Place and Space in Contemporary English-Written Literatures

BOOK
OF
ABSTRACTS

Plenary Speakers

Susana Onega (Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain)

The Symbolisation of Space and Border-Crossing, and their Fictional Representation in Times of Crisis

The lecture will briefly describe the evolution of the symbolisation of space from the spatialisation of the chaos/order binary opposition as inside/outside to the present. After explaining the complex symbolism of the walled garden as the primordial ordered space, it will delve into the related notions of city-state and territory as a geopolitical space delimited by stable borders, with the capacity to grant identity to its inhabitants. To the ancient Greeks, the word "barbarian" provided a spatial contrast between the Hellenes living in the *polis* and those living outside it. During the Modern period, the ideology of the Empire fostered a new symbolisation of the barbarians as heathens/racial inferiors and of the world as divided by the border separating the interior realm of the law, peopled by friends, and the exterior realm of lawlessness, peopled by enemies. The lecture will provide examples of the fictional representation of these and related issues in fictional works by J. M. Coetzee, Eva Figes, Jon McGregor, David Mitchell and Ali Smith.

Martin Procházka (Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic)
"The Big Open"? Heterotopias, Apocalypse, and Colonial Expansion in North America

Modernity is characterized by a substantial transformation of space. The closed medieval space defined by a hierarchy of fixed places gives way to the open and infinite space of modern science and imagination. According to Michel Foucault, modern space "is presented to us in the form of relations of emplacement." In contrast to fixed places, most emplacements are mobile and functional, yet not all of them are determined by their specific functions. For instance, "heterotopias" undermine the functional status of other emplacements. Moreover, heterotopias engender "heterochronias", which attract attention to discontinuities of space and conventional time.

As heterotopias, modern ruins unsettle the discourses of redemption and progress, and testify to the failures of economic or technological power. This is especially true about the "ghost towns" emerging during the colonization of the American West as one of its major symbols articulating the space of the "Big Open": the West as both an "exceptional" and a "national" region, historical as well as mythical experience. As discursive and material objects, ghost towns oscillate between the function of historical monuments of the Gold Rush, prosperous industrialization or local settlement, and the squalor and obscurity of trash, which, however, can be fetishized or even monumentalized. This "circulation" of values may even lead to the "revivals" of ghost towns – their transformation into historical make-believe of festival parades, tourist sites, amusement parks or fashionable residential districts. It organizes the discourse of ruins into several "enunciative modalities" (Foucault) including that of "the end of history" – eschatology and revelation.

From its outset, the colonization of North America has been represented and justified by means of religious, as well as secular, apocalyptic narratives. As "spectres" (Jacques Derrida), ghost towns reveal an important feature of North American colonial expansion – the imaginary, illusory, but also real nature of the Frontier. Moreover, they turn our attention to the functioning of modern borders, especially migration flows and social divisions.

Parallel Session Speakers

Joanna Antoniak (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland)

Following your homing desire: domesticating spaces and the sense of belonging in *We Are All Birds of Uganda* by Hafsa Zayyan

The notion of home and its rewritings lay at the core of diasporic literature – it is the sense of home, after all, that not only reinforces the sense of belonging but also constitutes a safe space necessary for forming one's identity. The connection between the idea of home, the desire for belonging and diasporic identities that are always plural, in process and in the state of in-betweenness is explored by Hafsa Zayyan in her 2022 novel *We Are All Birds of Uganda*. When Sameer, the protagonist of the novel, goes to Uganda, the country of his forefathers, he does not expect to stay there long. After casual racism of his co-workers and racially-motivated attack on one of his best friends, Sameer loses the sense of safety provided by his London flat and his Leicester family home and, in consequence, his sense of belonging – the belief that he is at home in the United Kingdom, that he is a part of British society – becomes shaken. Entranced by the stories told by one of his parents' acquaintants, Sameer decides to travel to Uganda, hoping that through visiting places once inhabited by his ancestors he will be able to find himself and reinforce the connection he has with his British homeland. As he learns more about his family's roots, Sameer starts to realize that the answer to two important questions – who he is and where does he really belong – is not as simple and obvious as he assumed it to be.

The aim of this paper is to discuss how Zayyan entwines two narratives – one historical, set against the backdrop of decolonization and Africanization of Uganda, and one contemporary and rooted in post-Brexit realities – to depict the process of domesticating (or redomesticating) spaces – shaping and reshaping them into the idea of home – and the sense of belonging in the postcolonial context. Through referring to postcolonial theories, especially diaspora studies and home studies, the paper will focus on the depictions of the relationship between space and the idea of home and their subsequent connection to the sense of belonging present in Zayyan's novel.

Cristina Benicchi (Università degli Studi Internazionali – UNINT Roma, Italy)
Unveiling Transnational Narratives: Language, Identity, and Space in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*
This paper navigates the intricate transnational narratives within Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, delvin into the profound intersections of language, identity, and spatial dynamics. Levy's portrayal of post-World War II Britain illuminates the complex negotiations of Caribbean immigrants amidst London's evolving urban landscape. Drawing on theoretical frameworks by Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and John Clement Ball, this study scrutinizes how Levy articulates themes of displacement and belonging.

Small Island interlaces the lives of Hortense, Gilbert, Queenie and Bernard, showing how their identities are negotiated within London's transforming urban milieu. The novel subverts traditional conceptions of home and nationhood, revealing the contested nature of place within a post-colonial and post-modern context. Through its vivid depiction of London as a transnational metropolis, Levy's work embodies the city as a dynamic space where historical legacies and contemporary realities intersect. The characters' sense of linguistic dislocation underscores their cultural and spatial relocation, highlighting how language becomes crucial in identity formation and adaptation. John Clement Ball's theorization of the postcolonial city as a transnational space provides a framework for analyzing Levy's portrayal of London. The city emerges as a locus of cultural convergence and divergence, where colonial legacies shape social and spatial dynamics. By interweaving individual narratives with broader socio-political discourses, Levy challenges readers to reconsider the fluidity of identity and the transformation of space into place within a multicultural landscape.

In conclusion, *Small Island* reconfigures our understanding of space and identity in contemporary literature. It invites readers to engage with the impacts of colonialism and complexities of transnational migration, reshaping perceptions of urban environments, linguistic adaptation, and cultural belonging.

Lobna Ben Salem (Manouba University, Tunisia)

The "troublesome metropolis": Post-Apartheid Johannesburg and the Anxiety of (Re)Presentation

The spatial fracturing of South Africa's geography due to Apartheid ideology resulted in diverging understandings and meanings of space and place (both urban and rural) for the different racial (and social) groups of South Africa's population over time. Since the demise of Apartheid, global migration flows and excessive urbanism have further shaped the country's already fractured and colliding "lived spaces" (Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*). The paper purports to discuss the urban morphological evolution of the city of Johannesburg, South Africa's commercial center and one-time gold rush boomtown, in an attempt to grasp its contrasting spatial facets. The literary texts discussed, namely Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*, Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, and Lauren Beukes' *Zoo City*, negotiate what has been termed "the racialization of space and the spatialization of race", proving the strong interactions that exist between spatiality, historical temporality, and the construction of blackness. The narratological features of the texts under investigation deftly filter, support, or manipulate aspects of space, time, and black subjectivity. Sarah Nuttall's and Achille Mbembe's topographical 'mapping' of the (South) African metropolis in relation to its spatially marked history, and Nuttall's topological reading of the literary city in relation to conditions of the South African city's various entanglements, provide the theoretical framework of the paper.

Preeti Bhatt (Malaviya National Institute of Technology Jaipur, India)

The Chronotope of Travel in Alice Munro's Short Stories

Mikhail Bakhtin in his article, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel", refers to the chronotope of travel, where the protagonist's travels are often associated with the metaphorical inner journey, and where the "choice of a real itinerary equals the choice of the path of life" (Bakhtin 1981: 120). Bakhtin describes the concept of chronotope as a space that develops with the movement taken by an individual. The experiences and events during a journey intensify an individual's relationship with the space that surrounds him/her. The Canadian short-story writer Alice Munro (1931-2024) presents her characters' travels not only through geographical space but also the metaphorical journey of life. Munro in the trilogy, "Chance", "Soon" and "Silence" published in the collection *Runaway* (2004), represents the protagonist Juliet's journeys over four decades, where she meets strangers who change her life and situations which help her to grow as a person. The stories also portray Juliet's evolution as a distinguished writer. All through the trilogy, Juliet is shown taking on various journeys either on foot, road or train; the experience she gains in the journeys changes her during the course of her life.

With a focus on the trilogy by Munro and based on Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope, the paper attempts to examine how temporal and spatial determinations are always coloured by emotions and values during a journey leading individuals to make momentous decisions that alter their lives.

