

**Casa de Cultură
a Municipiului Timișoara**

**West University
of Timișoara**

**Helion Cultural
Association**

Helion International Conference

Fifth edition

***Frontiers of the Possible: Borders and
Openings in Speculative Fiction***

**12 – 13 April 2019
Timișoara**

Orizont Conference Hall, Sf. Gheorghe St. 3, First Floor

Organisers:

Cornel Secu, President of Helion Cultural Association

Lucian-Vasile Szabo, Faculty of Political Sciences, Philosophy and Communication Sciences, West University of Timișoara, Conference Chair

Marius-Mircea Crișan, Teacher Training Department, West University of Timișoara, Scientific Chair

Scientific Committee:

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Professor Otilia Hedeșan, West University of Timișoara

Professor William Hughes, Bath Spa University

Dr. Dana Percec, West University of Timișoara

Dr. Lucian-Vasile Szabo, West University of Timișoara

Dr. Marius-Mircea Crișan, West University of Timișoara

Conference programme

Friday, April 12

Arrivals

17.00 – 17.30 Opening Session

Chair: Lucian Vasile Szabo

Cornel Secu, Lucian Vasile Szabo, Marius-Mircea Crişan, **Opening remarks. Helion in International Contexts**

Marius-Mircea Crişan, West University of Timișoara, **Helion International Conferences and New Perspectives on Speculative Fiction**

17.30-18.30

Chair: Marius-Mircea Crişan

William Hughes, Bath Spa University UK, **'a final bit of Gothic melodrama': Stephen King and the Frankenstein Paradigm**

Magdalena Grabias, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland, **The New Millennium Monster Parade: Supernatural Lore in The CW Television Series *The Originals***

18.30 – 19.30

Chair: William Hughes

Brankica Bojović, University of Montenegro, **Interior is Anterior in the work of Ljiljana Habjanovic**

Gabriela Glăvan, West University of Timișoara, **Avatars of an Icon: Alien's Commander Ripley**

20.00 Dinner, Casa Politehnicii 2 (Casa Universitarilor / Casa Oamenilor de Știință – House of Scientists - COȘ, Mihai Eminescu Blvd. 11)

Saturday, 13 April

10.00 – 11.00

Chair: William Hughes

Ștefan Borbély, Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, Romania,
World Despotism and Beyond: The Politics of Techno-Orientalism (A Few Questions and Answers)

Letterio Todaro, University of Catania, Italy, **Children, Cradles and Vampires: Openings to the Fantastic and Challenges to Reality in Luigi Capuana's tales**

11.00 - 12.00

Chair: Letterio Todaro

Emanuela Ilie, "Al. I. Cuza" University from Iași, Romania, **Beyond Transparent Graves**

Constantina Raveca Buleu, The "Sextil Puscariu" Institute of Linguistics and Literary History, The Romanian Academy, Cluj-Napoca, **Time Traveling between SF and Gothic**

12.00 – 12.40

Chair: Lucian-Vasile Szabo

Marius-Mircea Crișan, Openings in Speculative Fiction

Cornel Secu, Lucian Vasile Szabo, Marius-Mircea Crișan, **Closing remarks**

12.45 – 13.45 Lunch, Casa Politehnicii 2

13.45 Conference trip

20.30 Conference Dinner

Helion Circle in International Contexts

Anticipation Club Helion Timiș was established on March 18, 1980. On March 25, 1981 it published the first magazine **Helion**, printed and distributed throughout Romania, which had three series 1981-1991; 1994-1995; 2006-present (82 numbers in total). In 1981 it launched the national competition of short stories **HELION**, which reached its 32nd edition. Helion Club's publications have won numerous awards at national conventions of science fiction, the magazine **Helion** won the award for best European fanzine in 1984 at Brighton and in 1988 at San Marino, as well as **Library Nova Award** for the best nonfiction magazine at **EUROCON** Budapest in 1989.

Since 2010 Helion Association, which includes the most important members of the **Helion Club**, edits the electronic magazine **Helion online** (ten issues per year).

