

English Exposed: Vulnerability and Hope in Culture and Language

International Symposium

October 8–10, 2026

Tallinn University, Estonia

Call for Papers

In a world marked by overlapping crises—wars, epidemics, climate catastrophe, democratic erosion, technological acceleration, and the growing entanglement of artificial intelligence with everyday communication—*vulnerability* has emerged as an increasingly recognised condition. English, as a global language of culture, education, governance, and digital mediation, is deeply implicated in these processes: it both exposes subjects to new forms of precarity and offers resources for articulation, resilience, care, and hope.

How to think about vulnerability in today’s world? Is it to be resolved or can we conceive of it as a condition to be accepted and embraced? Is it helplessness and lack of agency or is it a relational, affective and ethical condition? How can it be reconceptualised and recognised for its potential to generate new forms of creativity, solidarity, and critical hope?

This symposium invites scholars working across **literary studies, cultural studies, linguistics, and language education** to explore how vulnerability manifests in the world and is represented in and through English and Anglophone cultures today. Drawing on recent theoretical work on fear (Han 2024a), survival societies, pain (2020) hope (Han 2024b), critical attention (Citton 2017, Ganteau 2023, 2024), and narrative engagement beyond the human (Caracciolo 2021, 2024), the symposium asks how cultural and linguistic practices respond to a present marked by anxiety, exhaustion, and exposure. How do literary, artistic, cinematic, and discursive forms register contemporary vulnerabilities? How does English function simultaneously as a site of domination and of shared agency, whether in local, global, or intercultural *lingua franca* contexts? What kinds of futures—pedagogical, political, aesthetic—can be imagined from within conditions of vulnerability?

We particularly welcome contributions that engage vulnerability not only as a theme but as a **method, stance, or practice**, including creative-critical and interdisciplinary approaches.

Possible thematic areas include (but are not limited to):

- Vulnerability, precarity, and exposure in contemporary literature, film, and culture
- Fear, crisis, and “survival societies” in cultural and linguistic imaginaries
- Hope as disruption, refusal, and collective practice
- Reimagined communities, solidarities, and the “we” of hope
- English as a global language: ownership, inequality, and risk
- English as a *lingua franca* and the vulnerabilities of global communication
- AI, automation, and the transformation of linguistic and cultural attention and agency
- Narration, storytelling, and art as practices of care, repair, or healing
- Creativity, innovation, and aesthetic experimentation in vulnerable times
- Vulnerability, attention and hope

The symposium will combine academic panels with **film screenings and poetry readings**, creating a space for dialogue between scholarly analysis and artistic practice.

We invite proposals for **20-minute papers** or (where appropriate) practice-based or creative-critical contributions.

Please send a 300-word proposal and a short bio to: flu.english.major@gmail.com by **15 June 2026**.

Acceptance notifications will be sent by 25 June.

Please address your queries to: Prof Julia Kuznetski, julia.kuznetski@tlu.ee

Confirmed keynote speakers:

[Marco Caracciolo](#) (Ghent University)

[Hannah Lowe](#) (award-winning British writer and poet)

Organising committee:

Professor Julia Kuznetski

Dr Miriam McIlfatrick-Ksenofontov

Dr Alpo Honkapohja

Dr Ksenia Shmydkaya

Iveta Aare

Bernadette Merila

References

Caracciolo, Marco (2022) *Narrating the Mesh: Form and Story in the Anthropocene*. University of Virginia Press.

Caracciolo, Marco (2024) *On Soulsring Worlds: Narrative Complexity, Digital Communities, and Interpretation in Dark Souls and Elden Ring*

Citton, Yves (2017) *The Ecology of Attention*. Cambridge: Polity.

Ganteau, Jean-Michel (2015) *The Ethics and Aesthetics of Vulnerability in Contemporary British Fiction*. Routledge.

Ganteau, Jean-Michel (2022) *The Poetics and Ethics of Attention in Contemporary British Narrative*. Routledge.

Han, Byung-Chul (2020) *The Palliative Society*. Translated by Daniel Steuer. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Han, Byung-Chul (2024a) *The Crisis of Narration*. Polity Press.

Han, Byung-Chul (2024b) *The Spirit of Hope*. Translated from the German by Daniel Steuer. Cambridge: Polity.