Eva Bilská (Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic)

Narrative Spaces, Transgression, and Identity in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*

Although primarily set in Toronto, Margaret Atwood's book *Cat's Eye* is a multilayered narrative where space is both literal and metaphorical. Captured in Elaine Risley's comments and memories, the city's

changing landscape mirrors her evolving personality. The multiple narrative spaces correspond to Elaine's multiple selves and illustrate how identity is constantly reconstructed over time. This paper will explore Elaine's childhood spaces, including her home, school, and neighborhood – arenas of trauma and conflict, especially in her interactions with her friend Cordelia, and the way they are projected into Elaine's paintings, her artistic spaces, which help her process these traumatic events from childhood. It is through her art that Elaine transgresses the boundaries of conventional femininity and societal roles, coping with the tension between personal expression and public reception. Triggered by anxiety, danger, and isolation, this transgression – symbolized by the ravine, a space of abandonment—inspires Elaine's artistic rebellion and reclamation of her narrative.

Considering this spatial anxiety, the paper will analyze moments where boundaries of physical and metaphorical space are contested. It will focus on the blurred line between normal childhood interactions and abuse, the narrative space reclaimed through art, and the transgression of conventional femininity in relation to Elaine's evolving identity.

Šárka Bubíková (University of Pardubice, Czech Republic)

Unstable Places and Crime in Selected Works of Crime Fiction

Apart from offering thrilling entertainment, the crime fiction genre often addresses nagging problems of the contemporary world, such as social isolation, liminality, inequality, displacement, mass migration, globalization, or environmental crises, many of which are connected to unstable, liminal, in-between places. My presentation will analyze the function of such places in connection to crime in selected works of crime fiction utilizing Marc Augé's concept of non-place. Introduced in his *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (French original 1992, English translation 1995), the concept refers to (anthropological) spaces of transience lacking meaningful relations with other spaces, historical presence, or identity concerns. For its very nature, crime is situated both spatially and socially. Therefore, the concept of non-place is a well-suited lens for studying crime's literary depiction because, as Mirjam Gebauer (2015) claims, it is not only a spatial notion, but is also indicative of the human condition.

Zuzana Buráková (Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Slovakia)

Deep Time and Architectural spaces in Cormac McCarthy 's Fiction

Cormac McCarthy's oeuvre has been extensively examined through the lenses of space and landscape, yet his use of architecture remains underexplored despite its significant presence alongside the depictions of nature. McCarthy himself practiced architecture, which informed his close relationship with this field. This article examines the interplay of deep time and architecture in McCarthy's novels *Suttree* (1979), *Blood Meridian* (1985) and *No Country for Old Men* (2005). Drawing on Henry Gee's geological perspective of deep time and Wai Chee Dimock's literary studies approach, we analyze how McCarthy's fiction captures the vast temporal scale and critiques the illusion of permanence associated with human-made structures. By focusing on McCarthy's portrayal of architecture, this study explores the relationship between humans and their environments, emphasizing themes of isolation and survival. The contrasting settings – the American Southwest in *Blood Meridian*, the urban landscape of Knoxville in *Suttree*, and the rural landscape of *No Country for Old Men* – provide a comparative framework to understand McCarthy's representation of architecture and its implications for the human condition. Following Georg Guillemin's interpretation of McCarthy's depiction of nature beyond anthropocentric terms, this study argues that McCarthy's architectural elements serve not only as backdrops but also as critical components that reflect deeper existential and societal themes. Ultimately, this article positions McCarthy's work within the broader discourse of the postmodern "spatial turn".

M. Mirac Ceylan (Gaziantep University, Turkey)

Traumatic Spaces in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*

The "spatial turn" in literary studies is a fruitful field in which the reciprocal relationship between human beings and the spaces they occupy is centralised in literary criticism. Tom McCarthy's debut novel *Remainder* (2005) is a unique representation of this relationship as the novel represents a nameless character who suffers amnesia as a result of an accident, "something falling from the sky" in which the character himself is also unacknowledged (McCarthy 5). To substitute the damage given, the character is granted eight and a half million pounds and decides to spend the money to re-enact his remaining memories by reconstructing the spaces in the way he remembers them. In re-enacting these spaces, as McKenzie Wark states, the character acts like "an accidental God", using his time and money "not to create but to recreate". The main character's "compulsion to repeat" leads him to re-create space within space where he can explore and master his traumas. Through re-enacting specific memories, the character also searches for the remains of his identity within those spaces. In time, the re-enacted spaces exceed the simulated sphere and extend into the "real" world, problematising the relationship between space and reality. The presentation will explore the relationship between the (recreated) spaces and the character's traumatic condition, as he builds, re-builds, unbuilds and repeats it all in his world of re-enactment.

Melinda Dabis (Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary)

"I shall undertake this journey": Spatiotemporal Dynamics and Memory in Kazuo Ishiguro's Novels

The Nobel-Prize winning author Kazuo Ishiguro's narratives are often characterized by their suppressed and gradually unfolding nature. However, these narratives are highly dynamic in spatial terms. Physical movement is a crucial aspect in all his novels, serving a fundamental element in the plot development. Yet the journeys in space are frequently intertwined with and embedded into journeys in time, specifically into the past. Spatial movement becomes instrumental in facilitating temporal movement, the recall of memories, as well as shaping and structuring those recollections. In this paper I will map out the spatial and temporal journeys undertaken reluctantly, but inevitably by the narrators and protagonists of Ishiguro's novels. Furthermore, I will examine whether and how the characteristics of journey, distance and proximity influence the patterns of remembering, and the uncovering and selection of memories. Through the spatiotemporal analysis, the memory patterns governing the narratives can be traced in relation to movement, even identifying specific triggers.

Sridipa Dandapat and Priyanka Tripathi (Indian Institute of Technology, Patna, India)

Intersecting Spaces: Gender, Geography and Resistance in Select Indian Picturebook

This paper presents a multimodal analysis of *Drawing from the City*, an Indian picturebook that explores the visual-verbal autobiographical narrative of Tejubehan, a contemporary artist from Ahmedabad. Contextualizing Tejubehan's narrative – from being a girl in the Jogi community (Other Backward Class) in a rural region, participating in household chores, to moving to the city as a woman who performs traditional art and gaining acclaim – this research reveals how mobility impacts resistance, spatial identity, and social consciousness. The central argument of this study examines the interaction between geography and literature to understand how space and gender intersect, revealing how literary works reflect and shape social dynamics. Employing Robert Tally Jr.'s "spatial literary theory" and Doreen

Massey's "feminist geography", this analysis critically explores how diverse geographical landscapes and cultural mobility influence gender, class, and caste positioning in society. Along with an ethnographic reading of the text, this study emphasizes the aesthetic fusion of text and image to explore how Tejubehan's artistic expression acts as a form of resistance against societal marginalization. Focusing on Tejubehan's narrative journey, this study contributes to a broader understanding of mobility as it intersects with gender and culture, providing insights into how mobility and spatial dimensions shape identity and the negotiation of agency in diverse cultural contexts.

Stephan Delbos (Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic)

"Laughing Butcher Berlin Blues": Cityscapes and Urban Phenomena in the Poetry of Mark Terrill

The American poet Mark Terrill (born 1953), who has lived on the outskirts of Hamburg for several decades, writes a poetry that applies the stylistic traits of his Beat Generation forebears, as well as his deep study of phenomenology, to the vicissitudes of life and thought in German cities and the countryside. His writing achieves an expansive range with an exacting focus, verses and prose poems in which the events and thought processes described unfold in the same interval it takes to read about them. This results in meticulously recorded observations in which scenery serves to direct a flow of associative thought. Terrill calls our attention equally to urgencies like globalization and pollution as well as the "subtle cinematic shifts" of German sunlight, all the while tracking resolutely each "momentary realization" sparked by sensory phenomena. His poems, which often seem to have been grafted from the nebulous atmosphere of thought, pressurized and framed on the page, invite us into the world of an attentive urban observer whose intellect is as unrestricted as his language is precise. This paper examines several of Terrill's poems, focusing on the central role of urban sensory phenomena on his narrators' perceptions and expressions.

Celestino Deleyto (Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain)

From Archimedes to Indiana Jones: Cinematic Space and the Palimpsest

This proposal starts with a spoiler: at the end of *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny* (2023), Indie (Harrison Ford) travels to 212 BC Syracuse and meets Archimedes. This unexpected event evokes the Archimedes Palimpsest, a tenth-century parchment manuscript in which important writings by the Greek mathematician were discovered hidden underneath later texts (Easton and Noel). This paper explores what an apparently silly, CGI-laden, critically disparaged adventure blockbuster can teach us about the power of cinematic space and how it may point the way to critical practice, specifically the potential rewards of applying "a spatial lens" in the analysis of films. One of the consequences of the "spatial turn" in film studies has been a return to early theories of cinematic realism (Bazin, Kracauer) and the intense illusion of reality of the medium. In this paper, recent theories by Mark Shiel, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Rhodes and Gorfinkel, Antoine Gaudin and others are employed as part of a methodological approach consisting in describing mise en scène as an open door to real places and their history.

