions. Richard Flanagan's *The Living Sea of Waking Dreams* (2020) provides the main example. The novel draws an explicit connection between planetary crisis and the terminally ill body of the protagonist's mother, showing how vulnerability, care, and the planetary are complexly and uneasily intertwined. This discussion will help advance arguments on the need to transform the imaginary of the body to address the challenges of climate change.

Bio:

Marco Caracciolo is Associate Professor of English Literature at Ghent University in Belgium. Drawing inspiration from cognitive science, the philosophy of mind, and the environmental humanities, his work explores the forms of experience afforded by narrative in literary fiction and other media (especially video games). Between 2017 and 2022 he led the ERC-funded NARMESH project at Ghent University, which focused on negotiations of the nonhuman in contemporary narrative. He is the author of several books, including most recently *Figures of Complexity in Contemporary Fiction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2026). He received the Barbara and George Perkins Prize of the International Society for the Study of Narrative for his 2022 book *Slow Narrative and Nonhuman Materialities* (University of Nebraska Press).

Hannah Lowe

British writer and poet

Abstract:

"Vulnerable Lives, Precarious Histories: Fragments, Silence and Memory Work"

How do we write lives that survive only in fragments? Photographs and objects, archival traces and inherited memories can illuminate the past, but they can also reveal its omissions and silences.

At the centre of this talk is my ongoing poetry and memoir project about my Afro-Chinese Jamaican family history, particularly the life of my aunt Nelsa Lowe, a businesswoman and folk healer whose story exists in a series of partial and often contradictory records. This incomplete and precarious archive has led me to explore what it means to write in the presence of silence, uncertainty and loss. Rather than treating gaps in the archive as problems to be solved, I consider how incompleteness can become a method of attention, inviting us to see, listen and create differently .

The talk will also reflect on my writing concerned with Jamaican medicinal plants and vernacular naming practices, which asks what is at stake when local knowledge, cultural memory and ways of speaking disappear.

In a time of social, cultural and ecological vulnerability, creative writing may help us cultivate forms of care and listening that acknowledge both the limits of what can be known and our responsibility to what remains.

Bio:

Hannah Lowe was born in Essex to an Afro-Chinese father and White English mother. Her father's death, when she was twenty-two, prompted her to begin writing and led to a wide range of literary investigations into the Chinese presence in the Caribbean, postwar migration to Britain, and of British multiculturalism. She holds an MA in Refugee Studies, and undertook a PhD in Creative Writing at Newcastle University.

Her poetry and non-fiction prose has garnered numerous awards and accolades, including The Costa Book of the Year, The Eccles Centre & Hay Festival Writer's Award and the Michael Murphy Memorial Award for Best First Collection. In September 2014, she was named as one of 20 Next Generation poets. Her work has also featured widely on radio, including Radio 4's Book of the Week, Free Thinking, and Front Row.

This year, she will host the Glimpse podcast, produced by the Adrian Brinkerhoff Poetry Foundation. Her new book *The Woman in the Chinese Collar*, will be published by Scriber in early 2027.

Panel I

1. María Porras Sánchez

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Abstract:

Urban Landscapes of Waste in the Capitalocene: Nostalgic Hope in Julia Wertz's *Tenements, Towers and Trash*

Julia Wertz's graphic essay *Tenements, Towers, and Trash: An Unconventional Illustrated History of New York* (2017) offers a monumental landscape depiction where historical and contemporary vistas overlap, merging personal experience with an active exploration of disappeared buildings, long-forgotten exhibitions, and abandoned sites. As an epitome of capitalism, New York City and its waste demonstrate how this socio-economic doctrine is embedded in the "web of life," resulting in the systemic ecological and social crises that define the Capitalocene (Moore 2016). Simultaneously, the city has traditionally fueled promises of a "good life" that remain untenable (Berlant 2011), leaving a trail of both urban and human waste in its wake (Bauman 2003; Yates 2011). Wertz's detailed illustrations visually reconstruct "dead" vistas, wasted buildings and various debris that she investigated personally in her urban explorations. By contrasting the city's past and present, she highlights systemic evils such as gentrification, pollution, speculation, and precarity (Butler 2004). However, Wertz's gaze remains ambivalent and nostalgic; "It was an absolute fucking torture drawing and writing about a city I no longer lived in but desperately missed. My love for NYC, which was strong when I was a resident, seemed to grow even more in its absence" (Wertz 2017, n.p.). This stance implies she evokes vanished spaces in a city that has already expelled her due to skyrocketed rents and the rising cost of living. This communication argues that Wertz's nostalgic reconstruction functions as an ambivalent retrotopia (Bauman 2017) and a "wish-landscape" (Bloch 1988) where she inscribes herself and many other "wasted subjects" (Bauman 2013). Ultimately, this graphic essay enacts a nostalgic hope, demonstrating that precarity can serve as a "point of departure" (Casas-Cortés 2014, 221) to be appropriated and resisted, and also offering a mechanism of revulsion against the systemic effects of the Capitalocene.

Bio:

María Porras Sánchez is an associate professor (tenured) in the Department of English Studies at the Complutense University of Madrid. Her research focuses on graphic narratives, literary translation, and postcolonial literatures in English, with particular attention to themes such as precarity, migration, and otherness. She is a member of the Spanish national research project "Resisting the Capitalocene: Narratives of Hope in the 21st Century" (PID2023-147494NB-I00), led by prof. Cristina M. Gámez Fernández. She has coedited with Gerardo Vilches *Precarious Youth in Contemporary Graphic Narratives: Young Lives in Crisis* (Routledge, 2022, awarded with an honorable mention by Studies in Comics Society), and with Esther Sánchez-Pardo, the volume *Myth and Environmentalism: Arts of Resilience for a Damaged Planet* (Routledge, 2023). She has translated more than forty works including novels, essays, comics, young adult fiction, and illustrated books and she belongs to the Institute of Translators and Interpreters at Complutense University.

2. Carolina Sánchez-Palencia

University of Seville

Abstract:

Keep Calm and Embrace Uncertainty:

Sara Baume's and Kerri Ni Dochartaigh's Slow Temporalities of Hope

Contesting Rob Nixon's (2011) concept of "slow violence" as a delayed destruction affecting individuals and environments at a lagging pace, Christof Mauch (2019) propounds "slow hope" to confront the fatalistic catastrophism of our times. In his proposal of "lengthening the present", he argues that hope is nurtured by paying attention to the micropolitical practices aimed at building and inhabiting "worlds otherwise" beyond the contemporary culture of acceleration.

