



Common Room: Crisis/Catastrophe/Apocalypse?

Płock, 25-26.10.2019

The name of the annual **Common Room** conferences organised by the Department of English Studies within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the State University of Applied Sciences in Płock, Poland refers to the literary salon held in London by Stefan and Franciszka Themerson, an extraordinary couple of Polish-born artists and intellectuals, during the years 1957-1959. It hosted numerous scientists, academics, artists and literary figures and was the site of unique lectures, presentations, artistic evenings, concerts and discussions. It is the intention of the organizer to recreate the truly interdisciplinary spirit of what the Themersons defined as a “friendly meeting place and a forum for the exchange of ideas.”

This year’s seventh edition of the conference is devoted to a broadly defined notion of crisis – both real and perceived – along with its implications. On the one hand, crisis may sooner or later lead to a palpable catastrophe; on the other hand, it gives rise to apocalyptic visions of the end of the world or the collapse of human civilization. Reflections on crisis, whose awareness seems to permeate all areas of human activity nowadays, result in ineluctable fears about the current world order coming to an end. Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic images of the future are not only the obvious consequence of our anxiety over what lies in store, but also a desperate warning against disastrous effects of our misguided actions, a variety of dangerous phenomena beyond our control as well as all sorts of crises afflicting humankind. Such images, which abound in contemporary culture, are in themselves manifestation of the prevailing axiological, epistemological and ontological crisis. In his lecture “On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy” Jacques Derrida reminds us, however, that the word “apocalypse” derives from Greek, meaning “to reveal” or “to uncover”, thus highlighting the potential connection between the discourse of crisis, premonitions of disaster and the disclosure of truth that can restore the lost harmony and be the beginning of the new world order.

In his last novel *Hobson’s Island* Stefan Themerson leads the characters towards a catastrophe, which annihilates the utopian idyll of the picturesque island and its residents when civilization and politics inevitably reach the piece of land purchased by an American millionaire just before The Great Depression. The novel is characterized by the prophetic forecast of the imminent death of dreams for a better world – numerous critics interpreted it as a self-proclaimed admission of the failure of Themerson’s moral theory put forward by the artist in his earlier works, which consistently eulogized human decency. *Hobson’s Island*, like the rest of his artistic oeuvre, reveals Themerson’s trademark flippancy, as the author does not by any means follow T. S. Eliot’s famous apocalyptic dichotomy – rather than dying “with a bang” or “a whimper”, his characters die from laughter...

Drawing our inspiration from the Themersons' innovative and interdisciplinary works, we invite contributions from all researchers interested in exploring the phenomenon of a broadly understood crisis, its potentially catastrophic outcomes as well as apocalyptic visions of the future. **The papers may address the following as well as related topics:**

- apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic visions of the world and civilization in culture: literature, visual arts, theatre, film, music, comics, video games and others;
- apocalypse as a metaphor in literature, film, theatre, visual arts and others;
- the Holocaust; war as an apocalyptic experience; religious/ethnic extermination and cleansing;
- portrayals of an end in historical and fictional narratives;
- ecocriticism;
- awareness/lack of awareness of the implications of environmental degradation; ecological disasters; climate catastrophe; annihilation of wildlife species and ecosystems – reality and representations;
- political, feminist, ecological and other dystopias;
- utopias and dystopias in representations and experiences of urban space
- aesthetics of crisis in literary and cinematic narratives: noir, neo-noir, cyberpunk, horror and others;
- crisis of language, meaning and/or communication; crisis of representation;
- crisis of the notion of truth in conventional/digital media and political messages;
- crisis of the notion of the real: new technologies and the virtualization of reality; literary and cinematic representations of a virtualized world;
- the role of the discourses/narratives of crisis and catastrophes in media and propaganda;
- major crises of modernity and postmodernity: crisis of identity, crisis of ideas and values, crisis of faith and spirituality, crisis of interpersonal relationships, crisis of culture, existential and ontological crises, epistemological crisis, crisis/end of “grand narratives”, crisis of authority in society, crisis of tradition and others;
- crisis of traditional genres and/or an aesthetic crisis in literature, film, theatre, music, visual arts and others;
- crisis/eclipse of the canon in culture: literature, arts, education and other fields;
- crisis/eclipse of traditional cultural patterns related to sexuality, human body and/or social roles along with its representations in literature, film and visual arts;
- crisis/eclipse of hegemony: culture, power, empires, patriarchy, masculinity and others;
- economic, financial, political and social crises/catastrophes throughout history and their consequences;
- the notion of crisis in philosophy of history; crisis as a philosophical category;
- migrant crisis and its implications; how culture and arts respond to the migrant crisis;
- crisis of (liberal/deliberative) democracy; crisis/eclipse of traditional political categories. structures and institutions;
- crisis as an opportunity in politics, business, economy, psychology, culture and other fields;
- crisis management; managing through crises; management by crisis;
- life crises/catastrophes/apocalypses – personal and developmental – and/or their representations in literature, film and visual arts: mourning and loss, relationship breakdowns, loss of status, losing control of your life, loss of dignity, addictions, adolescence, midlife crisis, old age and others.

Since it is our goal to run the conference in the spirit of the Themersonian Common Room, which was so interdisciplinary and versatile that it escaped facile categorization, we cordially invite not only specialists in philology, literature studies, cultural studies, linguistics and translation studies but also representatives of other academic disciplines such as film studies, media studies, political science, economics, sociology, pedagogy, psychology, philosophy, history, ethnography, arts studies, etc. to join the discussion.

The conference is part of the annual Themersons Festival (the festival's website: <https://www.facebook.com/themerson/>), commemorating and celebrating the creative output of Stefan, who was born in Płock, and his wife Franciszka. All delegates will be able to participate in the numerous events of the festival including workshops, concerts, exhibitions, theatrical performances and film screenings. **All the key information concerning Płock, the Themersons Festival, the previous editions of the Common Room Conference as well as useful travel and accommodation tips can be found on our new website: <https://pwszplock.pl/common-room-conferences/>**

The conference languages will be Polish and English. We welcome submissions for papers in English or Polish from experienced researchers as well as graduate students, PhD candidates or anyone with a keen interest in the theme of the conference. **Abstracts in English or Polish (max. 250 words) along with the title of the proposed paper and short information about the author should be submitted online by 30.09.2019 using the registration form on our new website: <https://pwszplock.pl/common-room-conferences/registration/>**

You can also contact the Conference Organizing Committee and send your enquiries or submissions for papers directly at: j.ligor@pwszplock.pl

Notifications of acceptance will be sent in the quickest possible time and the approved participants will be notified by 01.10.2019 at the latest. **It is intended that all the papers presented at this conference will be eligible for publication. Information on our previous publications can be found on the new website.**

The conference fee is as follows:

- early registration (until 18.08.2019): 200 PLN (50 euros). The fee must be paid by 18.08.2019.
- regular registration (after 18.08.2019): 280 PLN (70 euros). The deadline for paying the fee is 04.10.2019.

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Yours faithfully,

The 2019 COMMON ROOM Conference Organizing Committee:

Anna Suwalska-Kołecka, Ph.D. and Jakub Ligor, Ph.D.