Since 1981 **Helion Club** organizes **Helion Days**, which in 1985 were transformed in the **Session Helion** (31 editions).

Since 2015 **Helion Club**, with substantial support of the **Culture House of Timisoara** and **Helion Association** organises **Helion International Conference**.

Helion has organized alone or in cooperation with other clubs five S.F. National Convention and it was the mainstay in **EUROCON** in 1994, when Cornel Secu (president of the club at that time), was awarded the prize for best European promoter.

Since its beginnings, **Helion** established itself as an important center for S.F. authors, and in the last decade it has become the Romanian club with the most diverse and substantial activity.

Abstracts

Ștefan Borbély, Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, **World Despotism and Beyond: The Politics of Techno-Orientalism (A Few Questions and Answers)**

Interestingly enough, the globally extended geography of the mainstream speculative fiction relies chiefly on Oriental social and political patterns, as if the Western resources of the social and political thought have been exhausted. William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, Philip K. Dick's numerous texts (*The Man in the High Castle*, *The Faith of Our Fathers*), as well as significant parts of Orson Scott Card's *Ender* fiction series dwell on Oriental, not on Western values. The utmost techno-human perfection imagined by many speculative writers consists of a highly civilized techno-Oriental civilization run by elusive, omnipotent despots whose power and influence go much beyond the borders of their region. For many writers whose books become bestsellers worldwide, the art of nowadays politics is nothing more than some sort of Oriental sophisticated "secretology". Do we witness the dawn of the classical democracy, the irreversible decline of the Western open society model? The presentation aims to formulate several answers to these dilemmas, investigating the political realm of techno-Orientalism.

Keywords: SF, William Gibson, Philip K. Dick, Orson Scott Card, techno-Orientalism, postmodern political thinking

Brankica Bojović, University of Montenegro, **Interior is Anterior in the work of Ljiljana Habjanovic**

The paper discusses the aims of various approaches to discovering the *true* meaning of Ljiljana Habjanovic *Salt on the Ground*. I focus on the contrasts and similarities which lay at the basis of Bartfield's argument that *inner world is the mirror or microcosm, of the forces of the external, objective world, the macrocosm*. Human's

inner world reflects his or her exterior one. Exterior is a visible body which is the content of his inner world. Most of the Balkan readers are familiar with the name of Ljiljana Habjanović, who has been made known through her impressive stories, novels and broad distribution of them throughout the Christian world. The author of the novel *Salt on the Ground* inspires me to find in it very illustrative examples of evil, which at the end destroys itself. The fact that evildoers destroy themselves became evident, but the past could not be changed, therefore the ending could be, if a man starts where he or she is and changes the ending.

My examples of fantastic narrative would appear to qualify causal connection between events in her fantastic stories. Her narrative discourse is a set of stories told by adults, where fantasy makes a foundation for the world in the fantastic dimension. To discuss the multifarious aspects of the human spirit and human imagination includes the planetary and cosmic imaginations which have been developed in its literary responses.

Constantina Raveca Buleu, The “Sextil Puscariu” Institute of Linguistics and Literary History,
The Romanian Academy, Cluj-Napoca, **Time Traveling between SF and Gothic**

Based, analytically, on Deborah Harkness's *All Souls Trilogy*, composed by *A Discovery of Witches*, *Shadow of Night*, and *The Book of Life*, the presentation aims to investigate a new version of speculative time traveling, a widely recognized concept in philosophy and fiction. If, in his seminal, partially dystopian *The Time Machine*, H.G. Wells conceives a vehicle capable of sending a human being into the distant future, in Deborah Harkness's Gothic trilogy time traveling is the magic and surreal privilege of a cast of witches, who send their travelers back into the past, although, theoretically speaking, it is still uncertain if time travel to the past is physically possible. The trilogy mixes, within its prevalent Gothic milieu, several well known, already verified literary patterns (like, for instance, the accidentally found manuscript within the dusty depths of the Bodleian Library in Oxford), being an intricate scholarly fiction, which makes it even more attractive, since Deborah Harkness is a well regarded historian of science, medicine, alchemy, magic and the occult, all his knowledge being

brilliantly put on display in her trilogy full of witches, demons and, eventually, a 1,500 years old French vampire.