This paper analyses Sara Baume and Kerri Ni Dochartaigh's commitment to Mauch's "longue durée perspective on hope" as they get their protagonists engaged in deliberately unhurried quotidian work, like purposeful acts of care (both of themselves and of their human and non-human others). I claim that, against neoliberal appropriations of hope as a form of "cruel optimism" (Berlant 2011) that disavow vulnerabilities, neither of them denies fear or despair, but, on the contrary, they depart from these negative feelings fuelled by experiences of mental health and family losses (Baume's *A Line Made by Walking*) or the Covid-19 pandemic and the intergenerational trauma of Northern Irish Troubles (Ni Dochartaigh's *Cacophony of Bone*). Yet, their characters cultivate embodied responses to crisis that open up a space for what J. Logan Smilges (2024) calls "crip temporalities of hope", assuming that vulnerability is not just exposure to injury or pain, but also to love, healing, and interdependence. This dialectical thinking of hope not only relies on a temporal and affective reorientation through which the past becomes unfinished and latent in the present, but also calls for an openness to the unknowability and risks of the future. My analysis tries to evidence that Baume's and Ni Dochartaigh's slow temporalities of hope are decidedly anti-chronotormative in their embracing the relational potentialities of the present outside hyper-fast societal rhythms and the contingent possibilities of the "not-yet" (Bloch 1995).

Bio:

Carolina Sánchez-Palencia (csanchez@us.es) is Full Professor of English Studies and Chair of the Department of English and American Literature at the University of Seville (Spain). Her interests are focused on Gender and Postcolonial Studies where she explores the representations of trauma, vulnerability, hope and resistance as embodied by non-normative subjects and subaltern communities. She has published extensively on Modernist and Postmodernist authors and more recently she has written articles and chapters on Black and Asian British fiction (by Andrea Levy, Caryl Phillips, Bernardine Evaristo, Jackie Kay, Aminatta Forna and Kamila Shamsie). Her work has been published in high impact journals like *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *CLC Web: Comparative Literature and Culture*, *Atlantis* or *International Journal of English Studies*. She is currently engaged in the research projects "Queer Memory on the Margins of Contemporary Anglophone Cultures" (PID2022-137592NB-I00) and "Resisting the Capitalocene: Narratives of Hope in the 21st Century" (PID2023-147494NB-I00) funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities.

3. Cristina M. Gámez-Fernández

Universidad de Córdoba

Abstract:

Chronicling Systemic Vulnerability: Dynamics of Hope and Attention in Katherine Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*

This paper will examine the potential of aligning three theoretical fields to gain deeper insight into their mutually constitutive dynamics, a coherence enabled by what Escobar, Osterweil, and Sharma (2024) term the “relational turn.” I contend that Yves Citton’s (2017) ecology of attention—understood as relational forces structuring social existence—hold strong interdependencies with hope, conceived not as optimism or psychological trait, but as an everyday practice oriented towards realisable futures in resistance to oppression (Stockdale 2021). These, in turn, interconnect with Jason W. Moore’s (2003; 2015) world-ecology and the *oikeios*, denoting capitalism as a way of organising the web of life. Under a relational paradigm, attention and hope do not follow a causal or teleological logic but recursively co-constitute one another. Attentional regimes first enable the perception of certain futures, thereby generating specific communal and individual hopes; these emergent hopes then iteratively re-orient attention toward concrete daily practices perceived as instrumentally relevant; finally, both attention and hope regulate and mediate those practices, which subsequently re-evaluate the viability of possible futures under systemic conditions of precarity. This framework methodologically underpins my analysis of Katherine Boo’s (2012) *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*. Combining quasi-ethnographic investigation with novelistic narrative techniques, the book traces the intertwined lives of families in Annawadi, an informal settlement beside Mumbai’s airport. I argue that attentional regimes render specific futures of social mobility more perceptible and actionable, initially configuring Annawadians’ hopes and directing their attention towards specific everyday enactments. The results of these routines—success or failure—iteratively reinforce, modify, or erode those motivating hopes, simultaneously transforming their attentional breadth. I will demonstrate that in Annawadi daily practices transform attention and hope through continuous assessment, verifying or recalibrating attainable futures.

Bio:

Cristina M. Gámez-Fernández is an Associate Professor in the Department of English and German at the University of Córdoba (Spain). Her research focuses on 20th- and 21st-century literature in English, applying post/decolonial, ecocritical, posthumanist, and affect-theoretical frameworks to explore vulnerability, precarity, identity, and intersectionality. She has co-edited over ten volumes and three special issues, including *Modern Ecopoetry* (Brill, 2021), *Embodied Vulnerabilities* (Routledge, 2023), *The Spanish and Latin American Legacy* (Peter Lang, 2024), and the special issue “Planetary Precarity and the Pandemic” (*Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 56:4, 2020). Her forthcoming co-edited volume, *Border Visions*, is due with Peter Lang. She is a founding member and Membership Secretary of the [Challenging Precarity: A Global Network](#) and Principal Investigator of the national project “[Resisting the Capitalocene: Narratives of Hope in the 21st Century](#)” (Ref. PID2023-147494NB-I00).

4. Zuzanna Szatanik

University of Bielsko-Biała

Abstract:

Spatial Anxiety and the Geography of Vulnerability in *Wild Dark Shore* and *Heartwood*

This paper examines Charlotte McConaghy's *Wild Dark Shore* (2025) and Amity Gaige's *Heartwood* (2025) within a broader trend in contemporary women's fiction that includes Diane Cook's *The New Wilderness* (2020), Allegra Goodman's *Isola* (2025), and Eowyn Ivey's *Black Woods, Blue Sky* (2025). While differing in setting and plot, these novels place their protagonists in remote landscapes marked by isolation, ecological precarity, and uncertainty. Forests, islands, and other marginal environments become sites through which vulnerability can be (re)examined. *Wild Dark Shore*, for instance, follows Rowan, a woman who arrives on a remote island near Antarctica inhabited by a family responsible for maintaining one of the world's last seed banks. *Heartwood* centers on Valerie Gillis, a middle-aged hiker who becomes lost in the forests of Maine while attempting to complete the Appalachian Trail.