Using geographer Doreen Massey's description of space as "a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (*For Space* 2005), I argue that films contain, palimpsest-like, a multiplicity of stories about places that can be accessed through spatial analysis. What is exceptional about *Dial of Destiny* is the way it anticipates critical work and, after placing spectators in the island of Sicily, proceeds to lead us to deeper layers of the palimpsest.

Gizem Doğrul (University of Vienna, Austria)

"I've tried to build my own small world in the vastness.": Negotiating Black British Identities through Place Identity and Thirdspaces in Caleb Azumah Nelson's *Small Worlds*

Against the backdrop of the (post)colony and within the dynamics of migration, there is a growing interest in exploring contemporary literary texts that do not fall prey to the "danger of a single story" (cf. Adichie), but provide a nuanced, multifaceted outlook on notions of "unhomeliness" (cf. Bhabha), belonging and identity development. This paper addresses how Caleb Azumah Nelson's *Small Worlds* (2023) explores the construction of identity through lived experiences of space. Drawing on theories of spatial production by Michel Foucault (heterotopias), Homi Bhabha (Third Space), Edward Soja (Thirdspaces) and Erol Yildiz (transtopias), I will analyse how the protagonist, Stephen, a young Black man, navigates his life post-graduation, constructing his identity through specific spaces that Azumah Nelson describes as "small worlds". These spaces – the church, Aunt Yaa's food shop, and the club – are not solely physical spaces but they turn into sites of belonging and "places of attachment" (cf. Altman & Low). The church and the club, with their emphasis on music and dance function as liminal spaces that offer a place for expression, a place for connection – to each other and their cultural heritage – and a means of catharsis. In a similar vein, Aunt Yaa's shop becomes a social sphere to strengthen the collective identity through food (cf. Cresswell), which has a community-building function (cf. Bauman) as well. Accordingly, I will analyse these spaces, portraits of identity construction and crisis, emphasising "place identity" (cf. Speller), and explore how they "create affective" and meaningful sites for marginalised groups.

Pavlína Flajšarová (Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic)

Places and Spaces, Ethnicity, Sub/urbanisation, and Identity in the Contemporary British Fiction

Postwar sub/urban British fiction explores the lives and experiences of individuals living in the suburbs of Britain. Novels often examine the domestic sphere, the everyday struggles, aspirations, and relationships of middle-class families or individuals in specific suburban settings. A few notable examples of post-1945 novel include *The Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi, *The Cement Garden* by Ian McEwan, *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* by Kate Atkinson, *High Fidelity* by Nick Hornby, *The Casual Vacancy* by J.K. Rowling. These novels offer diverse perspectives on suburban life in Britain, exploring themes such as identity, family, social dynamics, and the challenges faced by individuals in suburban environments. However, this paper will discuss selected novels by Andrea Levy and Bernardine Evaristo as they best develop and interlink the themes of ethnicity, suburbanity, and identity. Both authors bring across the experiences of characters who navigate these complex aspects of their lives. Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island* focuses on the post-World War II housing experiences of Jamaican immigrants in Britain. The characters in the novel struggle with their ethnic identities while living in a predominantly white suburban society. The novel also highlights the tensions between different ethnic groups within the suburbs and the challenges faced by the characters in carving out a place for themselves. In addition, Levy in *Every Light in the House Burnin'* and in *Never Far from Nowhere* explores how the ethnicity of the characters impacts their sense of belonging, opportunities, and interactions with others. Similarly, Bernardine Evaristo's novel *Girl, Woman, Other* portrays a diverse range of characters, each with their own unique ethnic backgrounds, living in different suburban areas across Britain. Through their stories, Evaristo explores the complexities of identity and how it intersects with ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality. The characters in the novel confront issues related

to stereotypes, discrimination, and societal expectations as they navigate their suburban lives. The novels by Levy as well as by Evaristo challenge conventional ideas of space and place, and identity and highlight the diversity and richness of experiences within suburban communities. Through their compelling narratives, both Levy and Evaristo shed light on the multifaceted nature of suburban life and the ways in which ethnicity shapes one's sense of self and the character of the place.

Peter Gaál-Szabó (Debrecen Reformed Theological University, Hungary)

Reclaiming Space by Remembering Place: Memory Work in James H. Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*

In his *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, James H. Cone gives a vivid account of how the African American community is haunted by the spatial image of the lynching tree. While reiterating themes of his black theology of liberation and, simultaneously, condemning American racism from a Bible-inferred moral position, he reinterprets the lynching tree as a source of reconciliation with themselves by recycling the lynching tree as a multifaceted symbol rooted in the American cultural landscape. The lynching tree is turned into an authenticating place in African American memory, which despite the pain felt over lynching and American racism represents trauma work on a cultural level. The paper examines how Cone's late writing inverts the image of the lynching tree as a religio-cultural entity to counter the demeaning meaning imposed on the African American community, i.e., how, by countering the American social space, he creates a place to inhabit, a *lieu de memoir* to complete the cultural trauma work – as the book itself performs.

Marie Gemrichová (Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic)

"She was wary of where it was she came from": Home as a Place of Connection and Estrangement in Anna Burns' fiction

The space of home is the primary environment for children to experience the world. Home is indeed essential in one's development, and it could be argued that this particular space becomes even more crucial during the time of an outside conflict or war. However, one's home is also importantly a contested space (with the possibility of an inner conflict) of diverse influences of one's parents and community. Home is a space of specific practices, customs, relationships, and attitudes, which play a crucial role in the development of one's own outlook and access to the outside world.

The paper proposes to examine the concept of home, as exemplified above, in the novels of Northern Irish author Anna Burns – who has set her texts during the period of the Troubles – particularly looking at her early text *No Bones* (2001), with additional references to the more recent *Little Constructions* (2007), and *Milkman* (2018). The paper will consider how home is described in Burns' texts, considering both the physical space and the individuals who occupy it. Focusing specifically on the influence these have on children and young adults – who are of major interest in Burns' work – the paper will thus comment on whether home is seen as a place of connection or estrangement in the time of the Northern Irish conflict.

Tereza Humhalová (Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic)

Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* and the connectedness between identity and space in contemporary fantasy literature

Chronotope, according to Bakhtin, could be described as a "fusion of temporal and spatial indicators in the narrative". The fantasy genre employs "impossible" temporal and spatial indicators, namely the chronotopes of multidimensionality, time-traveling or displacement, and heterotopia (multitude of discordant universes). Fantasy fiction thus has the capacity to represent chronotopes of the transition

between the "primary" and "secondary" world – the chronotope of reality and the chronotope of the alternative realm (Nikolajeva, Gomel). Based on J. Campbell's "The hero of a thousand faces" and T. Todorov's "The Fantastic" which maintain that there are archetypes of heroes and of their stories, the hero embarks on a fantastic, transitional journey to a realm beyond reality, from which they return changed and having learned a valuable, life-changing lesson.

In *Neverwhere*, the protagonist, Richard Mayhew, has recently moved to London and is having significant difficulties adapting to his new surroundings. He then finds himself stuck in the "London Below" – an alternate reality version of London, but upside down, displaying a fantastic and unrealistic version of the city wherein places have been variously altered and instead of people, there are odd beings who assign him to carry out tasks on his transitional journey of self-discovery. At the same time, the characters the protagonist encounters themselves serve as a very interesting aspect of the story to explore through the perspective of the aforementioned theories. The overarching topic of my contribution, therefore, would be the use of physical and/or imagined space to reflect the protagonist's transition from the known to the unknown; which simultaneously reflects a journey of his self-discovery and getting used to new environment/life situations in the real world, all the while making use of the fantasy-genre specific chronotopes.

Renata Janktová (University of South Bohemia, Czech Republic)

The Landscapes of the North: Space and Identity in Philip Hensher's *The Northern Clemency*

Set primarily in Sheffield, South Yorkshire, Philip Hensher's novel *The Northern Clemency* (2008) portrays the destinies of two families against the backdrop of the profound social and cultural transformations in Britain from the 1970s to the mid-1990s. Using a nuanced interplay between space, place, and identity, the novel explores the concept of "northernness" and the tensions and stereotypes attached to regional identity. This paper will focus on Hensher's depiction of physical and imagined spaces – urban, suburban and natural environments — and the ways in which they shape and are reflected in the characters' personal developments and participate in the construction of collective regional and cultural identities. The North-South dichotomy, dominant in the debates on regional identities in England, will be explored in Hensher's portrayal of the two families, one domestic to Yorkshire and the other relocated north from London, and their contrasting views and experiences of the environments. Inevitably, the paper will examine Hensher's treatment of the stereotypes and clichés linked with the imagined "North" as a cultural construct and the sense of place as a key constituent of the "northern identity".

