

CFP

Liquid Futures: SF, Postapocalypse and Fantasy in the Neoliberal Era

Organised by Johannes Kaminski, Olesia Medukha and Igor Tyšš (Institute of World Literature, Slovak Academy of Science)

Confirmed keynote: Michal Hvorecký (author)

The fragmentation of our shared reality is accelerating, a process that began with the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the advent of neoliberal markets. Amid the waning appeal of ideological projects on both sides of the Iron Curtain, societies and communities retreated from the imaginaries that had previously provided orientation or, at least, a set of shared symbols. Arguably, this sense of fragmentation manifests in literature as a pronounced departure from realist norms of world-building, as the three genres situate their plots in non-empirical environments. While often dismissed as epiphenomena of the neoliberal book market, SF, fantasy and postapocalyptic fiction emerge from diverse traditions, including utopian writing, Christian and pagan myths and Gothic fiction. Rather than nurturing escapism, the flight of fancy responds to the collapse of social and political certainties, as the promises of liberal modernity and technological rationality appear increasingly incapable of producing greater equity, justice or a desirable future. While notable examples of genre fiction embrace nihilistic scenarios of how the world ends, others passionately renegotiate the horizon of the imaginable future. If the existing world is, as is often claimed, without alternatives, why not begin imagining different worlds altogether?

This conference brings together literary and intermedia scholars to discuss texts from Central Europe and beyond – that is, literature written in Czech, Croatian, German, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Russian, Serbian, Slovenian, Slovak, Ukrainian and other languages. The transnational circulation of English-language texts will also be considered. The topics may cover the range from highbrow writers such as László Krasznahorkai and Dubravka Ugrešić to popular writers such as Andrzej Sapkowski and Frank Schätzing.

- What is the place of SF, fantasy and postapocalyptic fiction in contemporary criticism?
- How much relevance do discussions on the “New Weird” (Miéville 2009) possess beyond the Anglo-American sphere?
- As the neoliberal book market reorganises the literary field (Huehls & Greenwald Smiths 2017), how do SF, fantasy and postapocalyptic fiction carve out their own field?
- How is the reworking of myth gendered? Is there a male equivalent to female authors’ “gynocentric reinvention” of Slavic myth (Amenta 2000)?
- How do fantastic and postapocalyptic narratives imagine possible futures beyond political, ecological or social collapse?
- What makes fantasy fiction such a powerful tool for imagining ecological futures in the Anthropocene (Oziewicz, Attebery & Dedinová 2022)?
- How do local histories and transgenerational trauma find articulation through the fantastic?
- How might we distinguish the ideological nihilism in SF and postapocalyptic fiction from its commitment to explore uncertainty?
- What distinguishes *immersive* forms of fantastic narration from representations of the fantastic as *intrusion* (Mendlesohn 2008)?

Location: Institute of World Literature, Slovak Academy of Sciences (Bratislava)

Dates: 25 & 26 November 2026

Deadline for abstract submission: 15 July 2026

Travel and accommodation bursaries will be available for select participants.