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**THE 26th ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE ENGLISH
DEPARTMENT,**

UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST

LITERATURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES SECTION

29-31 May 2025

CALL FOR PAPERS

Writing in a World on Fire:

Perspectives on War and Climate Change

University of Bucharest, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures

7-13 Pitar Moş St., Bucharest, Romania

Keynote Speakers:

Penelope Corfield, Royal Holloway, University of London

Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru, University of Bucharest

Domnica Rădulescu, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia

Climate change and war are often perceived as similar forms of conflict, both triggered by the human impulse to conquer and colonise, and together they fuel the perception that the world today is – literally and metaphorically – on fire. In recent years, for example, wildfires, destructive and hard to control, have raged in Europe, the USA, Canada, North Africa, Australia and Indonesia. Fire, both literal and metaphorical, also features strongly in the many armed conflicts and violent civil disorders around the world.

Such disasters have helped detonate a veritable explosion of ecological thinking that has spread across other environment-related disciplines, with literature playing an important part as a framework of artistic and imaginative reflection on the environment and the ways society relates to it. Ecology has permeated critical discourses such as postcolonialism (in the shape of Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin’s “green postcolonialism” [2007] or “postcolonial ecocriticism” [2010]), feminism (ecofeminism, as coined by Françoise d’Eaubonne in 1974 and continued by Maria Mies; Vandana Shiva; Val Plumwood; Greta Gaard), landscape studies (Adeline Johns-Putra [2010]); posthumanism and/as ecohumanism (Hubert Zapf), often in a dialogue with animal studies (Donna Haraway); critical plant studies (John Charles Ryan); sustainability studies (Greg Garrard) or interdisciplinary environmental humanities (Scott Slovic).

Environmental concerns have also entered philosophy, for instance the concepts of “deep ecology” first formulated by Arne Næss in 1973, and “dark ecology”, as explored in Timothy Morton’s *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Existence* (2016). Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) was an important precursor of environmental ethics as an academic discipline, which began to develop in the 1970s, for instance in the work of Christopher Stone (1972), Richard Routley [later Sylvan] (1973), and Holmes Rolston III (1975). In the field of jurisprudence, environmental law, and especially the concept of “climate justice”, have become significant aspects of legal philosophy and practice (David Schlosberg and Lisette B. Collins [2014]; Simon Caney [2005, 2020]).

Reactions against the continuous exploitation of the environment have ranged from Donna Haraway’s concept of “natureculture”, pleading for a reconciliation of the human with the natural and, subsequently, the posthuman (2003), to ecological activism such as Peter Berg’s, who waged a whole war in defence of a reconciliation between human and non-human life on the planet, through bioregionalism and the green city concept; or, more recently, Frédéric Neyrat’s theory of an “ecology of separation” (2018) which, on the contrary, claims that nature should be left alone to cater to its own healing. Through fostering better communication between humans and “earthothers” (Greta Gaard [2017]), better communication across human communities is encouraged, which leads to the resolution of old conflicts and the avoidance of new ones. Critical ecofeminism, for example (Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Val Plumwood, Greta Gaard and others), brings new, stronger evidence and argument in favour of opening up repressive binaries and acknowledging the dynamic continuum that encompasses all that has life.

As pointed out in postcolonial approaches to environmental humanities (see Huggan and Tiffin), as well as Amitav Ghosh’s fictional and non-fictional work, the proliferation of a western, Eurocentric model of civilisation across the world through the colonial system and

later through the post-war globalising capitalist machine has led to an excessive exploitation of non-European societies and ecosystems alike. Whatever the approach, the general feeling guiding the study of human interaction with nature has, in recent times, been similar to the reaction of societies against the many wars that have plagued our planet.