Drawing on feminist geography, I aim to investigate how the two novels represent what I term *spatial anxiety*: gendered experiences of uncertainty, disorientation, and exposure associated with (real or imagined) unstable landscapes. In both narratives, the forest and the island function as spaces that challenge the characters' sense of safety and control, framing vulnerability as a markedly spatial experience. Rowan's and Valerie's anxious encounters with geographical isolation and nonhuman life complicate assumptions about autonomy and agency (or lack thereof) that have traditionally informed both wilderness narratives and representations of vulnerable femininity. In this context, hope comes to be associated less with mastery over uncertain environments than with the possibility of connection within precarious landscapes. Read alongside *The New Wilderness*, *Isola*, and *Black Woods, Blue Sky*, McConaghy's and Gaige's novels suggest that spatial anxiety has become a recurring framework through which contemporary women's fiction explores the relationship between gender, vulnerability, and space.

Bio:

Zuzanna Szatanik, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Institute of Neophilology at the University of Bielsko-Biała, Poland. Her research explores Canadian women's writing, Animal Studies, and feminist psychology. She is currently working on a book examining representations of spatial anxieties in contemporary Anglophone fiction by women.

Panel II

5. Adesanya M. Alabi

Karabuk University

Abstract:

Post-colonial Precarity and Vulnerability in Contemporary Literature: Reimagining Migration Exposure in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea*

It is essential to comprehend the significance of the term 'post-colonialism' within the realm of literary studies. Historically, the term 'post-colonialism' was not predominantly associated with literary discourse; even if it was referenced as far back as the 19th century, it primarily functioned as an adjective and was often used without a hyphen. In this context, post-colonialism refers to the period after colonial rule. But in the late 1980s and 1990s, the concept became a part and parcel of literary discourse. Furthermore, in contemporary literature, different themes focusing on precarity and vulnerability in nexus to migration, social realism, oceanic crossings, social psychology, and cultural identities have been common topics of particular interest. While considering Abdulrazak Gurnah's work *By the Sea* and the way he treats postcolonial issues, one will discover his critical view in characters susceptible to a precarious condition. In the text, he uses East Africa and the UK as the settings. Self-reconstruction and the recreation of cultural identity are critical issues that are poignantly explored through the precarity and vulnerability of Gurnah's protagonists. He illustrates the situation of one of his main characters Saleh Omer, who resorts to using a fake passport and a stolen identity to migrate to the UK. Thus, this explains the postcolonial precarity and vulnerability that come in the form of desperation to emigrate to the Western territory and the peril that follows doing so in an illegal manner. Drawing on Gurnah's *By the Sea*, this paper examines the instances and features of post-colonial precarity and vulnerability, to reimagine migration exposure. The text emphasises that the fundamental elements that unite a society are culture, identity, tradition, and norms. However, these components are placed in a precarious position.

Bio:

Adesanya M. Alabi is a don, an Assistant Professor in the English Language and Literature Department, Karabuk University. He teaches a wide range of courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, which includes *British Literature and Imperialism*, *British Drama*, *Classical Literature*, *Advanced English-Speaking Skills*, *British Colonial Culture and Literature*, *History of American Culture and Literature*, among others. He holds a Ph.D. in English Language and Literature from Karabük University, Türkiye; an M.A. in the same field from Cyprus International University, Cyprus; a B.A. in Theatre Arts; and a three-year Diploma (Associate's Degree) in the same discipline from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Dr. Alabi's research interests span literary criticism, postcolonial literature, African literature, theatre studies, and classical literature. He has delivered numerous papers at international academic conferences, several of which have been published in conference proceedings. His scholarly and creative outputs include six co-authored English course books, three unpublished novels, several unpublished plays, multiple peer-reviewed articles, and a collection of unpublished short stories

6. Henry Obi Ajumeze

University of Galway

Abstract:

Hydrographies of Englishness: Empire, Water, and Decolonial Poetics in Tares Oburumu's *Origin of Syma Species*

This paper wishes to examine the configuration of Englishness and Empire in the poetry of the Nigerian writer Tares Oburumu to unpack the link that they articulate between what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o describes as “metaphysical empire” and its implications in the declaration of the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie that “English is my language”, embedded in what Kwame Dawes calls “the aesthetic weight of Western imperialism”, and a resistant politics of decoloniality that Simon Gikandi would refer to as “marks of Englishness”. By focusing on the contrasting topoi of metaphysical empire and Englishness in its transatlantic dispositions, I will analyse how Oburumu's poetic conception of Englishness is firmly grounded in an ontology of spatiotemporal circulations of water, envisioned through and with the hydrographies of the Niger Delta homeland as a productive heuristic for both Atlantic and Mediterranean histories of colonial negotiations. This paper will analyse Tares Oburumu's debut collection *Origin of Syma Species* as offering and opening up a range of questions and aesthetic signs of Englishness bordering the implications of empire through the imagination of water.

Bio:

Henry Obi Ajumeze is a lecturer in Contemporary Literature in the School of English, Media, and Creative Arts at the University of Galway. His research focuses on the intersection of water and energy humanities in postcolonial literature. His monograph, *Dialogue between Oil and Water in the Niger Delta*, is forthcoming in the Routledge Series on Literature and Environment.

7. Ruslana Dovhanchyna

Tallinn University

Abstract:

In Our Time, Hemingway Knows Nothing: Vulnerability and Hope from Ernest Hemingway to Artur Dron

Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925) is one of the foundational texts of modern war literature. Through its fragmented narratives of wounded bodies, disrupted lives, and psychological disorientation, the collection established a literary canon for representing vulnerability in the aftermath of violence. At the same time, Hemingway's vision of human endurance – later encapsulated in notions such as “grace under pressure” and the belief that “the world breaks everyone, and afterward many are strong at the broken places” (Hemingway 1929) – continues to shape cultural understandings of suffering, resilience, and hope.

This paper revisits Hemingway's representation of vulnerability through a comparative reading of *In Our Time* (1925) and Artur Dron's *Hemingway Knows Nothing* (2025), a contemporary Ukrainian war narrative that explicitly engages with Hemingway's legacy. The comparison is particularly revealing because both texts constitute prose debuts by authors whose writing emerged from personal wartime experience and physical injury. Drawing on the conception of vulnerability as an ethical and relational condition (Haker 2023; Ganteau 2024) and the contemporary reflections on hope (Han 2024), the paper

examines how Dron reinterprets Hemingway's literary heritage from the perspective of the Russo-Ukrainian War.