Keywords: Deborah Harkness, Neo-Gothic fiction, alchemy, demonology, witchcraft, time travel, vampires

Marius-Mircea Crișan, West University of Timișoara, **Helion International Conferences and New Perspectives on Speculative Fiction**

Some of the main aspects discussed in the editions “Frontiers of the Possible: Borders and Openings in Speculative Fiction” of the *Helion International Conference* have regarded the connections between science fiction, fantasy, utopia and the Gothic. The theoretical premises have been illustrated with significant literary works from several cultures, in an international context. This paper aims to track some of the main approaches developed by the conference participants and to suggest a synthetic view of the topic debated.

Gabriela Glăvan, West University of Timișoara, **Avatars of an Icon: Alien’s Commander Ripley**

It’s been four decades since Ridley Scott’s *Alien* was launched in 1979 and, in the three following sequels, *Aliens* (1986; James Cameron), *Alien3* (1992; David Fincher) and *Alien Resurrection* (1997, Jean -Pierre Jeunet), the protagonist, Commander Ripley, has gradually become an epitome of female empowerment in a dystopian context that problematizes classic science fiction patterns: exploration of deep space, encounters with alien species, facing adversities that reveal essential aspects of human nature. I intend to explore the manner in which the original heroine has been transformed and adapted to new fictional and technological strategies that significantly contributed to establishing the Alien franchise as a landmark of SF cinema. Ripley’s avatars often resonate with the changing paradigms of science fiction film and my aim is to discuss this synchronicity from the perspective of film narrative.

Magdalena Grabias, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin,

Poland, **The New Millennium Monster Parade: Supernatural Lore in The CW Television Series *The Originals***

The visions of an alternative reality, in which supernatural characters constitute an intrinsic part of the diegetic universe, have been feeding imaginations of endless numbers of writers and filmmakers throughout history. Amongst the 21st century pop culture products emerging from the tradition of Gothic literature, there are abundant cinema and television shows scrupulously referring to numerous canonical paradigms of the genre. The CW American television series *The Originals* (2013-2018) will serve as an example of the third millennium cultural text in which new models are formed by means of confirming and negating the existing ones.

William Hughes, Bath Spa University, UK, **‘a final bit of Gothic melodrama’: Stephen King and the Frankenstein Paradigm**

It has long been known – and, indeed, openly acknowledged by the author himself – that Stephen King drew at least some of the inspiration for his 1975 novel *Salem’s Lot* from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) King’s intertextual inspirations, however, are not limited to this one highly successful work in the vampire canon. This paper will explore the generic heritage of another significant novel by King, *Pet Sematary* (1983), which is perceptibly influenced by another paradigmatic Gothic text, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818). Unlike *Salem’s Lot*, *Pet Sematary* draws not merely upon a literary heritage but also a cinematic one. This is a narrative of human resurrection and though it does not replicate the surgical fabrication of a monstrous being, it highlights the consequences of irresponsible parenting and unethical medical speculation by way of the resurrected being turning upon its creator.

1. Stephen King, *Pet Sematary*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989, p. 255.

2. Anon., “*Salem’s Lot*” at *StephenKing.com: The Official Website*, available online at https://stephenking.com/library/novel/_salem_s_lot_inspiration.html accessed 18 March 2019.

Emanuela Ilie, “Al. I. Cuza” University from Iași, Romania, **Beyond Transparent Graves**

In the first decades after the fall of the communist regime, due to the inevitable changes of the Romanian world and culture, most of the writers attired by the fantastic genre felt the need to renew the typical formula by using various social and political references. A common auctorial option materialized as a mixture of autochthonous sources (i.e. folkloric beliefs and superstitions), ideological themes specific to the post-communist Romania and universally dramatic realities as the exile. Taking into account one of the most relevant fictions written in the late 90s, Dan Stanca’s controversial, but remarkable novel *Transparent Graves*, we’ll explore both the benefits and the limits of this new fantastic schema.

