

Call for Papers: 11th Congress of the European Society of Comparative Literature

University of Leeds, 24-28 August 2026

Ethics and Affect: Rethinking the Text and the World

Invited speakers

Susan Bassnett (opening event on Monday 24 August)

Honorary Professorial Research Fellow, University of Glasgow / Emeritus Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Warwick
President of the British Comparative Literature Association

Jean-Louis Haquette

Professeur des Universités en Littérature comparée, Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne

Duncan Large

Professor of European Literature and Translation, University of East Anglia / Director of the British Centre for Literary Translation

Elleke Boehmer (closing plenary on Thursday 27 August)

Professor of World Literature in English, University of Oxford / Director, Oxford Centre for Life Writing

Ethics and Affect: Rethinking the Text and the World

‘Questions about justice, about well-being and social distribution, about moral realism and relativism, about the nature of rationality, about the concept of the person, about the emotions and desires, about the role of luck in human life – all these and others are debated from many sides with considerable excitement and even urgency.’

Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*

What different roles does literature play in our lives today? What are the stakes involved in the ways that literature is produced, circulated, translated, adapted, and taught? Over the last few decades, there has been a renewed interest in both ethical criticism and what has become known as affect theory. But literature has always been concerned with questions such as morality, politics, law and justice on the one hand, and sensations, emotions, intimacy and relationality on the other. Developments in literary/cultural theory have given us new ways to think about these questions and to reflect on changes in both epistemology and technology.

For Wayne Booth, ‘ethical criticism attempts to describe the encounters of a storyteller’s ethos with that of the reader or listener’. This emphasis on the ethics of both writing/narrating and reading/listening invokes wider questions of representation, reception, and criticism. It also implies the notion of a community of writers and readers engaged in using literature to make sense of their being in the world and their relationship with one another, recalling Tobin Siebers’ statement that ‘at the heart of ethics is a desire for community’. This interest in

community involves in turn questions of identity, subjectivity, alterity, otherness and difference that underpin a wide body of theory and criticism, encompassing (but not limited to) decolonialism, feminism, postcolonialism, queer studies, translation studies, and world literature.

The focus on identity and community is also where we see a potential convergence of ethics and affect: literature influences both the private and the public spheres. Raymond Williams' identification of 'structures of feeling' provides a means to consider 'meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt'. This emphasis on embodied experience can also be seen in the works we now associate with affect theory, exemplified by Lauren Berlant's definition of the 'the intimate public sphere' as 'a space of mediation where the personal is refracted through the general'. Affect theory allows to consider pre-cognitive and non-linguistic states of being, to consider how these states affect us, and to analyse how we interpret them. As Deleuze and Guattari write, 'Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them'. We can approach these affects from different ethical standpoints, or consider how affects inhere to different ethical questions, exemplified by Sara Ahmed: 'Justice is not simply a feeling. And feelings are not always just. But justice involves feelings, which move across the surfaces of the world, creating ripples in the intimate contours of our lives.'

Submitting a proposal

We invite individual papers and themed panels or roundtables (up to 4 speakers per panel, or up to 8 for a double panel) which address the ethical and/or affective relationships between text and world in their broadest sense, encompassing different periods, genres and media. Proposals may rethink the relationship(s) between text(s) and world(s) with regard either to ethics, to affect, or to the intersections between them, or offer a critical re-examination of theoretical viewpoints and debates.

Submissions are not required to consider 'European' literature(s) *per se*: we also encourage proposals that think about European/Western dimensions of the study of global literature(s), or the diverse relations between Europe and literatures from the majority world.

Individual papers should be 15-20 minutes in length. Sessions will be for 90 minutes with up to 4 speakers per session.

The languages of the conference are English and French. Proposals can be written in either English or French.

Possible themes /subjects may include but are not limited to the following:

Ethical and/or affective approaches to criticism and interpretation
Writing and reading as ethical and/or affective practices
Ethics of representation / witnessing, memory, and postmemory
Empathy, hospitality, and reparation
A good life / a good-enough life/ living one's 'best life'
The human/ humanism/the Anthropocene
Globalisation, decolonialism, and decoloniality
Censorship and didacticism
Travelling, tourism, ethnographies
The ethics and/or affect of the gaze
Affective ecologies / affective landscapes, walking, pilgrimages/ the Blue Humanities

Medical humanities and disability studies
 Aesthetics, aestheticism, aisthesis and noesis
 Archives, museums, canons/anti-canons, pantheons, catalogues, alternative taxonomies
 Queer readings, alternative epistemologies, epistemic disobedience
 Translation, adaptation, intertextuality, intermediality
 Life writing, biography, autobiography, the autobiographical pact
 Utopias, dystopias, fantasy, possible worlds
 Genre, form, medium, style, rhetoric
 Erotics and hermeneutics / messy interpretations
 Performance, interaction, immersive theatre, gaming

Please send your abstracts (500 words) to the following address: escl2026@leeds.ac.uk
 Please include with your submission your name, email address, position/status and institution (if applicable), as well as a short biographical note (c. 250 words).
 If you are proposing a panel or roundtable, please provide an overall abstract well as abstracts for individual contributions,

The deadline for proposals (panels, roundtables and individual papers) is **30 November 2025**.