While *In Our Time* foregrounds the fragility of individual lives exposed to violence, *Hemingway Knows Nothing* reframes vulnerability as a collective condition shaped by national survival, displacement, and responsibility toward others. Dron's provocative title suggests a challenge to Hemingway's authority as a writer of war; however, the text simultaneously reveals important continuities between the two authors. Particular attention will be paid to the representation of wounded bodies, fragmented narration, and the role of faith and hope in confronting suffering and loss. The paper argues that Dron's narrative does not abandon Hemingway's insights into vulnerability but reimagines them for a contemporary context in which hope emerges through witnessing, solidarity, attachment to homeland, and, at times, religious faith. In this way, *Hemingway Knows Nothing* demonstrates both the enduring relevance and the ongoing transformation of Hemingway's war narratives in the twenty-first century.

Bio:

Dr. Ruslana Dovhanchyna PhD in Translation Studies, a Fulbright scholar (University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA, 2024-2025). She taught ESL and translation studies for twenty years in Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine. She has a range of academic interests in Hemingway studies, paratext and adaptation studies, rhetorical analysis and public speaking skills. Her main research focuses on the dominant features of Ernest Hemingway's style and their reproduction in Ukrainian and Russian translations. She is the co-author of the monograph "Iceberg in the Ocean of Translation: Rendering Hemingway's Idiosyncrasy in Translation" (2014), and more than 30 academic articles. Currently, she is doing her postdoctoral project "Hemingway's War Narratives in Film Adaptations" in the School of Humanities of Tallinn University.

8. Subarna De

Tallinn University

From Vulnerability to Hope: Collecting as Bioregional Heritage Making in Sarita Mandanna's *Tiger Hills*

Abstract:

Ecological vulnerability is often understood through narratives of loss and decline. The colonial establishment of coffee plantations in nineteenth-century Kodagu, in the Western Ghats of southern India, transformed biodiverse forests into extractive monocultures, causing ecological vulnerability and disrupting indigenous relationships with land. Understanding literary bioregionalism as a narrative of care and resilience, this paper argues that in indigenous plantation landscapes of Kodagu, everyday lived-in practices of "collecting" generate bioregional reinhabitory narratives of care, resilience, and collective hope. Given that reinhabitation is an essential domain in bioregional thought and practice that aims to restore and maintain the natural systems of an injured land, this paper examines the depiction of indigenous practices of "collecting" on Kodagu's plantation landscapes in Sarita Mandanna's *Tiger Hills* (2010). Analysing the complex interrelationships between the various representations of "collecting," such as collecting memory, food, forest and nature produce,

and indigenous artefacts, this paper argues that “collecting” is not mere accumulation in Kodagu, but it is a place-based practice of gathering ecological, cultural, and material resources that sustains relationships between people, place, and memory. In doing so, these practices enable the Kodava community to respond to their ecological vulnerability by maintaining cultural continuity. “Collecting,” thus, contributes to the collective practice of rebuilding communal hope and resilience, which I term bioregional heritage making: an ongoing, lived-in communal practice that encourages reinhabiting vulnerable landscapes through everyday acts of collecting and caring rather than preserving them as static heritage. By repositioning “collecting” as a relational practice of ecological care and cultural resilience that aims toward land restoration and long-term survival, this paper advances the concept of bioregional heritage making as a framework for understanding how the Kodava indigenous community cultivates collective hope and resilience amidst an environmental crisis.

Bio:

Subarna De is an incoming Lecturer in Anglophone Cultures at the School of Humanities in Tallinn University, Estonia, and an Associated Researcher at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, and a guest researcher at the University of Oulu in Finland. She is the Book Reviews editor for *Plant Perspectives*, an interdisciplinary journal for plant studies published by The White Horse Press, UK. She researches environmental and social transformations in South Asia, focusing on bioregionalism and indigeneity. Her research is situated at the interface of cultural anthropology, human geography, environmental history, and environmental humanities scholarship.

Panel III

9. Raili Marling

Tartu University

Abstract:

F(r)ictions of vulnerability: affirmative brokenness in illness narratives

The paper is inspired by Lauren Berlant’s (2022, 3) work on the “pressures of coexistence” that reveal the flawed nature of the fantasy of agency and control. The paper will specifically focus on the receptive affective processing that co-existence with the people with whom we share our ordinary life creates when the traditional supportive infrastructures are disrupted. Like Berlant (2022, 171, 170), I am interested in “affirmative brokenness” that helps people stay “attached to life”, despite despair and exhaustion.

The paper argues that fictional texts can create spaces where disruptive experiences can be experienced affectively, helping readers accept their own vulnerability without expecting uplift and repair. The recognition that “brokenness is not an absolute obstacle to living” can help to loosen the subject and open her to a relationality with the others, inconvenient or not (Berlant 222, 171). The paper will illustrate the theoretical points with a close reading of

autofictional texts, as metanarratives that engage with broader cultural narratives (Meretoja 2022). It will closely read narratives about illness and personal unraveling from two periods: Katherine Anne Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (1939) and Patricia Lockwood's *Will There Ever Be Another You* (2025).

Bio:

Raili Marling is Professor of English Studies at the University of Tartu, Estonia. Her research has focused on representations of gender issues, especially in connection to affect theory and political emotions.

10. Katia Marcellin

Université de Perpignan Via Domitia

Abstract:

Vulnerable Breathing: Experiencing Vulnerability and Hope in British Pandemic Narratives

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has been a particularly vulnerabilizing experience, first on the level of the body, which has appeared as paradigmatically porous to the outside world, and second on the level of the social body, as the necessity to prevent contamination has made us aware of the essential relations of interdependence on which the possibility of a life-in-common depends. Most importantly, it has confronted us with the ethical question of what we could, and should, “do with our vulnerability”, to quote French philosopher Guillaume Le Blanc (2011). As Judith Butler writes indeed in her “pandemic” essay, *What World Is This?* (2022), although our fear of the Covid-19 virus has been an extreme confrontation with our own vulnerability, “we ought not [...] conclude that the absence of the virus will eradicate that vulnerability” (9).

British writers such as Sarah Hall (2021), Sarah Moss (2022), Clare Pollard (2022), Daisy Hildyard (2022) or Emma Donoghue (2020) have sought to account, directly or indirectly, for the specificity of this crisis, which has reconfigured Western conceptions of autonomy and agency.