Marek Jeziński (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland)

City as a Space for intertextual remix: Bob Marley's "Ambush in the Night"

The novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings* by Marlon James is a literary interpretation of local history intertwined in the context of political events in the area where the story takes place. In the presentation, I focus on the chapter entitled "Ambush in the Night," which brings the story of the attempt of Bob Marley's murder by unknown perpetrators on December 5, 1976. It is a starting point for showing the broader contexts of Kingston's criminal circles and their entanglement with the national politics of Jamaica in the 1970s. Kingston is a place where criminal groups conduct illegal activities, including drug trade, extortion, kidnapping, and murder. The city is a symbolic center, providing a specific space for human activities and giving spatial identity to the characters. People perceive the city space as a specific Inferno, in which crimes and evil are indelible elements of everyday life, as they belong to the

established order maintaining the *status quo*: the banality and ordinary character of evil dominate the story.

In the novel, James uses oral history as the only narrative technique. He gives voice to multiple narrators (over 70 people talk about their stories in the book), each with their own opinion and perspective, discussing what is essential to a particular person. The novel's "I", spoken as the voices of Papa Lo, Josey Wales, Alex Pierce, Nina Burgess, and others, is multiplied as the events told from a specific perspective overlap, intersect, and collide. As a result, the identity and status of the speaker are the primary communicative aspects used by James, diminishing the content of the message at the same time. Such narrative technique makes *A Brief History of Seven Killings* not so much a typical novel narrative but rather a kind of remix of events and stories delivered by the author. The term remix refers to Jamaican reggae culture's musical and sound sphere: multiple stories, narratives, and relations reverberate with firm sound.

Aleksandra V. Jovanović (University of Belgrade, Serbia)
Imaginary Toronto in Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*

Drawing on the life histories of certain immigrants, Michael Ondaatje imagines the "invisible" Toronto in his novel *In the Skin of a Lion*. The city emerges as a puzzle picture from their spatial stories, which connect the snippets of their histories with specific locations in Toronto. "Geography links the physical and cultural worlds with the fictional, symbolic, and imaginary", claims Trevor M. Harris. Places are created in fiction – in the stories about spaces and locations. Spaces in fiction are both real and imaginary as they feature plans, fantasies, histories, and traces of the daily routines of their inhabitants. These traces create spatial stories that make *places*.

Michael Ondaatje is himself an immigrant to Canada. Migrant culture is one of the major themes of his fiction. Many events in the book are connected to documented Canadian history based on archives. Canada welcomed immigrants in the early decades of the 20th century, and many of them were engaged in building Toronto. Ondaatje imagined them as inscribed in the cityscape, their lives "a part of a mural". Their histories and stories are intertwined by their shared experience of alienation, struggle, and hope. In this paper, I propose to show how spatial stories re-map Toronto by tracing some invisible itineraries of the life journeys of its immigrants.

Karagianni Eleftheria and Karastergiou Anestis (University of Crete, Greece)

Amor Towles' *A Gentleman in Moscow*: the hotel space as a heterotopia and a place for a bare life

Most of the research regarding the hotels' representation in literature is related to modernism, cosmopolitanism, urban context (Simmel; Kracauer; Bettina; Despotopoulou et al.), and social interaction (Tallack; Pready). This paper intends to put forward another dimension of the hotels' representation in fiction: their use as a place of confinement for political prisoners, as in the case of Amor Towles' *A Gentleman in Moscow* (2016) and Eugen Ruge's *Metropol* (2019). The setting of both novels is Moscow's renowned and luxurious hotel Metropol, which, for many years since the Bolsheviks revolution, was functioning as a "covered" detention space for the dissidents, condemned to political and social death. The paper will focus on Towles' *A Gentleman in Moscow* with the intention to approach the hotel Metropol as a political space, which at the same time shapes the politics of space. Metropol will be considered as a *heterotopia*, which designates a space within another one, a mirroring counter-space of a parallel reality, where those who do not fit the dominant system are confined. It will also be argued that the biopolitics applied to Metropol, force Towle's main character, the disgraced Count Rostov condemned in long-life house arrest, to conduct a *bare life* (Agamben, *State of Exception* 1998),

a mere biological living, turning him into a *homo sacer* (Agamben, *State of Exception* 1998), a vulnerable subject on which an invisible but omnipresent sovereign exercises a perpetual and total domination over life and death.

Justyna Kiełkowicz (Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland)
"In Timeless Cycles": Medievalist Spaces and Temporalities in Samantha Harvey's *The Western Wind*

In line with recent formulations of medievalism (D'Arcens; Matthews), this paper proposes a reading of the spatiotemporal aspects of medieval settings in Samantha Harvey's *The Western Wind* (2018). Combining historical and detective fiction, the novel depicts the rural landscape of fifteenth-century Oakham, Somerset, and contains a number of paradoxes inherent in portraying the medieval tradition in contemporary literature. The study demonstrates how the category of cultural memory, along with a variety of recognisable medievalist tropes, such as mystery, communality, and simplicity of existence, assists in the narrative's reimagining of medieval England. Drawing upon medievalism's complex temporalities and the novel's nonlinear structure, the paper further examines the predominant textual practices through which recent medievalist fiction mediates the British Middle Ages while (re)creating medieval spaces. The analysis indicates that, in place of an accurate reconstruction of the historical past, contemporary medievalism frequently offers seemingly authentic images of the medieval that are, however, filtered through modern perception. Consequently, the Middle Ages – as represented in twenty-first-century texts – may serve not only as a cultural construct but also as a pretext for alluding to modern themes and offering a dislocated representation of the present-day society. While emphasising the status of "literature as a medium of collective memory" (Erll and Nünning), Harvey's work also explores postmedieval approaches to individual/collective identity and the environment. In addition, the novel's extensive references to the late medieval religiousness and the employment of symbolic spaces facilitate the discussion of spirituality, morality, and fate.

Pekka Kilpeläinen (University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland)

Posthumanist Spatiality: Traumatic Cultural Memory in Daniel Black's *The Sacred Place*

The legacy of slavery and the history of racial discrimination may be grasped in terms of traumatic cultural memory that continues to haunt American society. Daniel Black's novel *The Sacred Place* (2007) negotiates this collective trauma and its aftermaths by reimagining and narrativizing the brutal racist murder of Emmett Till that occurred in 1955 in Money, Mississippi. Importantly, in depicting the rise of black resistance as a response to the murder, *The Sacred Place* adopts what may be read as a posthumanist approach by constructing a supernatural space of resistance. This central cultural space, the Sacred Place, is, on the one hand, a clearing in the forest where racist violence has occurred. On the other hand, it is also a site of communal celebration, where humans, nonhuman animals, plants, and ancestral spirits coexist and communicate across the conventional boundaries of reality as established and maintained by Western modernity. The narrative negotiates the murder through the presence and support of past generations and transforms the Sacred Place into a posthumanist space of resistance. Emmett Till's memory is thereby reconfigured and reclaimed as not merely traumatic, but as an empowering and mobilizing impulse on multiple levels. Through this conceptualization of the Sacred Place in terms of posthumanist spatiality, inspired by such scholars as Cary Wolfe, Mary Louise Pratt, Michel Foucault, and Fredric Jameson, the novel constructs a counternarrative to the tenets of rationality and demystification of Western modernity and its racist tendencies.

Michał Klata (University of Warsaw, Poland)

Cognitive Estrangement in (Cyber)Space: Psychological, Social, and Philosophical Implications of the (De)Construction of Spatiality in William Gibson's *Sprawl* Trilogy

The rise of AI and concerns about the singularity make cyberpunk perhaps more relevant than ever. William Gibson's 'Sprawl' trilogy of *Neuromancer* (1984), *Count Zero* (1986), and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988) are considered the main works among those that provided the foundation for the genre. The analysis is based on the researcher's own theory of cognitive estrangement, elaborating on the ideas of the author of the term Darko Suvin. The theory proposes that there are 3 aspects of cognitive estrangement: a) *sensitization*, by which the text is estranged, which encourages critical reading; b) *motif*, whereby cognitive estrangement is a motif within the text, e.g. when experienced by the characters when transformed by a journey they no longer take their homeland for granted; c) *message* that invites the readers to question the basic assumptions of their society. The analysis spans a number of locations in the trilogy, seeking to reveal the structure of space in the novels, its impact with regard to cognitive estrangement as the characters navigate the imaginary world, the readers try to make sense it, or the questions posed by the text, as well as the literary tools used to that effect.

Kateřina Kovářová (University of South Bohemia and Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic)

From *The Orchard Keeper* to *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris*: Cormac McCarthy's Tennessee

This paper focuses on the formative influence of Tennessee and the Appalachian region on the fiction of American author Cormac McCarthy (1933–2023). McCarthy spent his youth in Tennessee, which became the setting of his first novels. His familiarity with Appalachia enabled McCarthy to describe the industrial transformation of the region and its consequences for both the land itself and the local communities. One of the major forces in this process was the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) established in 1933, which immediately started to develop the power-producing potential of the Tennessee River. This process had also a personal dimension for McCarthy since his father was a TVA attorney and much of McCarthy's writing seems to be an argument against the actions of his father and those who altered the region in the name of economic progress.