Acceptances will be sent out by the Scientific Committee by **31 January 2026**

Early-bird registration will close on **31 March 2026**

The provisional programme will be confirmed by **31 May 2026**

Registration will close on **30 June 2026**.

The confirmed programme and book of abstracts will be published by **15 July 2026**.

Conference Fees: (these include refreshments and lunch on 25-27 August*)

Full rate	Postgrad/unwaged	Day rate (full rate)	Day rate (postgrad/unwaged)
Early bird: £180	Early bird: £150	Early bird: £60	Early bird: £50
After 31 March: £195	After 31 March: £165	After 31 March: £65	After 31 March: £55

Early bird registration fees are valid up to 31 March 2026. After this date, the standard fee will be payable. All fees are in GBP (British pounds sterling). (*Unfortunately we are not able to offer a reduced fee without refreshments and lunch.)

Participants will need to be members of the European Society of Comparative Literature (details on joining can be found [here](#)).

Subsidies for Participants

A limited number of subsidies will be available to support attendance at the event. Preference will be given to:

postgraduate students,
 unsalaried early career researchers (ECRs),
 participants from [low-income economies as defined by the World Bank](#) or from [EU Inclusiveness Target Countries \(ITCs\)](#).

Participants who wish to apply for a subsidy should indicate this when submitting their proposal.

Opening of the congress

The congress will open with a welcome address and reception at **5pm on Monday 24 August**, hosted by the [School of Music](#) on the [University of Leeds campus](#).

Plenaries and parallel sessions

These will take place from Tuesday 25 to Thursday 27 August in [Cloth Hall Court](#) in the centre of Leeds.

Conference dinner (optional)

This will take place on Thursday 27 August in the [refectory of the University of Leeds](#).

Optional excursion

On Friday 28 August there will be an excursion to the [Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth](#)

Accommodation and further information

We have reserved rooms for delegates in university residences at a rate of £60 per night (room only). Information about this and other accommodation will be made available on the dedicated congress website in December 2025: <https://conferences.leeds.ac.uk/escl2026/>

We look forward to receiving your proposals!

The Organising Committee, 11th Congress of the European Society of Comparative Literature

Scientific Committee

For the European Society of Comparative Literature:

Riccardo Antonangeli, "Sapienza" University of Rome, Italy
Karolina Bagdonė, Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Lithuania
Francesco de Cristofaro, University of Naples Federico II, Italy
Emilia Di Rocco, "Sapienza" University of Rome, Italy
Marijan Dović, ZRC SAZU Institute of Slovenian Literature and Literary Studies, Slovenia
Małgorzata Fabrycy, Sorbonne University, France
Bernard Franco, Sorbonne University, France
Rosanne Gallenne, Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès, France
Antonella Ippolito, Universität Potsdam, Germany
Asun López-Varela, Universidad Complutense de Madrid
Francesca Manzari, Aix-Marseille University, France
Salomé Paul, University College Dublin, Ireland
Tatjana Portnova, University of Granada, Spain
Angeliki Spiropoulou, The University of the Peloponnese, Greece
Valentina Sturli, University of Pisa, Italy
Georgiana Tudor, Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj Napoca, Romania
Zsuzsanna Varga, Glasgow University, UK
Zoë Ziller, University of Cambridge, UK

For the University of Leeds:

Alessio Baldini
Sarah Dodd
Helen Finch
Peter Haysom-Rodriguez
Irena Hayter
Richard Hibbitt
Owen Hodkinson
Sarah Hudspith
Laura Lucia Rossi
Nigel Saint
Olivia Santovetti
Andy Stafford
Gigliola Sulis
Duncan Wheeler
Paul White
N. Kivilcim Yavuz

References/suggestions for further reading

Ahmed, Sara, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Routledge, 2004)
Berlant, Lauren, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Duke UP, 2008)
Booth, Wayne, *Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (University of California Press, 1988)
Cvetkovich, Ann, *An Archive of Feelings? Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Duke UP, 2003)
Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (Verso, 1994)
Frank, Adam J., and Elizabeth A. Wilson, *A Silvan Tompkins Handbook: Foundations for Affect Theory* (University of Minnesota Press, 2020)
Mouffe, Chantal, *Towards a Green Democratic Revolution: Left Populism and the Power of Affects* (Verso, 2022).
Nussbaum, Martha, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford UP, 1990)
Siebers, Tobin, *The Ethics of Criticism* (Cornell UP, 1988)
Williams, Raymond, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford UP, 1977)