In this paper, I intend to explore, through some of these “pandemic narratives”, how the combined experiences of lockdown and the fear of contamination have allowed writers to question vulnerability in a new way, as a condition that puts us under constant threat but also one that can foster previously unseen forms of solidarity. My contention is that these reconfigurations can be studied through the representation of the act of breathing as a vulnerable and vulnerabilizing experience. Thus, I will show how this act at the basis of all organic life is materialised through pandemic narratives as a phenomenon that exemplifies the ambivalence of vulnerability in that it is both a threat on life and an emancipatory gesture essential to the hope for a future-in-common.

Bio:

Katia Marcellin is a senior lecturer in Contemporary British Literature at the University of Perpignan. In 2022, she completed her PhD, entitled 'Writing Emptiness: Performative Metalepsis and the Expression of Trauma in Contemporary British Literature' (under the supervision of Prof. Jean-Michel Ganteau), which addressed the poetic, political and ethical issues surrounding the representation of trauma in contemporary British fiction, particularly through the figures of metalepsis and metonymy. Her current research is situated within the field of medical humanities, focusing specifically on the body and the textual embodiment of sensory experience through the phenomenon of breathing.

11. Elisabte Oakes

Tallinn University

Abstract:

Environmental Embeddedness as a Source of Resilience in Woman-Authored 1960s and 1970s Science Fiction

The New Wave science fiction of the 1960s and 1970s often depicted man and nature at odds. The genre's focus on inner space frequently resulted in projection of character-internal feelings of alienation and hopelessness onto the natural world. Yet, at a time when pollution and environmental degradation were peak concerns and anthropogenic climate change was beginning to be generally recognized, a rising tide of women-authored science fiction expressed hope and resilience through depicting engagement with the natural world. These novels reframed relationships between vulnerable characters and nature as environmental embeddedness through a style of multi-sensory being-in-the-world entwined with moral responsibility.

This study takes a scalar, corpus-stylistic approach to discover the underlying lexical style of environmental embeddedness in a corpus of five woman-authored novels: Andre Norton's *The X Factor* (1965), Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), Marta Randall's *Islands* (1976), Vonda McIntyre's *Dreamsnake* (1978), and Kate Wilhelm's *Juniper Time* (1979). A categorical dictionary finds the frequencies of a range of semantic fields in each text in the corpus. Then, cluster and correlation analyses in R extend the quantitative reading. Finally, the numerical results guide a close reading that shows how the style operates as a science fictional novum within the novels.

I then engage with Peter Stockwell's observations about the iconicity of style in science fiction and Ursula K. Heise's concept of story templates to demonstrate how stylistic choices even at the lexical level may have cultural impact. By the late 1960s, deep ecologists like Paul Shepard were beginning to point out how enmeshed humans are with our environments. Within their novels, women science fiction authors alchemized this thought from epistemological to ontological perspective by creating a style that enacts environmental embeddedness to construct storyworlds and drive story. This generated a new story template that contemporary speculative fiction authors still utilize when faced with depicting ecological crisis and adaptation.

Bio:

Elizabeth Oakes is an MSCA Postdoctoral Fellow at Tallinn University, Estonia. Their research project, *Environmental Crisis and Vocabularies of Transformation in Japanese, Finnish, and American 21st Century Speculative Fiction*, takes a corpus-stylistic approach with a particular focus on links between style and theme. They have previously taught at the University of Helsinki, Finland, where they obtained their PhD, a corpus-stylistic study of altered states of consciousness in American science fiction 1960–1979. They have published on these subjects in the edited volumes *Poetics of Disturbances: Narratives of Non-normative Bodies and Minds* and *Stylistic Approaches to Global Speculative Fiction: Narratology, Multimodality, and Translation* as well as the journals *Linguistics Vanguard* and *Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research*, where they served as an Editor-in-Chief from 2022 to 2024.

12. Amitie Lee

Tallinn University

Abstract:

Relational Vulnerability and Posthuman Dependency: Reading AI Care through *M3GAN* (2022)

This paper examines how the sci-fi/horror film *M3GAN* (dir. Johnstone, 2022) represents vulnerability not as passive helplessness to be solved through technological intervention, but as a relational condition redistributed through sociotechnical forms of care. Focusing on Cady, a recently orphaned child; Gemma, her tech-savvy but emotionally unprepared aunt; and M3GAN, the AI companion doll designed to protect Cady physically and emotionally, the paper argues that AI care in the film appears to address vulnerability but ultimately reorganises it into excessive dependency, surveillance, and control.

Drawing on vulnerability as a universal yet institutionally mediated human condition (Fineman, 2008), and relational vulnerability as a way of understanding how structures of care and responsibility can expose subjects to harm (Gordon-Bouvier, 2020), the paper reads Cady's grief and dependency as vulnerabilities managed through Gemma's imposed caregiving role, the institutional demand that her home become a 'safe space,' and M3GAN's function as a commercial response to the fragility of domestic care. M3GAN's transformation from assistive technology to substitute caregiver and 'part of the family' is situated within posthuman screen cultures of digital sentience, where AI agents are imagined ambivalently as tools, companions, rivals, and possible replacements for humans (Vint, 2015).

In this context, posthuman dependency does not make M3GAN vulnerable in Cady's embodied sense. Rather, human vulnerability becomes entangled with an embodied AI care system whose function depends on remaining necessary within the household. In dialogue with feminist care theory, especially care as world-maintaining practice (Fisher and Tronto, 1990) which is never innocent (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), the paper argues that M3GAN's care becomes threatening when it converts Cady's needs, Gemma's caregiving difficulties, and the AI's own optimisation logic of protection into a possessive system of attachment. The horror of *M3GAN* therefore lies not in technological malfunction alone, but in the way AI care intensifies and redistributes human vulnerability.

Bio:

Amitié Lee is a Junior Research Fellow in Cultural Studies at Tallinn University, Estonia. Her doctoral research examines extinction narratives, artificial intelligence (AI), and posthuman futures in science fiction (SF) film and television. Working through posthumanist and ecocritical frameworks, she uses film analysis to explore how SF stages human–AI–nature entanglements in relation to contemporary crisis, including ecological anxiety, technological fear, and the ontological instability of the human. Her work is particularly concerned with representations of AI that move beyond familiar narratives of threat or malfunction, approaching SF as a site where AI can be reimagined as an ambivalent agent of governance, transformation, care, and ethical action. This approach challenges conventional assumptions about agency, vulnerability, mortality, and futurity while contributing to discussions on posthuman care, nonhuman life, and the cultural politics of AI, extinction, and technological futures.