While the author's later works are predominantly set in the American Southwest, his last novels revisit the familiar locations of the Volunteer State. The aim of this paper is to discuss the significance of Tennessee in McCarthy's novels and to explore the connections between McCarthy's first and last novels, including not only the overt mentions in *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris* (both 2022) but also the enigmatic traces of Tennessee in *The Road* (2006).

Imke Lichterfeld (University of Bonn, Germany)

Seascapes, strands, and ecocritical awareness

Borderlands like the seashore encapsulate a liminal value (Singer), and textual representations of the beach often concern an individual's relation with the sea. Such connections are depicted in various travelogues, in nature writing, but also in novels of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Reaching a remote end of the world connects humans – and thus characters in prose writing – with their past, as well as their present and future. Walking the shore, sometimes just standing on the beach watching the waves or the endless horizon can evoke a postsecular awareness of water that transcends and connects with ideas of timelessness and the blue humanities (Mentz). This is often presented as a sensual encounter: haptic, visual, even olfactory. This paper would like to delve deeper into an autobiographic, non-fictional writing describing the shore, the sea, and water itself as a place of (re)discovery – of humanity and one's own identity. The proposed talk will dissect such a sense of an individual yet

collectively appealing experience focusing on Jean Sprackland's narrative logbook *Strand. A Year of Discoveries on the Beach* (2012). Reading the sea, the tides, and the flotsam and jetsam on the sand allows to understand it as a place of guardianship even in times of pollution. Deciphering its history and context proves illuminating and humbling.

Jakub Lipski (Kazimierz Wielki University, Bydgoszcz, Poland)

The Thames estuary in Peter Ackroyd's *Thames* and *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*

In *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* (2008), Peter Ackroyd elaborates on the (post)romantic entanglement of landscape and identity. Mary Shelley's word-paintings are "alive" again as Ackroyd skilfully explores the potential of the landscape not only to inform characterisation, but also – I will argue – to serve the broader metafictive purposes. The landscapes sketched by Ackroyd, ranging from clichéd mountain sceneries to more conceptually advanced vistas of the Thames estuary, become metaphors of the literary adaptation processes: the reconciliation of the old and the new through anachronistic storytelling. In particular, the estuary, the refuge of the Creature, stands for the rejuvenating movements and changes of textual lives that Frankenstein's Creature represents. The estuary is deprived of the typical set of connotations that the other *Frankenstein* landscapes (the Alps, the Rhein valley) offer, and becomes emblematic of Ackroyd's view of fluid textual identity. *Thames: Sacred River* preceded *The Casebook* by one year, and Ackroyd's observations in the former on the Protean identity of "the sacred river", the porous character of the estuary, as well as the more general remarks on the imagery of water encourage us to view the waterscapes in *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* as the core of the literary afterlives politics at play.

Edyta Lorek-Jezińska (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland)
The persistence of geopathological places in Rosaleen McDonagh's *Mainstream* and *Walls and Windows*
Recent disability drama, as Victoria Ann Lewis rightly asserts, reclaims place and rejects geopathological constructs defined by "the victimage of location" and the "heroism of departure" (The Theatrical Landscape of Disability 2004). Rosaleen McDonagh's plays *Mainstream* and *Walls and Windows*, however, strongly rely on the geopathological paradigm. Its significance is contextualized by exploring the community of Irish Travellers and their ways of seeing space and mobility. In my paper, I intend to argue that in McDonagh's drama, place is doubly geopathologized, firstly, by demonstrating how the settled ways of life are imposed on Travellers' communities and affect their existence and secondly, by exploring the traumatic memory of abuse experienced in special institutions by Traveller children with disabilities. In both cases, the Traveller characters' sense of identity is formed by its opposition to the settled ways of understanding space and its stability. Both *Mainstream* (2016) and *Walls and Windows* (2021) critically employ the tropes of victimage and suicide, on the one hand, and heroic overcoming, on the other, to demonstrate the paradoxical sense of displacement and deprivation by the oppressive structures of settled lives. The former play focuses on the traumatic kernel formed by childhood memories of isolation, institutionalization and abuse, while the latter on the community's attachment to their sites of traumatic memory, a testimony to the destructive influence of normative integrational politics.

Michaela Marková (Technical University of Liberec, Czech Republic)

Migration and socio-political geographies of division in Stacey Gregg's *Shibboleth* and Tadhg O'Sullivan's *The Great Wall*

Following the success of the Theatre of Memory Symposium, the Irish National Abbey Theatre organised a similar event in 2015 entitled the Theatre of War Symposium. The main objective of this event was to provide artists, journalists and academics with a platform to discuss the world's most troubling conflicts from a variety of standpoints. To enrich the debate, the Abbey commissioned a number of artists to produce pieces, which artistically explored the discussed issues. One of the commissioned works presented at the symposium as a rehearsed reading was Stacey Gregg's play *Shibboleth* (2015). The paper approaches Gregg's play as a means to question socio-political geographies of division. Specifically, it considers the play both as a performative embodiment of the aforementioned symposium's objective at a conceptual level, as well as an exploration of the more geographically specific socio-political issues, the Belfast interface barriers. Analysis of Gregg's portrayal of geographies of division is placed alongside the discussion of Tadhg O'Sullivan's artistic documentary, *The Great Wall* (2015), which explores political geography, articulation of power and the motives of those responsible for making decisions about borders of inclusion and exclusion. Both works question fundamental patterns of human behaviour and invite the audiences to ponder the seeming (un)changeability of the portrayed issues, an objective which, the paper argues, makes such works a necessary component of the debate on controversial socio-political issues such as those related to b/orders and migration.

Ewald Mengel (Tomas Bata University in Zlin, Czech Republic)

"Tomason in the City: Rapid Transformation of Urban Space and the Poetics of Ivan Vladislavic's *Portrait With Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked*

Ivan Vladislavic's *Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked* (2006) consists of seemingly random scenes and observations, vignettes of city life related by a first-person narrator who casts himself in the role of *flâneur*. He has much in common with Charles Dickens's narrator from *Sketches by Boz* (1836), which has a similarly fragmentary structure and also portrays life in a city undergoing a rapid process of transformation in the heyday of the Industrial Revolution.

Johannesburg after the fall of apartheid is characterized as a city in transition, whose white neighbourhoods are rapidly transformed by people streaming into areas which were formerly prohibited for them through pass laws and racial segregation. The city becomes a contested and beamed space in which walls, locks, security alarms and barbed wire bear witness to the attempt to bar one's private space and protect one's life and property. At the centre of Vladislavic's *Portrait* lies Akasegawa's concept of Tomason, which designates parts of buildings or objects found in the street whose functions have become obsolete through rapid spatial transformation. For Akasegawa, they amount to 'hyperart,' man-made but without obvious purpose or meaning. In *Portrait with Keys*, Vladislavic builds on the idea of Tomason and employs it as a central feature of his poetics. In Vladislavic's narrative vignettes, a "hidden history of obsolescence comes to the surface" (*Portrait,* 64). Literature holds the keys to unlock the city of Johannesburg and provide glimpses of its rapidly changing identity.

Ivona Mišterová (University of West Bohemia, Czech Republic)

From Venice and Cyprus to Washington: Spatial and Emotional Geography in Tracy Chevalier's *New Boy*

Time and space in Shakespeare's plays have been analysed through various lenses and discussed within different theoretical frameworks, focusing on both their actual and fictional geographical settings. However, in Shakespeare studies, the distinction between space and place has never been fully clarified, either terminologically or conceptually. Traditionally, place has been viewed as an inert backdrop for the social creation of spatial meaning, both in the text of the play/theatrical rendition and within the playhouse. Recent insights, however, have prompted innovative work in Shakespeare studies that

increasingly emphasises the concept of "emplacement". Drawing on the idea of intertextual geography, inspired by Laurence Publicover's concept of "intertheatrical geography", this paper examines how space is constructed in *New Boy* (2017), a modern reimagining of *Othello* by the American-British writer Tracy Chevalier, published as part of the Hogarth Shakespeare series. The paper first explores how Shakespeare's settings of Venice and Cyprus are invoked or reinterpreted in Chevalier's short novel, which is set in 1970s Washington. It further considers how the narrative's locations correspond to the emotional landscapes depicted in the novel.

Ladislav Nagy (University of South Bohemia, Czech Republic)
The Limits of the City in Iain Sinclair's Work
What are the limits of London? Are the boundaries just geographical? The paper will focus on the work of Iain Sinclair as it developed in the past thirty years. It will pay particular attention to Sinclair's work with mythologies, both inherited and invented, and the way he uses them to subvert the dominant political narratives. Sinclair's work will be compared to other writers who were interested in the topic of the city and will investigate to what extent the development of Sinclair's work reflects the changing political landscape of London and Britain at large. The paper will argue that the very concept of the limits of the city has undergone a major change as Sinclair's work developed and moved from the centre to the periphery.