In a world on fire, pressured by climate change and rife with conflict, what is the role of writing, especially of imaginative literature? Meteorological disorder and the distress it can cause are nothing new, but the enormity of climate change and possibly mass extinction poses a huge challenge to imaginative writing today – to fiction, poetry and drama. As Ghosh acknowledged, genre fiction, especially SF, had aimed to address the issues already, even before the idea of climate change became widespread, and recent years have seen the consolidation of a subgenre dubbed “cli-fi”, science fiction that engages imaginatively, though often with substantial scientific grounding, with the climate crisis: examples would include Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future* (2020) and Neal Stephenson’s *Termination Shock* (2021). Since Cheryl Glotfelty’s founding of the study of literature and the environment, literature has been acknowledged as a major space for voicing ecological concerns, with “cli-fi” often being grafted onto existing genres such as historical fiction (see Annie Proulx’s *Barkskins* [2016] or Elif Shafak’s *The Island of Missing Trees* [2021]), or dystopian narratives (such as Richard Powers’ *Bewilderment* [2021], or Diane Cook’s *The New Wilderness* [2020]). Often, the ecological warning against some form of human aggression against nature comes in the shape of graphic novels or adventure stories addressed to children and/or young adults (see Eoin Colfer and Andrew Donkin’s comic *Global* or Tochi Onyebuchi’s novels *War Girls* [2019] and *Rebel Sisters* [2020]).

Literal and metaphorical fire, in peace and war, is not only a feature of the present, of course. Fire is a primal phenomenon and the discovery of how to start and maintain fires would have been an epochal event in human history. Fire can destroy but also illuminate: it can bring light into darkness, turn cold into warmth, and transform raw into cooked food, a capacity that may mark the starting point of human culture. In ancient Greek and mediaeval philosophy, fire was one of the original four elements, along with earth, water and air, and it features as such in other early philosophical systems. In theology and eschatology, it can be both punitive and purgative; the fires of hell in which sinners burn for ever, the holy fires that refine and redeem. Fire features significantly in drama, poetry and prose from ancient times to the present, especially as an image for sacred and profane love and desire.

We invite papers that analyse and explore the relationships between writing, culture, fire, war, climate change and environmental movements, in the present and the past, as represented in narratives and discourses, in poetry, drama and dance, in music, film and television, in graphic novels, comics and video games, in painting, sculpture and installations, in mainstream and social media, or in any other relevant cultural form. We encourage comparative and interdisciplinary approaches, but we recommend that their starting point should be Anglophone literature and culture. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

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- ✓ Ecocritical approaches to interpreting past and present literary texts
 - ✓ Encounters between conflict-driven theoretical discourses (postcolonialism and ecocriticism, plant/animal studies and war studies, environmental sciences/humanities)
 - ✓ Spaces of healing and ecological utopian fiction or science-fiction: Rousseau // Bernardin de Saint-Pierre // islands, otherness and diversity
 - ✓ Nature as a source of psychological healing (e. g. Richard Mabey's *Nature Cure* [2005])
 - ✓ Reconceptualising nature and the human, e. g. natural vs human agency in conflict resolution
 - ✓ Ecofeminism and ecologies of gender fluidity
 - ✓ Sci-fi and cli-fi – the relationship between genre and subgenre
 - ✓ Climate change in film, graphic novels, and visual arts
 - ✓ Climate change denial as a cultural phenomenon (e. g. on social media)
 - ✓ Reflections on climate change, conflict, and war (see *American War* [2017] by Omar El Akkad)
 - ✓ Shakespeare and ecology (e. g. Gabriel Egan's *Green Shakespeare* [2006], Simon C. Estok's *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare* [2011])
 - ✓ Images of fire in poetry, drama, fiction, and the arts
 - ✓ Fire and war in literature and in mythical and religious discourse
 - ✓ Climate change, philosophy, and ecological ethics (see Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* [2016]); ecological considerations in relation to every possible discipline: the Anthropocene
 - ✓ Proto-ecological views in past European culture and in non-European and Indigenous cultures (e. g. interactions between Sanskrit philosophy and Romantic philosophy and the ways these fed into Transcendentalism)
 - ✓ Interactions between climate change and war (e. g. James R. Lee [2009], Kirsten Davies and Thomas Riddell [2017], Eoghan Darbyshire [2021]), but also anti-war warnings as reflected in the literature for children and/or young adults
 - ✓ Approaches to military/colonial/agriculture-oriented **terraforming** – changing/doing violence to the landscape (e. g. Matteo Rizzo [2006], Stefan Esselborn [2013])
 - ✓ Crime, criminality, the other, and the weird: ignitable realities
 - ✓ Utopian, dystopian, and ustopian tales of war and clime

N. B. The organising committee reserve the right to reject any abstracts or interrupt any presentations/discussions that might instigate the participants to conflict or intolerance.