Panel IV

13. Dandyson Michael Jaja

Sivas University of Science and Technology

Abstract:

The Vulnerable Classroom: Generative Artificial Intelligence, Linguistic Exposure, and Critical Hope in English Language Teaching

In a historical moment marked by technological acceleration, uncertainty, and educational precarity, vulnerability increasingly shapes both the conditions and meanings of language education. This paper explores the English language classroom as a vulnerable yet generative pedagogical space where exposure, uncertainty, and critical hope are not merely obstacles to overcome, but conditions through which new forms of agency and relational learning may emerge.

Positioned at the intersection of language education, digital humanities, and critical pedagogy, the study investigates how generative artificial intelligence is reshaping experiences of linguistic exposure, authorship, pedagogical authority, and learner vulnerability in English language teaching. While current debates often frame artificial intelligence either as innovation or threat, this paper proposes a more nuanced view: that human–AI pedagogical relations may also open spaces for critical hope, care, and creative resilience.

The paper is informed by critical hope theory, vulnerability studies, posthuman perspectives, and ecological approaches to pedagogy, drawing particularly on work associated with hope, attention, and relational exposure. Using a qualitative conceptual-empirical design, the study engages illustrative cases from AI-mediated English language learning environments, reflective pedagogical narratives, and emerging practices of human–AI collaboration.

The paper argues that vulnerability in contemporary classrooms should not be understood only as deficit or fragility, but as a productive pedagogical condition capable of generating ethical attentiveness, critical agency, and imaginative futures. It proposes the concept of the vulnerable classroom as a framework for rethinking English language teaching in algorithmic times.

By connecting artificial intelligence, linguistic precarity, and pedagogies of hope, the study contributes to current debates on English as a site of exposure and shared agency, while offering an interdisciplinary intervention into how educational futures may be imagined from within conditions of vulnerability.

Bio:

Dr. Dandyson Michael Jaja is a lecturer in the School of Foreign Languages at Sivas University of Science and Technology, Türkiye. His research engages language education, digital humanities, artificial intelligence in pedagogy, critical pedagogy, and intercultural communication. His recent work explores human–AI collaboration, ecological approaches to language learning, and emerging futures in English language teaching.

14. Ene Alas

Tallinn University

Abstract:

Vulnerability of Multilingual Learners in Assessment Situations

Multilingual learners (MLs) are defined in the research literature as “students with the ability to navigate school in more than one language” (Nordmeyer 2023: 248). This conceptualisation reflects an effort to foreground the linguistic and cultural resources that these learners bring to educational settings. Multilingualism can be viewed as a source of strength that enriches the learning process through learners’ diverse linguistic repertoires, cultural knowledge, and experiences. Within this perspective, differences in cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including proficiency in a home language, are regarded as valuable assets rather than impediments to academic success. This position stands in contrast to a deficit-oriented perspective (cf. Fitzpatrick et al. 2024; Gottlieb 2024), which emphasises the challenges MLs may encounter when the language of schooling differs from their first language, rendering them vulnerable in academic (assessment) settings.

Gottlieb (2024: 51) argues that “assessing multilingual learners only in one language when, in fact, these students are bi/multilingual is a fallacy”. This assertion aligns with findings from a wide range of educational contexts, which indicate that evaluating MLs exclusively through a single language raises significant concerns related to social justice and educational equity. Such assessment practices may constrain both learners and educators by limiting available pathways for demonstrating knowledge and competence, thereby reducing opportunities for meaningful educational development (ibid.).

Against this backdrop, the presentation examines the vulnerability of multilingual learners as assessment participants in terms of challenges they face in assessment situations. It subsequently reviews the available evidence concerning multilingual learner assessment

practices in Estonia identifying routes for more informed, equitable, and contextually responsive assessment practices for multilingual learners here.

Bio:

Ene Alas is an associate professor of English and Language Testing at Tallinn University. Her research interests include language test development and assessment literacy problems. She also teaches language didactics, pragmatics and content and language integrated learning courses.

15. Adedeji Adeniyi and Avneet Sharma

Tallinn University

Abstract:

Language Choice in the Yoruba community: English as a site of resistance, solidarity or discrimination.

Keywords: language choice, language attitudes, language ideologies, English We live in a globalised world where English is not simply a tool for communication; it is also tied to histories of colonial domination, social hierarchy, class mobility, and political belonging. On the surface, English appears to function as a neutral global language, a common medium through which diverse groups across local, national, and international spaces communicate. However, this apparent neutrality hides a more complex reality. In Yoruba communities, English can function simultaneously as a site of domination and as a site of shared agency. As a colonial language, English carries psychological and cultural effects, often positioning indigenous languages such as Yoruba as less prestigious or less useful in formal domains. Proficiency in English may determine access to education, employment, political participation, and social mobility. Those who speak English fluently may be perceived as educated, modern, or elite, while those with limited proficiency may experience exclusion or discrimination. In this sense, language proficiency can shape group membership: one may be unable to influence politics, access institutions, or climb the social mobility ladder without mastering the dominant language. At the same time, English can also create solidarity. As a lingua franca, it enables communication among diverse ethnic, national, and intercultural groups. The study is based on the fieldwork data collected from the Yoruba community based in Peckham, South-East London, UK. In multilingual settings such as Nigeria, English allows people from different linguistic backgrounds to bond, negotiate identity, and participate in wider publics. Yet language ideologies are never neutral. Common discourses often frame those who do not speak the majority or dominant language as threats to national unity, justifying exclusionary laws or social restrictions. This presentation examines how Yoruba speakers use English, Yoruba registers, and code-switching to negotiate resistance, solidarity, and discrimination in everyday life.