Key words: fantastic, identity, exile, socio-political reference, orthodox spirituality

Letterio Todaro, University of Catania, Italy, **Children, Cradles and Vampires: Openings to the Fantastic and Challenges to Reality in Luigi Capuana’s tales**

The main cultural address characterizing the European cultural framework in the late XIX Century showed a sort of devotion to the Scientific thinking. In the literary field, the prevailing trend emphasized an appeal to describing reality, also conceiving the narrative act as the equivalent of a report generated by the practice of pure observation. Luigi Capuana (1839-1915) was one of the main interprets of this formulation of Naturalism within the Italian Literature and, more in general, a supporter of the scientific attitude. Nevertheless, the application of similar methods, aiming at producing detailed accounts of the reality, led his talent to the exploration of the disquieting borders of the ‘natural’ world and to point out the troublesome territories along which ordinary experience trespasses onto the ‘paranormal’ domain. In so far, his tales often sound like paradoxical texts, representing the insuperable ambiguity of reality, ever challenged by recurring slides towards the illusory and the fantastic.

Plenary speakers

Dr Ștefan Borbély (born: Oct. 31, 1953, Făgăraș, Romania) is a Professor at the Department of World and Comparative literature of The Faculty of Letters in Cluj, Romania (Babes-Bolyai University). He holds a Ph.D. in comparative literature (1999). Starting as an editorial member of the student literary journal *Echinox*, edited in Cluj, he made his debut in 1995, by publishing the volume of essays *Grădina magistrului Thomas* (*Master Thomas's Garden*). His further books are: *Xenograme* (*Xenograms*, 1997), *Visul lupului de stepă* (*The Steppenwolf's Dream*, 1999), *De la Herakles la Eulenspiegel. Eroicul* (*From Herakles to Eulenspiegel. The Hero*, 2001; 2nd ed. in 2013), *Opoziții constructive* (*Constructive oppositions*, 2002), *Matei Călinescu. Monografie* (*Matei Calinescu. A monography*, 2003), *Cercul de grație* (*The Circle of Grace*, 2003), *Proza fantastică a lui Mircea Eliade. Complexul gnostic* (*Mircea Eliade's Fantastic Fiction. The Gnostic Complex*, 2003), *Mitologie generală I* (*General Mythology, I*, 2004), *Despre Thomas Mann și alte eseuri* (*On Thomas Mann and other Essays*, 2005), *O carte pe săptămână* (*A Book per Week*, 2007), *Pornind de la Nietzsche* (*Starting from Nietzsche*, 2010), *Existența diafană* (*The Serene Existence*, 2011), *Homo brucans și alte eseuri* (*Homo brucans and Other Essays*, 2012), *Civilizații de sticlă. Utopie, distopie, urbanism* (*Glass Civilizations. Utopia, Dystopia, Urban Planning*, 2013), *Eseuri biblice* (*Biblical Essays*, 2015), *Simetrii și discrepanțe* (*Symmetries and Discrepancies*, 2017). He coordinated *Experiența externă* (*Experience Abroad*, 1999), as well as *Ion Pop – șapte decenii de melancolie și literatură* (*Ion Pop – 7 Decades of Melancholy*

and Literature, 2011) and translated G.M. Tamas's essays into Romanian (*Idola tribus*, 2001). He is a member of the Romanian Writers' Union. He has contributed to many literary dictionaries and encyclopedias such as: *Dicționarul Scriitorilor Români (The Romanian Writers' Dictionary, DSR, vol. 1-4)*, *Dicționarul Esențial al Scriitorilor Români* (the abbreviated version of the previous work, DESR), *Dicționar Analitic de Opere Literare Românești (The Analytical Dictionary of the Romanian Literary Works, vol. 1-4)*, *The Facts on File Companion to the World Novel* (2008). Scholarships: four New Europe College (Bucharest) scholarships during 1996 and 2004; East European Scholar, St. John's College, Oxford, UK, June (1999); Fulbright Visiting Scholar, Indiana University, Bloomington, US (March-Nov. 1992); *visiting fellow* in New York: at Columbia University and at The Institute for Psychohistory respectively (1997, 1999, 2000); *visiting fellow*, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (2001), Jawaharlal Nehru University, India (Institute of Advanced Study, 2009), and Universidad de Granada, Spain (2012). He has got several literary prizes from the Cluj chapter of the Romanian Writers' Union and the Lucian Blaga Prize of The Romanian Academy in 2012. He publishes frequently in *Convorbiri literare*. Contact: stefanborbely@yahoo.com. Internet: <http://sites.google.com/site/stefanborbely>.

