

ESCL/SELC CONFERENCE 2023 (Updated November 2022)

# Underground Imaginaries

Co-organizers: FRINGE/EROSS

Universidad de Alcalá, Spain

24-26 May 2023



The **European Society of Comparative Literature/Société Européenne de Littérature Comparée (ESCL/SELC)**, in conjunction with the research networks **Fringe Urban Narratives** and **EROSS: Expressions, Research Orientations – Sexuality Studies**, announces this conference dedicated to exploring the geographies of the underground.

From pre-Socratic cosmogonies and the mythical narratives of descent to late modern countercultural movements and the studies on contemporary subterranean architecture, humanity has always held a complex and creative relationship with the world beneath our feet. Subterranean landscapes also resonate with the abyss that lurks in the basements of the mind, a journey into our deepest-rooted fears and memories. Life below the surface is enticing, taboo, abhorrent, liberating and sometimes more appealing than the one up on the surface.

Theorising, representing and interpreting the underground involves thinking about how spaces are socially designed, lived in, and aesthetically mediated. This critical exercise also implies an engagement with the binaries which frame the underworld, from the mythical schemes of chaos versus cosmos and light versus darkness, to the political aesthetics of visibility versus concealment, compliance versus dissidence and normativity versus non-normativity.

In this conference, we invite comparative literature contributions that engage with the rich imaginaries of the underground, which may include reflections on:

- **Theory of human spatiality** in its relationship with the literary symbols of the underworld (verticality and descent, spatial symbols of regeneration and epiphany, zeniths and nadirs)
- **Literary urban studies** on subterranean cities (utopias, dystopias, Atlantis), underground urban architectures (sewers, bunkers and bomb shelters, catacombs, ghost metro stations, domestic undergrounds), urban countercultures.
- **Mobility studies** focusing on tunnels, underground portals, lifts, stairs, escalators, excursions, rites of passage, transitions and borderlands.
- **Migration Studies** and literary rendering of journeys, hiding, exile, trafficking, smuggling, GBV.
- **Gender and sexuality studies** on dissident sexualities and their relation to the underground (sex parties, public sex, cruising, sex work and prostitution).
- **Night studies** dealing with nocturnal regimes and their aesthetic representations of illegality, danger and the taboo.
- **Necropolitics**: burial grounds, inhumation/exhumation, mass graves, ossuaries, mourning, subterranean genealogies, archives, ruins.
- **Mythical approaches** to hidden geographies and **folklore of the underworld** (infernos, caves, labyrinths, cenotes, *Aos sí*, selkies).
- The symbolic underground and mental health from a **Medical Humanities** perspective (depression, trauma, psychoneuroses, paraphilias).
- **Anthropocene** and **Capitalocene**: ecocriticism, geological strata, underground landscapes.
- **Translation / Reception studies** that engage with censorship, propaganda, underground rallies and protests, resistance movements, underground networks and the dissemination of literature.

**Confirmed keynote speakers:** Prof. Sayak Valencia (El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Tijuana, MX) + Prof. Rachel Falconer (Université de Lausanne, CH).

The event will be held **in person** at the Universidad de Alcalá. As organizers, we commit to feminist research practices that consider the politics of unequal resources and availability of knowledge. Therefore, we offer the possibility of two online panels for scholars with limited mobility (precarious employment, caring responsibilities, disabilities).

## **Submitting proposals:**

The languages of the conference are Spanish, English and French (the languages of abstracts/titles/presentations will be the same as the delivery language).

We invite papers that adopt a comparative approach and analyse texts from two or more different literary cultures, languages, mediums (painting, film AND literature, for example) or disciplines (philosophy, sociology, photography AND literature, for example). We will also consider other non-standard presentations (action-research, performance).

Please submit your 300-word abstract + short bio to [undergroundimaginaries@gmail.com](mailto:undergroundimaginaries@gmail.com) before **4 November 2022**. Answer from the Organizing Committee: 2 December 2022.

**Conference website:** <https://underground-imaginaries.jimdosite.com/>

**Contact email:** [undergroundimaginaries@gmail.com](mailto:undergroundimaginaries@gmail.com)

## **Conference fees:**

Early bird, conference speakers (until 03/03/23): 60€

Full price, conference speakers (from 04/03/23): 80€

Attendance only with certificate: 40€

Registration closes: **03/04/23**. Membership of the ESCL/SELC by the conference date is a requirement to present a paper (15€/25€).

## **Organizing board:**

Patricia García (conference co-director, Universidad de Alcalá, ES)  
Jean-Philippe Imbert (conference co-director, Dublin City University, IE)  
Ana Casas (Universidad de Alcalá, ES)  
Fernanda Bustamante (Universidad de Alcalá, ES)  
Francisco Javier de León (Universidad de Barcelona, ES)  
Albert Jornet Somoza (Universidad de Barcelona, ES)  
Eoin MacCarney (Dublin City University, IE)  
Maria Clara Menezes (Dublin City University, IE)  
David O'Mullane (Dublin City University, IE)  
Ana Rodríguez Callealta (Universidad de Alcalá, ES)  
Olga Springer (Dublin City University, IE)  
Raquel Velázquez Velázquez (Universidad de Barcelona, ES)

**Fringe Urban Narratives** is an interdisciplinary network of researchers and artists interested in the cultural processes of imagining and narrating urban experiences from the margins.

**EROSS@DCU** is an interdisciplinary sexuality-focused research cluster which recognises the intersectional nature of gender and sex matters, and their intrinsic relationship to our experiences in the world as intimate, social and political beings.

### **Scientific board:**

Lieven Ameel (Tampere University, FI/ President of the Association for Literary Urban Studies), Emilia Di Rocco (Spapienza Università di Roma, IT), Bernard Franco (Sorbonne Université, FR), Richard Hibbitt (University of Leeds, UK), Elisa Kriza (Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg, DE), Brigitte Le Juez (Dublin City University, IE), Chiara Lombardi (Università degli studi di Torino, IT), Asun Lopez-Varela (Universidad Complutense de Madrid, ES), Florencia Quesada (University of Helsinki, FI), Catherine Rottenberg (University of Nottingham, UK), Zsuzsanna Varga (University of Glasgow, UK), Sandra Vlasta (Università di Bologna, IT), Metka Zupančič (University of Alabama, US)

### **Supporting institutions/associations:**



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