

invites you to attend the 19th November literary colloquium, this year on the topic

Good and Evil in Literature

The colloquium is organised on **18-19 November 2026** as a hybrid event.

Physically, it takes place at Department of English and American Studies at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia.

Room 115
Štefánikova trieda 67
94901 Nitra

International presenters and attendees can join the event via Zoom: Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81044215139?pwd=7iDO945v3Hm3prXjX3t73I5dTYn3Oc.1>

Meeting ID: **810 4421 5139**

Passcode: **705110**

Most sessions will be recorded and published afterwards on the department's YouTube channel

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiQ0cksAZYFWfLXH-tUcl_g

Presenters who wish to have their papers considered for publication, can submit them to the department's literary journal Ars Aeterna at: <https://arsaeterna.ukf.sk/index.php/arsaeterna>

**ALL TIMES IN THE PROGRAM ARE GIVEN IN
CENTRAL EUROPEAN TIME ZONE,**

SO CHECK YOUR TIME ZONE CAREFULLY IN ORDER NOT TO MISS THE SESSIONS.

Check your time here: <https://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/meeting.html>

PROGRAM

Wednesday 18 November

9:15 – 10:45

Goodness and Complicity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*

Belkhalfi Abir

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In Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989), the desire to be a good man becomes morally troubling when loyalty and duty come at the expense of independent moral judgment. This issue is raised through Stevens, an English butler who believes that blind obedience to his employer and professional discipline are the qualities that forge a good servant. This perception prevents him even from questioning Lord Darlington's decisions. His compliance with the dismissal of two Jewish maids along with his suppression of his feelings for Miss Kenton invites skepticism about his responsibility for wrongdoing committed under his employer's authority and reflects his flawed understanding of duty. His character leads readers to question whether a person can remain good while choosing loyalty over the willingness to stand against an unjust act. This paper explores the tension between professional excellence and moral goodness, arguing that Stevens is neither wholly good nor wholly evil. His position as a servant helps explain his behavior, but it does not completely excuse his action. Drawing on Frank Hakemulder's concept of literature as a "moral laboratory", the analysis scrutinizes how Ishiguro encourages readers to interrogate their moral judgment of Stevens and reflects on their moral responsibilities. The novel also opens up a broader discussion of amorality, understood here as the displacement of independent moral judgment by professional duty and institutional authority. Ultimately, Ishiguro suggests that goodness requires not only fulfilling one's duties but also recognizing when obedience becomes complicity.

Good Without Innocence: Courage, Care, and Power in the Hempstock Women of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*

Anfel Abdelmoumène

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Neil Gaiman's *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* never uses the word "evil", though critics readily apply it to the novel's antagonists. The novel's seven-year-old unnamed narrator is protected from harmful situations by the Hempstocks, three generations of women who are considered the forces of good within the narrative. However, whatever is perceived as "good" is not always innocent. Through the lens of the neo-pagan archetype of the triple goddess, this paper presents a close reading of the three Hempstock women Lettie, Genie and Old Mrs. Hempstock as Maiden, Mother and Crone. The interpretation is then interrogated through the prism of the "ethics of care" and "moral luck" to examine the costs that come with what the characters embody as Lettie's youthful courage invites risk, Ginnie's motherly care fails to fully protect those she loves, and Old Mrs. Hempstock's protective power is terrifying. Through the characters' analyses, this paper argues that goodness is relational and risky, and cannot guarantee victory or prevent every injury. The Hempstock women thus complicate good and evil by making goodness a state of continual imperfect responsibility rather than innocence.

The Privation of Deliberation: An Augustinian Reflection on Eugenic Legacy and Reproductive Choice in Steve Tomasula's VAS: An Opera in Flatland

Racha Yamouna Frioukh, Prof. Fella Benabed

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Steve Tomasula's *VAS: An Opera in Flatland* (2002) follows Square as he considers a vasectomy after his wife, Circle, has had a miscarriage and has ended a pregnancy when a prenatal test suggested a possible birth defect. Square comes to see the vasectomy as his "turn," and the couple makes the decision mutually. The novel nonetheless places this decision beside documents from twentieth-century eugenic programs that sterilized people judged "unfit" without their consent and justified this as care "for the good of the patients" and of society. Square's consent separates him from the victims of that history, but it arguably leaves the ethical question unresolved. The paper examines this question in light of Saint Augustine's definition of evil as the privation of good. In *VAS*, Square's will remains good, while the language available to him diminishes moral deliberation. The novel's medical vocabulary uses "the procedure" for both an abortion and a vasectomy, and this term, together with the rhetoric of free choice, makes reproductive decisions look technical and neutral. Square's hesitation and his sympathy for Circle show that he senses the moral questions this vocabulary leaves out. Saint Augustine locates evil in a will that turns away from the good, and the paper argues that privation can also lie in a shared language that lacks the terms Square would need to see the moral weight and the eugenic history of his decision. The paper also contributes to debates on liberal eugenics, from Nicholas Agar's defense of parental choice in *Liberal Eugenics* (2004) to Jürgen Habermas's warning in *The Future of Human Nature* (2003) that treating genetic intervention as a private choice removes from public debate questions that concern the species' ethical self-understanding. For a conference on good and evil, it offers a case in which evil enters a good act without a bad intention.