Tijana Parezanović (Alfa BK University, Serbia)
Chronotope of the Threshold in M. G. Sanchez's Literary Cartography of Gibraltar in *Jonathan Gallardo*

The very fact that contemporary Anglophone literatures are created in diverse places across the globe puts not only the writer in the position of a mapmaker, as Robert Tally Jr. claims, but also the literary researcher. It is from this position of literary cartography that this presentation aims to explore the 2015 novel *Jonathan Gallardo* by prominent Gibraltarian Anglophone author M. G. Sanchez. The eponymous protagonist, a seemingly common young man, experiences a series of uncommon sensations in contact with particular locations in his native Gibraltar. He hears voices which either echo violent events from the past or prophesy forthcoming misfortunes, which seriously affects his everyday life. The analysis of the novel is framed by the theoretical concept of Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope of the threshold, which is in *Jonathan Gallardo* related to the liminal places such as staircases and passageways, and which indicates a moment of crisis or epiphany, also signalling a break with the course of biographical time. Within this framework, the aim of the analysis is to illustrate the chronotopic imagery of Sanchez's *Jonathan Gallardo* as an example of contemporary Gibraltarian Anglophone literature, and thus contribute to the literary-cartographic approach to New English Literatures.

María Jesús Perea Villena (Camilo José Cela University, Madrid, Spain)

Time, Space, and hyperreal representations of literary London in Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton*

London and its literary settings become the ideal scenario for Peter Ackroyd to assume *new rearrangements on the spatial-temporal parameters, with* traces of hyperrealism. The fail of individual, social and historical time within this contemporary context is the result of the use in Ackroyd's novel *Chatterton* (1987) of narrative procedures which make us assimilate the understanding of a temporality that has brought about a chronological experience that tends to erase historical differences and to open *the present* up to multiple representations of durations and unstable temporalities.

Peter Ackroyd's experimentation in this novel is approached in this paper as an illustrative case where to appreciate innovative narrative games and techniques which help the author to create inventive and discontinuous temporal representations, fragmented in multiple temporal and spatial itineraries under the parameters of an existent instability which seems to be attached, from a postmodernist perspective, to the Bakhtinian chronotope, now revisited in the palimpsestic Londonian environment which is the setting for Ackroyd's *Chatterton.* As a result of this hyperreal approach towards the study of Ackroyd's representation in *Chatterton* of his iconic city, we will appreciate how this innovative vision of time and place in Ackroyd's literary London can be enhanced and improved with hints of hyperrealism and artistic representation. As a consequence, Ackroyd himself, following Eco, openly asserts that fictional London may overtake the vision of the real one as these new chronotopes and forms of experimentation, fragmentation and overexposure clearly fit with the primary roots and essence of hyperrealism accordingly, leading to new connection between the historical and the hyperreal representation of places such as the literary and the real London.

Eva M. Pérez-Rodríguez (Universitat de les Illes Balears, Spain)

The liminal space of misspent lives: a comparison of Kazuo Ishiguro's Christopher Banks (*When We Were Orphans*) and Ian McEwan's Roland Baines (*Lessons*)

Apart from the time settings, there is a case for comparing Kazuo Ishiguro's Christopher Banks, from his 2000 novel *When We Were Orphans*, with Ian McEwan's Roland Baines, from his 2022 novel *Lessons*. Both Banks and Baines must cope with the abandonment of close family members, and both see their adult lives affected by traumatic experiences inflicted on them as young children. Ultimately, both must come to terms with a reevaluation of their own existence, and the mistakes that were as much the result of their individual impaired progress, as a reaction to historical and social transformations in the background to their lives: while Banks travels between England and Shanghai in a world in the throes of War World II, Baines is a direct witness to the fall of communism in East Germany. My paper analyses these two protagonists' liminality, both in terms of space (they suffer from rootlessness and estrangement from their own close circles) and time (they never recover from their childhood traumatic experiences, which impairs their mature development). The novels' very titles suggest what the focus of the authors is, respectively: a sense of orphanhood in Ishiguro, and a – perhaps – less pessimistic hope for lesson-learning.

Tomáš Pospíšil (Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic)

Space and Place in *Slash Back*: A Canadian Look on the Alien Invasion Formula

A typical scenario of a B-movie alien invasion starts in a small town isolated from the rest of the world, with the hero discovering some strange, ominous occurrences disrupting the town's tranquil life. Since the local authorities do not trust the hero, he is alone in fighting to protect himself, save his community, and warn the world. Such is the situation of the main character of Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), who battles the invaders in an idyllic setting of a small town in California, while in another Fifties classic, *The Thing* (1951), a group of American soldiers confronts the alien monster on a polar base. In a refreshing update of this formula, the Inuit director and co-writer Nyla Innuksuk situates her debut *Slash Back* (2022) in Nunavut's hamlet Pangnirtung and assigns the responsibility of overpowering the shape-shifting attackers to a group of four local teenage girls. In so doing, Innuksuk reinvigorates the alien invasion genre through realistic representations of the Inuit community, its customs, and various social problems.

In the proposed paper, I will focus on how this low-budget film constructs its spaces and places and argue that its representations adhere to time-tested Canadian traditions. Here, the exteriors, with their sublime beauty, suddenly become locations of danger and fear, while the interiors, which at the beginning offer safety and relative comfort, have to be fought over and reclaimed by the team of teenage heroines. This profound ambivalence about outside spaces (breathtaking yet potentially fatal) has traditionally occupied a central position in the Canadian imagination. Similarly, representations of minority experiences rooted in unique places have lately become a thematic staple in Canadian cinema.

Magdaléna Potočňáková (University of West Bohemia, Czech Republic)

From the Oneiric House to Heterotopias: Place and Space in Polly Crosby's *The Illustrated Child*

The paper deals with the treatment of place and space in the debut novel of a contemporary East Anglian author Polly Crosby (b. 1980). *The Illustrated Child* (2020, č. *Holka jako malovaná*, 2023) is a first person coming of age story narrated by the daughter of an idiosyncratic artist residing in a lonely Suffolk country house. The interaction of the juvenile protagonist with the setting resonates surprisingly well with Gaston Bachelard's notion of topoanalysis as expressed in his *Poetics of Space*, which ascribes the house a crucial role in the life of a child. The kinship with the ideas of the French phenomenologist is further reinforced by the significance of the water element in the novel, which corresponds with Bachelard's writings on the imagination of matter, namely in his essay *Water and Dreams.* The latter part of the paper offers an alternative but by no means contradictory reading of the same text. The attention shifts to the novel's secondary settings (e.g. the circus, the cemetery and the nursing home) and alternative "spaces" (mirrors and book illustrations) and draws attention to the relevance of Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopias from his seminal essay *Of Other Spaces*.

Irina Rabinovich (Holon Institute of Technology, Holon, Israel)

Spatial Dynamics of Eugenics: Unveiling Injustice in K.D. Alden's *A Mother's Promise*

This paper critically examines the egregious actions of American authorities in the early twentieth century, particularly in the context of eugenics. It epitomizes a blatant transgression against human rights and dignity, deeply intertwined with the spatial and social dynamics of the United States. By examining the dark history of eugenics, the study investigates how American lawmakers, scientists, and first-wave feminists propagated this abusive ideology within specific geographical contexts, shaping the landscape of place and space. It centers on Indiana's 1907 eugenicist ruling and its subsequent adoption by thirty-two states, revealing the implementation of forced sterilizations as a transgressive violation of individual autonomy and integrity within the spatial confines of the American legal and social landscape. This examination underscores not only the historical significance but also the geographical specificity of these actions, emphasizing the role of place in perpetuating such injustices. Drawing parallels to the notorious case of Buck vs. Bell, wherein Carrie Buck underwent forced sterilization after being raped, the analysis highlights the fractures within American legal and social structures, situated within the distinct places and spaces of the United States. This spatial lens elucidates how the implementation of eugenics varied across different regions, reflecting the complex interplay between place, power, and ideology.

K. D. Alden's novel, *A Mother's Promise* (2021), offers a fictional portrayal of this narrative. Through a feminist lens, the paper illuminates the protagonist Ruth-Ann Riley's struggle against oppressive practices perpetuated by pseudo-scientists and lawyers driven by self-serving motives, situated within the geographical and social contexts of the United States. Furthermore, by employing Foucault's theory of power-knowledge relations, the study elucidates the symbiotic relationship between power and knowledge within the eugenicist discourse, specifically as it pertains to the spatial and social

dynamics of authority within the United States. This analysis sheds light on how certain places became focal points for the dissemination and enforcement of eugenic ideologies, reinforcing hierarchies of power and control. Contextualizing the ethical dilemmas of misogynistic practices, it draws parallels between the struggles faced by women like Carrie Buck and modern-day movements such as #MeToo, emphasizing the enduring relevance of addressing transgressive power dynamics and advocating for gender equality within the unique spatial contexts of the United States. Finally, the paper underscores the significance of ongoing legal battles, such as the potential overturning of the Roe vs. Wade decision, in safeguarding reproductive rights and combating entrenched systems of oppression within the specific places and spaces of American society.

