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THE RESEARCH CENTRE “NONANTHROPOCENTRIC CULTURAL SUBJECTIVITY” – PART OF THE PROGRAMME “INITIATIVE OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE – RESEARCH UNIVERSITY” OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

**THE INSTITUTE OF MODERN LANGUAGES, PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY OF KRAKOW,
THE INSTITUTE OF GERMAN STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW
AND THE BOTANICAL GARDEN OF WARSAW**

IN COLLABORATION WITH

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LOS ANGELES,

INSTITUT FÜR MEDIENKULTURWISSENSCHAFT, ALBERT-LUDWIGS-UNIVERSITÄT
FREIBURG

LITLINAL RESEARCH GROUP, DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOGÍA INGLESA Y ALEMANA,
UNIVERSIDADE DE SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

would like to invite you to participate in the international conference “Literature and Botany,” organized as part of the interuniversity research project “Literature – Contexts,” initiated by the Institute of German Studies of the University of Warsaw and the Institute of Modern Languages of the Pedagogical University of Krakow. The conference is going to take place on May 20-22, 2022, in hybrid format: in-person in Warsaw and on ZOOM.

Ever since the dawn of mankind, plants have constituted a significant elements of humans’ symbolic imaginary, especially in the sphere of mythology-religion. The topos of the cosmic tree establishing the *axis mundi* and its variants, which include The Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden or – in the vitalist versions – the *Etz Chaim*, known from the Kabbalah, appears in almost all cultures: e.g., the Chinese mulberry *Fusang*, the Sumerian *Schaluppu* or the *Yggdrasil* ash tree known from Nordic sagas. Plants have also played a significant role in religious rituals, to mention the Vedic soma and the Iranian haoma, known for their function of expanding awareness.

Simultaneously with the development of phytotherapy, a systematic knowledge of the world of plants and its correlation with the human body also appeared, giving rise to the science of botany. Theophrastus of Eresos (approx. 371-287 B.C), the author of *Περὶ φυτῶν ἱστορίαι* (Latin, *Historia plantarum*), a work which was influential through early modernity, is known as the father of this science. The European Middle Ages brought about a number of herbaria and herbal medicine encyclopedia (Walahfrid of Reichenau’s *Liber de cultura hortorum*, Hildegard of Bingen’s *Physica*, Alberth the Great’s *De Vegetabilibus*, Konrad of Megenberg’s *Book of Nature*), which were often not only scientific treatises but also works of art.

Albrecht von Haller’s poem “Die Alpen” (1729) marks the pinnacle of the interconnectedness of botany and literature in the modern world. The text includes numerous footnotes pertaining to the plants mentioned in the body of the poem and presenting a scientific commentary by the poet, who also had extensive naturalistic knowledge. The same models and imagery which solidified the image of the garden as the *locus amoenus* in the pastoral lyrics of the Renaissance and the Baroque, can be detected in Haller’s poem. The connections between these models and contemporary postpastoral literature, where the significance of the ecological context is ever expanding, have been pointed out in Terry Gifford’s influential 1999 study *Pastoral*. The more distant the landscape becomes from nature, the more marked it is by industrialization, the stronger the longing for the garden of paradise becomes in culture and especially in literary fiction, as manifested in the tropes of the African jungle, the Victorian orangery, or the Hungarian village lost in the *Pushta*.

The (post)modern approach to humans' relations with their plant environment is largely determined by the discourse of ecocriticism, which, in the course of the development of the environmental humanities, even resulted in the appearance of the term "Plantationocene," (German, *Plantatiozän*) a synonym to the "Anthropocene," as proposed by Anna Tsing to discuss the contemporary period – an epoch marked by the presence of humans like no other before it. While the term "Plantationocene" does not come directly from the word plant, it is no coincidence that the root of the terms is the same: unpaid slave labor, which underlies the root of Tsing's term, was ultimately used largely with the aim of increasing the production of certain plants. The resulting threat to biodiversity from monocultures and the mass deforestation of tropical rainforests are currently not only the subjects of public and scientific debate considering the upcoming climate catastrophe but also of literary texts of the "self-conscious Anthropocene" (Lynn Keller). Proposals for symbiotic communication of humans and plants feature prominently in this type of literature, e.g., in Richard Powers's novel *The Overstory*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 2019.

The themes which the organizers of the "Literature and Botany" conference would like to emphasize include the following:

- plants in origin myths of the world and of humankind,
- the symbolism of plants in literature,
- depictions of the forest and the garden in literature,
- plants in folk literature (e.g., through the lens of ethnobotany),
- plants and the topos of *locus amoenus*,
- anthropomorphism of plants and images of plants as humans,
- human-plant hybrids in literary history,
- botany and eco-poetics,
- plants from a posthumanist perspective,
- botany and the environmental humanities from a literary perspective,
- the literature of botany,
- botanical illustrations in literature.

Languages of the conference: English, German, Polish

Length of presentations: 20 min. (additionally 10 min. for discussion).

Conference fee: 200 PLN / 50 EUR.

Publication: Texts in English and German, prepared according to editorial guidelines, are going to be published after peer review and editorial review in the series "Culture – Environment – Society: Humanities and Beyond" published by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (BRILL Deutschland). The publication of a multilingual monograph volume in the series "Literatura – Konteksty" (University of Warsaw or Pedagogical University of Krakow) is also planned.

Deadline for submissions: January 31, 2022

We would like to ask persons interested in participating in the conference to fill out the application form and send it to literature.botany@gmail.com. The form is also available on the website: <https://nonanthro.uw.edu.pl/en/conferences/literature-contexts-posthumanism/literature-and-botany/>. Confirmation emails and further information will be sent out by February 28, 2022.

On behalf of the organizers
dr hab. Joanna Godlewicz-Adamiec, prof. UW
dr hab. Paweł Piszczatowski, prof. UW
dr Tomasz Szybisty (UP Kraków)