Dr. Brankica Bojović (born: Nov 3, 1965, Montenegro) is a Full Professor at the Faculty of Philology, University of Montenegro. She obtained her Ph. Doctorate in Philology at the University of Belgrade. She has published more than 100 studies related to *translatology, science fiction, culturology, English for Specific and Academic Purposes, lexis in criminology, legal English, business and legal terminology, semantic relations*, three textbooks and small dictionaries, as well as several translations from English (for instance, academic monography *Turns of Translation Studies*) into Serbian, as well as novels, stories and poems. She is co-editor of the online *Journal of English for Specific and Academic Purposes*. Contact: brankicaboj@yahoo.com

Dr Constantina Raveca Buleu was born on the 16th of March 1979 in Bistrita. After graduating from the Faculty of Letters of the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca in 2002 (major: Romanian; minor: German), she joined the M.A. program *History of Ideas – History of Images* run by the Department of Comparative literature of the same faculty, and later on she completed her Ph.D. dissertation with a thesis focusing on *The Representations of Power in the 19th Century*, earning a *Summa cum laude* degree in March 2008. Currently she is a literary researcher, working for the Cluj-Napoca chapter of The Romanian Academy. Books: *Greek Cultural Reflexes in Literature* (2003), *Dostoievski and Nietzsche. Similarities and Dissimilarities* (2004), *Four Essays on Power. Napoleon, Dostoievski, Nietzsche and Foucault* (2007), *The Paradigm of Power in the XIXth Century* (2011), *The Will to Power - An European Idea* (2012). She edited Bucura Dumbrava's travelogue on India (2016). She worked as an academic researcher in Bologna, New Delhi, Paris, Granada and Rome and delivered conferences in Germany (Köln and Bonn, 2008) and Granada (2012). Contact: constantina.buleu@yahoo.com.

Dr Marius-Mircea Crişan (born in 1977, PhD 2008 University of Turin, Italy) is Associate Professor at the Teacher Training Department, West University of Timișoara. He is the editor of *Dracula: An International Perspective* (Palgrave Macmillan, Springer Nature 2017), author of *The Birth of the Dracula Myth: Bram Stoker's Transylvania* and *The Impact of a Myth: Dracula and the Fictional Representation of the Romanian Space*, as well as of *Syntheses of Didactics of Romanian language and literature*, and co-editor of the volume *Beliefs and Behaviours in Education and Culture: Cultural Determinants and Education*. He was the manager of the research project *The impact of a Myth: Dracula and the Image of Romania in British and American Literatures* (2011-2013). He also publishes on Imagology, reception theories

and Didactics, and is co-author of *An Imagological Dictionary of the Cities in Romania Represented in British Travel* and *Dictionary of the Writers of the Banat*. He organised several international conferences on education and fantastic literature. For more information see http://www.themythoftransylvania.ro/home_en.htm. Contact: marius.crisan@e-uvt.ro

Dr Gabriela Glăvan (born in 1978 in Timișoara) is an Associate Professor at The West University in Timișoara, Faculty of Letters, History and Theology where she teaches Comparative Literature. She is the author of a book on Romanian modernism (2014) and of a critical essay on Franz Kafka's short stories (2017). She has published numerous academic studies on modernism, the avant-garde and post-communism and is a contributor to several cultural magazines. Contact: gabriela.glavan@e-uvt.ro