Olga Roebuck (University of Pardubice, Czech Republic)

Investigating Consolation: Consolatory Role of the Environment in Contemporary British Crime Writing

The paper refers to several contemporary British crime novels in which the environment plays various consolatory roles. First, it aims to address the changing notion of the environment predominantly by allowing a more accurate and up-to-date identity definition. Rather than focusing solely on the investigation of crime or a subject-centred depiction of the environment, these works show engagement and suggest possible ways of reconnecting with the transcendental dimension of the interface between the human and the natural. The importance of experiential knowledge is discussed while referring to notions of immersion and embeddedness. The experience of new cultural layers of the environment activates the awareness of several collective and individual identities. Such readings have been mostly associated with the genre of nature writing, so the question is whether such claims are also applicable to crime writing. The paper seeks to answer that question, referring to the following authors and works: Elly Griffiths: *The Crossing Places* (2016), *The Lantern Men* (2020). Kate Atkinson: *Big Sky* (2019), *Death at the Sign of a Rook* (2024), Steve Burrows: *A Pitying of Doves* (2018), *A Foreboding of Petrels* (2022).

Silvia Rosivalová Baučeková (Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Slovakia)

The New Wilderness: Redefining Wild Landscapes in *Dart* by Alice Oswald, *The Fell* by Sarah Moss, and *Emergency* by Daisy Hildyard

The wilderness has always been a source of fascination for the human imagination. The impenetrable depths of the jungle, the sublime heights of mountains, or the vast inhospitableness of the tundra have a mysterious, mythical quality that inspires explorers and writers alike. But can we still speak of the wilderness in a country like the United Kingdom, where, in Leo Marx's words, the machine has entered the garden so long ago that there seem to be no remains of the wild or the rural untouched by civilization and technology? In this paper, I look at three works of contemporary British literature, namely the experimental poem *Dart* (2002) by Alice Oswald and the novels *The Fell* (2021) by Sarah Moss and *Emergency* (2022) by Daisy Hildyard, with the aim to show how their authors redefine the concept of wilderness for the post-industrial, climate crisis era. I argue that the three authors frame the industrialised English landscape itself as a wilderness. In the three works, neo-romantic depictions evoking the sublimity of the natural environment are juxtaposed with naturalistic portrayals of the industrial landscape's violence and indifference, achieving a representation that is both realistic and mythologising.

Ewa Rychter (Angelus Silesius University of Applied Sciences, Poland)

"The Dark Beyond the Gap": Rewriting the Postmodernist Abyss in China Miéville's Selected Fiction

The trope of the abyss (i.e., the bottomless chasm, or boundless, unfathomable deep) has long been present in the biblical, theological, philosophical and literary traditions. Conventionally associated with the blurring of rigid boundaries between the transcendent (divine, infinite) and the worldly (human, finite), the abyss has been conceptualized as a figure of indeterminacy, unrepresentability, aporia and radical otherness (e.g., Kristeva; Derrida), and as such, has been treated as compatible with the postmodern discourse (e.g., Pippin). In this paper I will argue that the ways in which China Miéville uses the trope of the abyss in his fiction (e.g., in *This Census-Taker*, 2016, or in *Kraken*, 2010) cannot be discussed solely within the established postmodernist framework and interpreted statically as a site of the collapse of meaning, or as a state in which one is perpetually trapped in between the opposing categories of absolute difference. My contention is that in Miéville's New Weird/utopian writing the abyss receives a different (more constructive) inflection and becomes associated with figures of potency, traversal, reemergence and redefinition.

Valeriya Sabitova (Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic)

The Space of Disavowed Imagination in Sarah Kane's *Cleansed*

Sarah Kane's oeuvre of five plays written between 1995 and 2000 presents the fertile soil for spatial reading of a variety of spaces ranging from specific locations (a hotel room in *Blasted*, a royal palace in *Phaedra's Love*, the university campus in *Cleansed*) to spaces only deducible from the dramatic text, as in the case of *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*. The presentation aims at the spatial reading of *Cleansed* (1998), which according to the cover of the first edition of the playtext is set in 'an institution designed to rid society of its undesirables.' Written as a response to Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse* and read as the attempt of inmates to save themselves through love, the play prides itself on the rich pool of critical responses focusing on the motifs of love and hope. In contrast, my spatial reading seeks to foreground the site of the play as a space of disavowed imagination resulting in voluntary non-resistance of its dwellers. Based among others on the example of Grace, a character arriving from the world beyond the institution and initially determined enough to demand her right to see her brother but essentially acting as a requisite of the institution, the space of *Cleansed* will thus be analyzed in terms of the functionality and essential attributes of its segments: inside and outside the perimeter fence of the university, spaces within the university, and (non)imaginable beyond.

Leila María Shan-Núñez (National University of Distance Studies, Spain)

Home as a Healing Space vs Place in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*

"Small trees had attacked my parent's house at the foundation. They were just seedlings with one or two rigid, healthy leaves" – with these opening lines right under the title chapter: "1998", Louise Erdrich offers the coordinates which will introduce us into the complex story of land reclamation issues, Indian Law, and the struggle of several indigenous women to recover from traumas that range from rape, discrimination and manipulation in her novel *The Round House* (2012). My paper focuses in exposing the several connections that link the female characters with their family home, which becomes the space where they can achieve healing from her different traumas vs the geographical place where their lives are lived – inside and outside their houses. The outside world is comprised by the tribal land and state land, separated by frontier lines. Through close reading, my aim is to analyse the lives of these indigenous women, central to the narrative of the novel but *placed* in a secondary spot, to uncover their

relationship with the self and health throughout what happens *inside* their houses as opposed with what happens *outside*. The physical nature of houses makes them inexorably related with liminal spaces, their physical thresholds translating into portals that connect and separate the public and the domestic and, in some cases, with a second floor that further separates the intimate from the domestic.

Nina Sirkovic (University of Spilt, FESB, Croatia)

Space and Identity Construction in Josip Novakovich's Novel *April Fool's Day*

In this paper, the idea of spatial identity in Josip Novakovich's Novel *April Fool's Day* is explored regarding the analogy between the fictional anti/hero who is a personified disintegrated country: the instability of the main character shows the instability of the state. The novel is, according to the author's own words "an obituary to a dead country" and the main character of the novel is personified Yugoslavia. This fictional story that describes life and death of Ivan Dolinar is a story of a war-torn country which can only live in the form of a ghost until it completely disappears from our minds. In this Bildungsroman strong connections between places, people and activities associated with them influence the idea of essential identity, making it fluid and mobile. In the end, the idea of personal identity is undermined, since the anti/hero represents the whole country in decay. The novel is simultaneously a war and a ghost story with strong satirical impulse and black humour targeted towards human vanity and imperfection, lust, hatred and absurdity of war in general.

Ieva Stončikaitė (Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona, Spain)

A Thousand Days of Transformation: Romance, Place, and Ageing in Marlena de Blasi's Venetian Memoir

The study focuses on Marlena de Blasi's best-selling memoir *A Thousand Days in Venice* (2002) to examine the intersection of place and space in relation to romance tourism and self-discovery through the lens of cultural and literary gerontology. By employing these interdisciplinary perspectives, de Blasi's travel memoir is given novel insights that have not been previously addressed from the perspective of an ageing female writer. The selection of this particular book is also informed by de Blasi's skilful and vivid portrayal of how a specific place influences individual identity, which is shaped by intimate relationships, the cultural heritage, the tourism industry, and the very passage of time. Additionally, the study broadens the trope of transformative travel in Italy, and shows how long-established cultural and romantic images of Venice continue to shape contemporary travel expectations and tourism marketing. By incorporating age studies within the framework of leisure tourism and travel writing scholarship, this study also expands the scope of personal travel accounts beyond the fictional literary or film context, as well as the examination of the meanings of place and space in tourism research, in which an ageing female traveller perspective is still scarcely represented. Ultimately, it also helps better understand the sociocultural experience of travel at both individual and collective levels, and contributes to the expansion of themes and perspectives in comparative literature and literary criticism.