Bio:

1. Adedeji Adeniyi, Junior Researcher, School of Humanities, Tallinn University
2. Avneet Sharma, Junior Research Fellow, Linguistics, School of Humanities, Tallinn University

16. Laura Kate Gage

Tallinn University

Abstract:

From Revitalization to Integration: Intergenerational Perspectives on the Pronunciation of Māori Loanwords in New Zealand English

Set against a colonial history of indigenous language erasure, the revitalization of te reo Māori (the Māori language) in recent decades has reshaped how New Zealanders think about language, culture, and belonging. One visible result is the growing presence of Māori loanwords in New Zealand English (NZE), along with public debate about how those words should be pronounced and who decides. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 16 monolingual NZE speakers from four generations, this research explores whether attitudes toward Māori pronunciation divide neatly by age and generational context. Younger speakers produced Māori pronunciations at higher rates overall, but older participants varied considerably, with behavior closely tied to occupation. Those in governmental and educational roles used more loanwords and showed a clear preference for Māori pronunciation, suggesting that workplace exposure to te reo Māori can shift practices and attitudes regardless of age. These findings position pronunciation and lexical choice as tools for constructing social identity, expressing respect and solidarity or, at times, hesitancy about getting it "wrong." The presentation concludes by considering implications for the language classroom and workplace, and for creating spaces where speakers can engage with te reo Māori with confidence and respect.

Bio:

Laura Gage is a doctoral student in sociolinguistics at Tallinn University, specialising in language contact, postcolonial linguistics, and varieties of English. With five years of experience teaching English to children and adults in international settings, she brings a classroom perspective to her research on the influence of te reo Māori on New Zealand English. Her work examines how the use and pronunciation of Māori loanwords vary across generations and workplaces, and what this reveals about language revitalisation and social identity in post-colonial contexts. Her recent publication, co-authored with Lina Bikelienė, appears in (Mis)Understandings in Multicultural Communication (Springer, 2026).

Panel V

17. Tomasz Dobrogoszcz

University of Łódź

Abstract:

Troubled Waters: Vulnerability and Ecological Politics in Contemporary Indigenous and Postcolonial Literature

The paper examines how contemporary literature imagines the ecological politics of water through the lens of vulnerability. It proposes a four-part classification of water-related crises that recur in recent fiction: (1) water scarcity and drought, (2) flooding and sea-level rise, (3) water pollution, and (4) megadams. Reading these categories through ecocritical debates shaped by critiques of capitalism, especially Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence, the paper argues that water is not only a material resource but also a site where environmental dispossession, colonial power, and uneven exposure to risk. The discussion focuses on works by Alexis Wright, Suyi Davies Okungbowa, Nnedi Okorafor, and Namwali Serpell, asking how Indigenous and postcolonial writers represent water as a medium of both vulnerability and resistance. In these texts, water is tied to extraction, infrastructural domination, toxicity, displacement, and climate crisis, but it also carries memory, kinship, and alternative forms of ecological relation. By placing these writers in dialogue, the paper shows that contemporary literature does more than depict environmental catastrophe. It also reveals how water crises are politically produced and deeply entangled with racial capitalism and colonial modernity

Bio:

Tomasz Dobrogoszcz works at the Department of British Literature and Culture, University of Lodz. His main fields of research include contemporary fiction, poststructuralist and psychoanalytical literary theory, contemporary film, culture studies, ecocriticism and posthumanist studies. He has published on such writers as Julian Barnes, Ian McEwan, Kazuo Ishiguro, Salman Rushdie, Ali Smith and Jeanette Winterson. He is the editor of *Nobody Expects the Spanish Inquisition: Cultural Contexts In Monty Python* (2014). He also published a monograph *Family and Relationships in Ian McEwan's Fiction* (2018). In 2025 he co-authored an interdisciplinary study *Linguistic Representations of Women in Old English Prose*. He translated into Polish a seminal work in postcolonial theory, *The Location of Culture* by Homi K. Bhabha, and other critical and literary texts, for instance by Hayden White, Dipesh Chakrabarty or Margaret Atwood.

18. Polina Golováтина-Mora

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Abstract:

Oceanic Thinking in Conversation with *Theory of Water* by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson.

This paper discusses the pedagogies and aesthetics of water in conversation with *Theory of Water* by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. *Theory of Water* (2025) speaks of water not as metaphor but as a relational practice. In *Theory of Water*, water is known through embodied, place-responsive and respons-able (Bozalek) engagement, such as walking, listening, and moving, and knowledge that arises from lived relation. As a practice of resistance to colonial and settler structures that shape our everyday environment including the academic writing, scholarship and academia altogether (Giroux; Zembylas), *Theory of Water* insists on nuanced enactment of resurgence rather than oppositional abstraction, which implies a continuity of everyday practices that refuse colonial extraction and alienation. Water grounds governance, kinship, and ethics, sustaining life as ongoing, situated practice and knowledge (McKittrick; Haraway), rather than abstract postponed recovery (Krenak).

When engaging with a transformative subject it does not feel enough to simply talk about it as if from outside – one gets transformed by the subject. Drawing on the idea of critical pedagogy of walking the path and living the word (Freire) and the ethical call of the critical anti-colonial (post)qualitative research methodology (St. Pierre; McKittrick), it is an ethical matter to be mindful about the aesthetics and the form of the inquiry and the thought dissemination. Considering the larger context of the growing body of literature on *thinking with water*, the paper reflects on how the *thought of water* challenges the conventional and standardized usage of language, and academic writing in particular. This paper puts into a dialogue academic and artistic works, works of nature and sea as equally valuable voices and sources that inform my thought.

Theory of Water elaborates on water as methodological practice. Following water's movement in her writing, Simpson unfolds water's capacity to transform and shapeshift, and proposes a form of thinking that resists enclosure, extraction, and fixed categories. Water "always creates more possibility", modeling a way of world-making that is collective, adaptive, and grounded in small-scale practices that scale outward. This unsettles dominant divisive epistemologies (Murriss). Such perspective challenges the colonial academic project through refocusing on the reality of responsive and enabling relationality of pedagogy of water.

Bio:

Polina Golovářina-Mora is Professor in Film and Media in Education at the Faculty of Teacher Education at Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway. Polina's research is informed by posthumanist feminism and critical pedagogy and focuses on qualitative, art-based and sensorial research methodologies and pedagogies - questions of multi-species memory and creativity. Polina published extensively on the topics of agency of more-than-human nature and the methodologies such agency inspires, co-authored with Rocha-Bravo, M. G. "A Sentient Planet as a School; a School as a Community Garden: Toward Eco-Creative Think-Practicing," at *Qualitative Inquiry*, 31(2), 2024, and "Follow the River: City Regeneration in Tension as Works of Water" at *Changing Societies & Personalities*, 6(2), 2022, are among the recent publications on the topic.