Dr Magdalena Grabias is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Cultural Studies at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland. She specialises in film studies, American studies, Gothic studies, literary translation and music journalism. Her academic publications include book *"Songs of Innocence and Experience: Romance in the Cinema of Frank Capra"* (UK, 2013) as well as numerous articles in Polish and English propagating film, music and theatre viewed from the perspective of philosophy, semiotics, anthropology and popular culture. Contact: mgrabias1@wp.pl

Dr William Hughes is Professor of Medical Humanities and Gothic Literature at Bath Spa University, UK. He is the author, editor or co-editor of 19 books including *That Devil's Trick: Mesmerism and the Victorian Popular Imagination* (2015), *Key Concepts in the Gothic* (2018) and *Gothic Britain* (2019). His next book, *Suicide and the Gothic*, co-edited with Andrew Smith, will appear later

in 2019. He is currently writing a monograph on phrenology and co-editing, with John Edgar Browning, *The Literary Vampire: An Edinburgh Companion*.

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Dr Emanuela Ilie (born: sept. 17, 1976, Iași, Romania) is an Associate Professor at the Romanian Literature Department of the Faculty of Letters, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University, in Iași, Romania. Areas of interest: the Romanian and the comparative literature and their didactics, the gender studies and the cultural studies. She is the author of several books: *Hieroglifele poeților* (*The Poets’ Hieroglyphs* – 2008); *Didactica literaturii române. Fundamente teoretico-aplicative* (*The Romanian Literature Didactics. Theoretical and Practical Fundamentals* – 2008); *Basarab Nicolescu. Eseu monografic* (*Basarab Nicolescu. A monographic essay* – 2008); *Dicționarul critic al poeziei ieșene contemporane. Autori. Cărți. Teme* (*The Critical Dictionary of the Iași Contemporary Poetry. Authors. Books. Themes* - 2011); *Fantastic și alteritate* (*Fantastic and Otherness* – 2013); *Didactica limbii și literaturii române* (*The Romanian Language and Literature Didactics* – 2014). She is the co-editor or co-author of other books or dictionaries in these academic fields. She is a member of the Romanian Writers’ Union and other cultural or academic associations (A.L.G.C.R., “A. Philippide” Cultural Association, “Junimea ’90” Cultural Association). She has got several regional or national prizes for the critical or the didactic activity. She frequently publishes in “Convorbiri literare”, “Expres cultural” and “Poezia”. Contact: iliemma@yahoo.com .

Dr Lucian-Vasile Szabo (born in 1965) is Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Philosophy and Communication Sciences, West University of Timișoara. In his research he touches subjects based on the involvement of mass-media in democratization. He is the author of the books: *Freedom and Communication in the Press World; Journalists, Heroes, Terrorists; Communication Pitfalls;*

Another Slavici; The Facts in the Case of E. A. Poe: Fantasy, Real Life, Science Fiction, Journalism; The Timișoara Syndrome 1989: Truth and Imaginary; The Slavici Complex; E. A. Poe: romanticism, modernism, postmodernism; The 1989 Revolution in the Timișoara Hospitals; Recourse in the Ioan Slavici's File. Contact: vasile.szabo@e-uvvt.ro

Dr Letterio Todaro (born in 1970) is Associate Professor at the Department of Education, University of Catania. In the last ten years he has taught History of Educational Publishing and of Children Books at the same Department. He has developed one focus of his research around the Children Literature as an area for the study of the imagery and for the construction of sense. He has dedicated many lesson courses to the Italian writers committed to the cultivation of imagination and the modes of the “fantastic”. He has especially dedicated some courses to Rodari’s ‘Grammar of Fantasy’ and to his novels, as well as to the alternative trends in Children Literature during the second half of the Twentieth Century in Italy. Lately, he has been the editor of the volume ‘Spazi della parola, tempo dell’infanzia’ (Milano, 2016), a collected work mainly dealing with the analysis of the recent evolution of the Children Literature in the Italian panorama. He has developed a stable collaboration with the Committee organizing the annual event ‘Festa del Libro’, the Italian National festival of Children Literature held in Zafferana Etnea (Catania) every April. Contact: ltodaro@unict.it