Continuing the structure initiated last year, our conference will also offer a number of thematic panel streams that will allow participants to group around their main fields of research and for which potential participants are asked to send their proposals **both** to the conference email address (listed below) **and** to the panel stream organizer:

Crime and the Weird in Literature and the Arts (panel stream organiser: Dragoş Manea, University of Bucharest, dragos.manea@lls.unibuc.ro)

Inflammatory Wars – Old, New, or Imagined (panel stream organiser: Adela Catană, “Ferdinand I” Military Academy, Bucharest, adela.catana@yahoo.com)

Literal, Metaphorical, Archetypal Fire in Literature and the Arts (panel stream organiser: Alina Bottez, University of Bucharest, alina.bottez@lls.unibuc.ro)

Roots and Routes in Ecofiction and Ecocriticism (panel stream organiser: Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru, University of Bucharest, sabina.draga.alexandru@lls.unibuc.ro)

The Early Modern World on Fire – Writing in an Age of Turmoil (panel stream organiser: Alina Bottez, University of Bucharest, alina.bottez@lls.unibuc.ro)

Utopian, Dystopian, and Ustopian Tales of War and Clime (panel stream organiser: Eliana Ionoaia, University of Bucharest, eliana.ionoiaia@lls.unibuc.ro)

Panel proposals on any other topics connected to the conference theme are welcome. Potential panel organisers are welcome to submit full panel proposals to the conference email listed below.

Two round tables will be organized to commemorate important figures of English and American Studies in Romania:

- one *in memoriam* Professors Ana Cartianu and Leon Leviţchi: *Canonic Figures of Mediaeval, Renaissance, and Victorian Culture*.
- one *in memoriam* Dr habil. Ana-Karina Schneider, associate professor at the “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, editor-in-chief of the *American, British and Canadian Studies* journal: *The ABC of American, British and Canadian Studies*

All those interested in contributing short academic papers on these topics or evocations of the three late academics are welcome to contact Alina Bottez, University of Bucharest, alina.bottez@lils.unibuc.ro.

Conference presentations must be in English and will be allocated 20 minutes each, plus 10 minutes for discussion. Prospective participants are invited to submit abstracts of up to 200 words. Proposals should be in .doc or .docx format and also include (**within the same document**): name and institutional affiliation, **the title of the proposed paper**, a short bio note (no more than 100 words), 5 keywords, and the participant's e-mail address. Proposals for panel streams (to be organised by the participants) will also be considered. Please submit all proposals to our email address: conf.eng.litcult@lils.unibuc.ro.

Deadline for proposals: 15 January 2025.

Conference fee:

Early bird: 100 Euro (by 1 April 2025)

Regular: 120 Euro (by 30 April 2025)

MA students and PhD Candidates: 50 Euro

Payment details will be communicated to the participants upon acceptance.

A selection of papers from the conference will be published in the *University of Bucharest Review* (ISSN 2069–8658) – listed on SCOPUS, EBSCO, ERIH PLUS and DOAJ. See the guidelines for contributors at <https://ubr.rev.unibuc.ro/>.

For further details and updates, see: <https://engleza.lils.unibuc.ro/conferinte/>. Enquiries regarding the Theoretical and Applied Linguistics section of the conference, which will be running at the same time, should be sent to aiced.2024@gmail.com.

We look forward to receiving proposals and welcoming you in Bucharest.

Organising and Selection Committee:

Dr Alina Bottez (coordinator)

Dr Alexandra Bacalu

Dr Eliana Ionoaia

Dr Dragoş Manea

Dr Andrei Nae

Dr Andreea Paris-Popa

Dr Oana-Alis Zaharia

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Prof. Kerstin Shands (Södertörn University)

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