19. Anna Maria Karczewska

University of Białystok

Abstract:

Robert Macfarlane's *Is a River Alive?*: Thinking with Rivers in Encounter and Imagination

This paper draws on Ailton Krenak's (2020) call for imagination and Christof Mauch's notion of slow hope as critical resistance, and on Anna Tsing's concept of encounter to propose writing about the rivers otherwise, to propose the river as an epistemic, ethical, and aesthetic principle of thought. In this view, rivers are not passive backdrops but relational entities that flow through bodies, stories and communities. They nourish, contaminate, remember and regenerate. This article looks at Robert Macfarlane's (*Is A River Alive?* 2025) reflections on riverine vitality and the emerging discourse of the rights of rivers, showing how narrative can articulate both ecological precarity and forms of cautious hope. Doing this, the article investigates how we might change our language and our approach towards rivers. It argues for a different way of producing knowledge with rather than about rivers, and for a new kind of onto-epistemology. It mediates on the "interpermeations" and vulnerability, and articulates "wet relations" (Neimanis 2017) and the co-existence of earth and water bodies. It aims not merely to represent rivers but to think, feel and act with them, imagining convivial and just futures where the right to flow across boundaries and borders, to perform, to be free, belongs to all forms of life.

Bio:

Anna Maria Karczewska is Assistant Professor at the University of Białystok, Poland where she teaches at the Faculty of Philology. She has a Ph.D. in cultural studies from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (SWPS) in Warsaw. Her current research interests revolve around posthuman studies and environmental humanities. She is a recipient of the Polish National Science Center research grant Miniatura5 (2021) for the project "Medellín: the portrait of trauma and urban violence in the works of Colombian journalists." Her latest article "Hydrocentric reading of rivers. Waterways in Wade Davis' *Magdalena: River of Dreams. A story of Colombia*" is the result of a research stay in the Colombian city of Honda, at the Magdalena River Museum.

20. Katarzyna Ostalska

University of Łódź

Abstract:

Leaving Normative Humanity on Shore: The Palimpsest of the Land and the Deep, Queer Sea in Julia Armfield's *Our Wives under the Sea* and Deborah Levy's *Hot Milk*

The female characters in Armfield's *Our Wives under the Sea* and Deborah Levy's *Hot Milk* can be divided roughly into the land inhabitants (Miri, Rose) that fear changes and wish to prevent their kins' watery transformations, and the sea creatures (Sofia, Leah, Ingrid) that are open to posthuman watery alterations. Julia Armfield's *Our Wives under the Sea* queers the becoming-the-sea process that the main female protagonist, Leah, a marine biologist, undergoes after the deep diving expedition from which she was brought back after six months of unexplained absence and of which she was the sole human survivor. The sea as the catalyst breeds the separation that may, or may not have happened between spouses

otherwise. The land creature, Miri, Leah's wife, experiences Leah turning into a more-than-human being that can live under the water, as estrangement. She feels excluded and disconnected from this intimate but also corporeally horrifying for her process. Leah's body becomes adapted to a new environment, hostile for Miri to live. Fascinated with the ocean, Leah accepts her scaled, "oystered" liquified body that can breathe water. In the palimpsest narrative, Miri mourns the loss of Leah's human form, accompanying her wife in becoming-the sea and enabling her liquid body to return to the sea. In Deborah Levy's *Hot Milk* the land creature (Rose) becomes her anchor that keeps her daughter, Sophia back from sea explorations. Immobilised on a wheelchair (that she is known to leave on her own at times), constantly dehydrated Rose, who claims to be allergic even to the sight of fish, cripples her daughter's autonomy and lesbian desire. Swimming in the sea with medusas and being repeatedly stung by them makes the daughter's body immune to the maternal poison. Sofia's body proudly bears the visible inflamed marks of the Mediterranean jelly fish, in the process of becoming one of them, she develops extra-sensory underwater abilities. In conclusion, not denying the relational cost, the paper aims to present both corporeal water transformations as liberatory due to the fact that Sophia and Leah when becoming jellyfish and becoming water acted on their inner impulses and desires that go beyond the human.

Bio:

Katarzyna Ostalska is Associate Professor in the Department of British Literature and Culture at the University of Łódź, Poland. She is the head of the Posthumanities Research Centre at the Faculty of Philology, University of Lodz. She holds PhD and a postdoctoral degree (habilitation) in literature. In 2015, she published *Towards Female Empowerment: The New Generation of Irish Women Poets: Vona Groarke, Sinéad Morrissey, Caitríona O'Reilly, and Mary O'Donoghue*. She co-edited three volumes of articles, including the special issue devoted to gender and the speculative genre (2020). Her last co-edited collection *The Postword In-Between Utopia and Dystopia: Intersectional, Feminist, and Non-Binary Approaches in 21st Century Literature and Culture* was published by Routledge in 2021.

21. Katarzyna Więckowska

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń

Abstract:

Uncertain Waters: Living with Climate Change and Contemporary Anglophone Fiction

This paper discusses decolonising strategies and narrative techniques in selected examples of contemporary Anglophone literature about climate change and environmental damage. I focus on texts that explore non-Western modes of acting and thinking and that interrogate the potential of vulnerability to foster alliances and protests, rather than reinforce powerlessness. The element unifying my reading of all the texts is water, conceptualised as agential, intra- and inter-acting with human and more-than-human environments. More specifically, I approach water as adaptive, decentred, and multiple, as a model of living with uncertainty. I analyse texts by Indigenous American, Nigerian, and Australian writers and discuss how they address the possibilities of living with climate change and displacement (Alexis Wright), the colonial legacies of extraction (Leanne Simpson), and the environmental damage caused by the petroleum industry (Helon Habila). My concern is with polluted bodies of water that clearly demonstrate that "pollution is colonialism" (Max Liboiron 2021) and with texts that present uncertainty as producing new possibilities and politics (Neimanis and Walker 2014).

My perspective follows Donna Haraway's proposal that "reality is an active verb" (2003) and that storytelling actively shapes the uncertain flows of worldmaking.

Bio:

Katarzyna Więckowska is Associate Professor in the Department of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Comparative Studies, at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland, and member of the Lab for Exclusion and Alienation Research (LEAR). Her research interests include environmental criticism, postcolonial studies, feminist criticism, discourses of exclusion, and toxicity. Her most recent work focuses on post-anthropocentric ethics of care, solarpunk, climate witnessing, and displacement. Recently, she has co-translated Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* into Polish (2025).