Alice Sukdolová (University of South Bohemia, Czech Republic)

The Space of the River and the London Underworld in Contemporary Urban Fantasy

The paper aims to explore the subgenre of urban fantasy from the spatial perspective of Manuel Aguirre's notion of The Closed Space, hinting at the Gothic and horror aspects of the underground spaces in the city. Peter Ackroyd projects his vision of London Under as The Secret History Beneath the Streets, contributing to the lore of urban mythology. Linking the space of the river to the underground labyrinth of tunnels, secret passageways and the sewage system, Ackroyd sees the River Thames as a metaphor mirroring the city's history, culture and national identity, symbolically representing the movement and change in the dynamics of the urban space of London. The main focus of the interpretive analysis of the urban space of the River Thames in contemporary fantastic fiction is centred on the works of Ben Aaronovitch (*Rivers of London*), Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere,* and Terry Pratchett's *Dodger*. Within the subgenre of urban fantasy, the layers of the fantastic, mythological, and liminal experience of the novels' protagonists will be mentioned, further discussing the presence of the supernatural, the uncanny and the frightening Other, regarding the sense of the Gothic in the British literary tradition.

Anna Světlíková (Technical University Liberec, Czech Republic)

Spaces of Home in Marilynne Robinson's Gilead Tetralogy

Home is a pervasive theme in the fiction of the acclaimed American novelist and essayist Marilynne Robinson, and one of the underlying themes which connects the four novels of her Gilead series. Not only do the characters find and experience home in a variety of places, ranging from the stable family home to the cheap boarding house or the roadside camp, but through these topoi the novels reflect more generally on the very possibility of being at home. Robinson drafts an understanding of home as a site of negotiation between individuality and sociability – this happens with a particular focus on the family in the second novel *Home* (2008), with a particular focus on the individual consciousness in the third novel *Lila* (2014), and with a particular focus on the social dimension in the fourth novel *Jack* (2020), while the first novel *Gilead* (2004) creates the framework for this reflection on home by moving from a focus on the individual consciousness to the larger issues of American society.

The paper will focus on the story of Jack, a prodigal son and a homeless bum, who has never been fully at home anywhere and whose interracial relationship with Della in the segregated postwar society of St. Louis puts the couple in a position where being at home is literally impossible. I will consider the home spaces which Jack inhabits and which the couple find and create in their attempt to be at home together, looking particularly at *Jack* and *Home*.

Zuzanna Szatanik (University of Bielsko-Biała, Poland)
Within "Softly Fleshed Walls"

Agoraphobia was first defined in 1871 by German physician Carl Westphal whose test subjects were three young men experiencing "abnormal fears" when walking alone in the streets of Berlin. In the 20th century, however, agoraphobia became irrevocably linked to femininity; the irrevocability substantiated by the fact that over 80% of agoraphobic patients were reportedly female (Joyce Davidson, *Phobic Geographies. The Phenomenology and Spatiality of Identity* 2003). This paper, in turn, is founded on the premise that in the post-pandemic, social media-driven Western world spatial anxieties require a thorough re-examination. It is part of a larger research project which aims to explore representations of agoraphobia - and other spatial anxieties – in literary works created post 2020. As such, it focuses on an agoraphobic character, Emma Absinthe, from a 2020 novel by Chelsea G. Summers entitled *A Certain Hunger*. Emma is "an exquisitely skilled, absurdly successful, and intensely reclusive" artist who, in the narrator's words, is enabled by the Internet. Some of the questions I aim to answer, therefore, concern the redefinition of the public and the private space in the modern world, and the possible re-interpretation of Agoraphobic Woman. Accordingly, I first ponder agoraphobia as a manifestation of "feminine vulnerability" and then attempt to "unclose" the Agoraphobic Woman. I am particularly interested in the transformative potential inscribed within the contemporary domestic space.

Linda Šubertová (University of Ostrava, Czech Republic)
From Suppression to Expression: Heterotopias of Deviation in the Neo-Victorian Novel

Heterotopias, first conceptualised by Michel Foucault in his 1966 talk "Les hétérotopies", are spaces of otherness existing outside of ordinary space, functioning as counter-sites or mirrors that simultaneously reflect and contest the other spaces surrounding them. These heterotopic spaces – prisons, ships, asylums, brothels, or cemeteries – exist in every culture, evolving over time and adapting to geographical contexts. In neo-Victorian literature, heterotopias are often foregrounded as spaces where the present and past converge. It is precisely in the heterotopic emplacements where much of historical injustice took place, and by bringing them to the forefront, contemporary authors aim to address these wrongdoings. This paper, informed by Foucault's theory of heterotopia and spatial literary criticism, considers the heterotopic spaces in two neo-Victorian novels, namely Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), and John Harwood's *The Asylum* (2013), both of which position the female protagonists as mad or commodified subjects operating in what Foucault calls the "heterotopias of deviation": asylums and brothels. The paper argues that heterotopias in the selected novels are ambivalent spaces that function as sites of both oppression and resistance. They represent hegemonic institutions complicit in suppressing and controlling non-normative behaviours, identities, and sexual desires that must be set apart to protect the status quo. However, they also serve as sites where the historically silenced and marginalised Other – the prostitute and the madwoman – can speak, thereby providing a space where history can be reimagined, rewritten, and reinterpreted in favour of historical justice.

Ladislav Vít (University of Pardubice, Czech Republic)

"Going out, I found, was really going in": In Search of Wildness in Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places*

This presentation will focus on Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places* (2007), the second in his "loose trilogy of books about landscape and the human heart". It will map ways in which this walker-writer brings the tradition of nature writing (e.g. John Muir, Edward Thomas, and Richard Jefferies) into the twenty-first century. It will show how Macfarlane, who sets out to find some of the remaining wild places in Britain, appropriates travel writing for his ruminations on environmental questions, escapism from the urban space, and the role of the wild in contemporary life. It will detail Macfarlane's strategies to consider the reciprocal relationship between people and the environment.

Ludmila Volná (ERIAC Université de Rouen Normandie, France)
Place and Identity in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

This paper discusses the Sundarbans chapter of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) while relating the unique spatial context of the jungle to the identity challenge of the main character and his companions. As the protagonist Saleem is in one way represented as an alter ego of India, his voyage into the depths of the Sundarbans can be perceived as a metaphor for the country's postcolonial identity crisis, "the development [... and] recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place" (Ashcroft et al.).

Rushdie portrays the Sundarbans forest as a distinct location while making use of the Indian Hindu imagery, such as the philosophical concept of reality versus illusion and the symbolism of water. The protagonist's identity and that of his companions are (re-)constructed only after they (re-)connect with their deepest Selves. For Saleem, this means a reconnection with the core of his culture. To achieve his objective, the author employs different representations that are crucial to the context of this particular space, such as a moving boat, the jungle as an enclosure, and the element of water.

Kamila Vránková (University of South Bohemia, Czech Republic)

Liminal Space of the Graveyard in Supernatural Ballads and in Contemporary English Children´s Literature (Rowling, Gaiman, Collins)

Drawing on Arnold van Gennep's theory of the rites of passage, the paper attempts to compare the graveyard image in the Lenore-cycle ballads and in several popular children's fantasy stories (*Harry Potter*, *The Graveyard Book*, *The Wimpy Vampire*). The graveyard is analysed as a sublime and liminal space, reflecting the influence of the English Gothic novel and evoking the feelings of uncertainty and hesitation, which are crucial for Tzvetan Todorov's concept of fantasy. Accordingly, in Bakhtin's terminology, the graveyard can be considered a threshold space that confronts the protagonist with different dimensions of the reality. The links between the particular versions of ballads (both medieval and romantic) and contemporary children's novels are explored with respect to the ambiguity of the graveyard space, as well as of the experience of the young characters. In particular, Gennep's and Twitchell's perspectives are employed in the analysis of the liminal point of transition as an important part of the young heroes´ complicated search for identity.

Clare Wallace (Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic)
Sites of Conflict, Spaces of Resilience in Northern Irish Fiction
In her 2016 book, *Post-Agreement Northern Irish Literature: Lost in a Liminal Space?* Birte Heidemann argues that "negative liminality" is a persistent feature of post-Agreement political and cultural environments, resulting in diverse states of suspension. Yet in recent Northern Irish fiction, and particularly writing by women, it could be argued that such states of suspension and sites of conflict are actively transformed by experimental approaches to narrating place and space. Drawing on Sten Pultz Moslund's work on topopoesis, this paper proposes an exploration of "the production – or the poiesis or presencing – of place in literature through the enduring interconnections between place, language, and bodily sensation" ("The Presencing of Place in Literature Toward an Embodied Topopoetic Mode of Reading" 2011) in two striking recent Northern Irish novels: Anna Burns' *Milkman* (2018) and Jan Carson's *The Raptures* (2022). Both these texts craft a heightened sensitivity to the sensory experience of being in and being from Northern Ireland through disruptive semioscapes, narrative situations and distorted temporalities. Producing narrative spaces of confinement, threat and discomfort both novels at the same time map an affective geography that radically alters suspended and negative liminalities so associated with Northern Irish experience and culture. This paper will analyse how the affective geographies of *Milkman* and *The Raptures* propose re-routings through over-determined and trauma-scarred stories to open spaces for resilience, difference and creative change.