

THE 23rd ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT,
UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST
LITERATURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES SECTION

CALL FOR PAPERS

The English Department of the University of Bucharest invites proposals for the Literature and Cultural Studies section of its 23rd Annual International Conference:

Disaster Discourse: Representations of Catastrophe

To be held online, 2–4 June 2022

Keynote speakers:

- Dr. Terence McSweeney** (Solent University)
- Dr. Nina Mickwitz** (University of the Arts London)
- Dr. Rareş Moldovan** (Babeş-Bolyai University)
- Prof. Sascha Pöhlmann** (University of Innsbruck)
- Prof. Nicolas Tredell** (University of Sussex)

At this stage of the twenty-first century, the actuality, imagining, anticipation and recollection of a multiplicity of present, past and potential future disasters (for example, climate change, earthquake, fire, flood, famine, mass death, pandemic, war) permeate daily experience, amplified and disseminated through global media that transmit words and images almost instantly. What are the ways in which we now represent disaster verbally and in other forms that mix words with visual and aural images or eschew language, such as films, comics, video and installation art, painting and music? How might these relate to earlier representations (in, say, predigital times)? What effects might current disaster discourse have in shaping perceptions of and responses to catastrophe? Does disaster discourse exacerbate catastrophe, or can it offer catharsis and healing? Can it envisage alternatives to living in a constant state of emergency and what might such alternatives be? Many urgent and intriguing questions are raised by this discursive mode, which seems omnipresent in our current era.

Disaster studies is a growing discipline that ranges from abstract considerations of the definitions and dynamics of disaster (for example, differentiating disaster from “accident”, “natural” disaster from human-made disaster) to the formulation of approaches to disaster preparedness, mitigation, impact assessment, response and recovery and management that have immediate practical applications (see, for example, Michael K. Lindell, “Disaster Studies” (2013); *Handbook of Disaster Research* (2018), edited by Havidán Rodríguez, William Donner and Joseph E. Trainor; and *Disaster Studies: Exploring Intersectionalities in Disaster Discourse* (2020), edited by Janki Andharia).

The examination of factual and fictional representations of disaster in words and visual images makes a crucial contribution to those studies and such representations can be studied by means of the concepts and methods developed for the theorization and analysis of elite and popular literary and cultural texts—and, reciprocally, the study of such texts can modify those concepts and methods.

Seminal texts in the study of disaster discourse include Susan Sontag’s essay “The Imagination of Disaster” (1965) and Maurice Blanchot’s *L’Écriture du désastre* [*The Writing of the Disaster*] (1980), and the twenty-first century has generated studies that focus on one or more particular periods and/or genres, such as *Romanticism and Disaster* (2012), edited by Jacques Khalip and David Collings; Hilary L. Chute’s *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* (2016); *America’s Disaster Culture: The Production of Natural Disasters in Literature and Pop Culture* (2017), edited by Robert C. Bell and Robert M. Ficociello; Eva Horn’s *The Future as Catastrophe: Imagining Disaster in the Modern Age* (2018) [originally *Zukunft als*

Katastrophe (2014)], trans. Valentine A. Pakis; and *The Experience of Disaster in Early Modern Literature*, edited by Sophie Chan (forthcoming, 2022).

We invite papers that explore the modes and implications of all and any kind of disaster discourse from the present or past in verbal, visual and aural forms – such as literary fiction, genre fiction, the graphic novel, comics, poetry, documentary, film, photography, painting, sculpture, installation art, music, social media posts – examining the ways in which they are generated, the media they employ, the signifying systems they use, the imagery on which they draw, their audiences, their historical, cultural and social contexts, and the further discourses they generate.

Papers may focus upon individual works or bodies of work and may also explore more general issues around conceptualizing, defining and theorizing disaster drawn from aesthetics, ethics, literature, philosophy, psychology, political thought, science, anthropology, sociology, theology, the arts, and any other relevant discipline.

Possible topics may include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Definitions of disaster (e.g., differentiating it from “accident”; dividing into “natural” and “[hu]manmade”)
- Impacts of disaster (e.g., physical, psychological, cultural)
- Social dimensions of disaster (e.g., in regard to class, community, ethnicity, gender)
- Rhetorics of disaster (the different ways in which it is spoken and written about, e.g., the kind of imagery used, the function of clichés, the issue of whether words can ever be adequate to the disastrous event)
- Disaster in history and historiography (e.g., the tension between documentary sources and narrative pressures)
- Disaster and scientific discourse (e.g., the relationship of disaster discourse to popularized and professional scientific ideas)
- Disaster and agency (perpetrators, accomplices and victims of disaster)
- Disaster and theology (e.g., the theodicean problem of vindicating God in light of the existence of evil; the idea of disaster as divine punishment [the Biblical Flood])
- Mythologizing disaster (from ancient literature to modern folk myths)
- Disaster and emotion (e.g., shock, excitement, grief, mourning)
- The aesthetics of disaster (e.g., the ancient Greek idea, in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, of catharsis (purging); the distinction between two modes of aesthetic experience in Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* [1797])
- Remembering disaster (public and private modes of remembrance and commemoration)
- Disaster at one’s fingertips (the effects of the almost instant transmission, sharing and amplification of disaster news on social media)
- Genre and disaster (e.g., tragedy; documentary; can disaster ever be (partly) written as comedy?)
- Disaster in literary and popular fiction (e.g., war novels, science fiction)
- Panels and bubbles: disaster in comics and graphic novels
- The rhythms and metres of disaster: engaging with disaster in poetry
- Theatres of disaster: is it possible adequately to put disaster on stage; what are the ways of trying to do so?
- Cinemas of disaster: ways of figuring disaster on film
- Camera eye: still photography and disaster
- Discord and concord: engaging with disaster in music
- Disaster in popular culture

- Anticipating disaster
- Living through disaster
- Recovering from disaster
- Transcending disaster
- Perspectivism / point of view: looking at disaster from different angles (or from clashing positions)
- Interdisciplinary approaches to disaster

Conference presentations should 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 should also include (within the same document) name and institutional affiliation, a short bio (no more than 100 words), and e-mail address. Proposals for panel discussions (to be organized by the participant) will also be considered.

A selection of papers from the conference will be published in *University of Bucharest Review* (ISSN 2069–8658) – listed on Erih Plus, Scopus, EBSCO (Literary Reference Centre Plus), CEEOL and Ulrichsweb. See the guidelines for contributors at <https://ubr.rev.unibuc.ro/>.

Deadline for proposals: **May 1 2022**

Please send proposals (and enquiries) to conf.eng.litcult@lils.unibuc.ro.

Conference fee: **30 euro** (or **150 lei** if paid in Romanian currency).

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.2022@gmail.com.)

We look forward to receiving proposals.

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