11:00 – 12:30

Good and Evil: Between Moral Agency and the Shadow of corruption in J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings and Peter Jackson's Film Adaptations

Boucharbat Rabab

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"Through a close reading of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Its Film Adaptations by Peter Jackson, this paper draws on Augustinian thought on the nature of evil and philosophical perspectives on free will and moral responsibility to examine how good and evil are portrayed through moral agency, the corrupting influence of the One Ring, and the limits of moral responsibility. It asks whether characters can be unequivocally considered good or evil regardless of their ability to choose, particularly when confronted with temptation. Through a comparative analysis of Gandalf, Gollum, Boromir, and Frodo, the paper investigates how moral judgment is shaped by characters' conflicting impulses and their capacity to resist temptation. The Ring not only reveals the characters' vulnerabilities but also gradually erodes their freedom, raising the question of the extent to which they can exercise moral agency when their capacity to resist is diminished. The study also explores the interplay between free will and fate, as Frodo was meant to be the Ring-bearer, although his ability to bear its burden was never assured. Ultimately, Gollum's inner struggle and failed redemption blur the boundaries between good and evil, encouraging a re-evaluation of moral responsibility when corrupting forces threaten free will.

The Immoral Protagonist: Good, Evil, and the Rejection of Moral Order in Brecht's Baal

Ingrid Nistor-Sopon

Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava, Romania

Bertolt Brecht's *Baal* (1918) examines the life of a self-assured immoral protagonist that questions the very existence of good and evil in human nature. Baal's constant search for pleasure and complete disregard for the feelings of others present a vivid portrait of an amoral individual who enjoys being a "bad" person simply for the sake of enjoying the badness in them. However, as Brecht (1918) depicts the character, Baal is not evil but a misfit who rejects accepted societal norms and regulations. Although Baal might be considered an "evil" protagonist because of his behavior and attitude towards others, his interaction with the world around him and internal struggles reveal a troubled individual who questions the existence of good and evil.

This paper will explore the theme of good and evil in Brecht's *Baal* by focusing on the leitmotif of the play – the immoral protagonist and his relationship with the world around him. Specifically, the paper will attempt to answer the question of how the portrayal of Baal challenges the given understanding of morality and whether the badness in him is a sign of freedom from morality or an expression of nihilism within. By focusing on the amoral nature of the protagonist, this paper will demonstrate how Baal's problems stem from the aneurysm of the concept of good and evil and how these problems question the existence of morality in general. The paper will rely heavily on Nietzsche's perspective on the concept of morality and its impact on human existence.

Subverting the Existential and Postmodern Conception of Good and Evil in Iris Murdoch's *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*

Meriem Chebel

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This paper examines how Iris Murdoch subverts the existential and postmodern conceptions of good and evil in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. Against the existential hero who creates value through free choice, and against postmodern relativism, which reduces morality to a construct, Murdoch believes that good and evil are real and lie in the way we see. Evil is inherent in human nature itself: man's egoism and lack of attention to the contingent reality around him make him a selfish and inattentive agent. Julius, her satanic figure, treats people as material for his experiments and plays with their lives like a novelist. Tallis, on the other hand, is the embodiment of good. He is simple and attentive. With his clear vision comes right conduct. He is not necessarily interesting, but he is truthful. The study also shows that most of Murdoch's characters refuse to surrender to the messy waves of the real and seek images and consoling myths in order to keep their own subjective lives whole. It argues that the good is transcendent, yet her characters attain different degrees of knowledge of it according to their own vision. Murdoch, thus, uses comic-tragic techniques to parody her characters' fantasy worlds.

PROGRAM

Thursday 19 November

8:00 – 9:00

“Heal my eyes and let me rejoice with your light!”: St Augustine's Dimensions of Light in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness

Bouregbi Salah

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Light is the sense of order that annihilates the natural time – time of the fallen body. Darkness is only the absence / lack of light. When the soul is hollow and not sound, due to the lack of light, the eyes are not sound too because they project the hollowness of the within! St Augustine defines light / good as an objective reality of creation and evil as a non-substantial "privation of good" (privatio boni). He argued that evil is not an opposing force, but rather the corruption (or absence) of goodness, caused entirely by the misuse of human free will rather than God. In Augustine's philosophy of morality, there is no dualism between good and evil, as in his previously adopted philosophy of Manichaeism; it is rather the absence / lack of illumination WITHIN. In other words, Augustine believed that God is the source of all being and goodness. Everything corrupted is only a deprivation of light. In Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad exploits the notion of light in order to explore the moral, psychological, and institutional voids of Europe. The story reveals that light brought by colonizers in Africa masks colonial brutality, hypocrisy, and the darkness inherent in so-called "civilized" societies. The protagonist of the novel Kurtz is "hollow at the core". He possesses no light within! The light he brought to Africa is very artificial and destructive as demonstrated by his operations in the Congo River.

The Confrontation Between Good and Evil in Joyce Carol Oates' s Evil Eye: Four Novellas of Love Gone Wrong”

Mohamed Yazid Bendjeddou

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The purpose of the talk is to discuss the treatment of good and Evil in Joyce Carol Oates's Evil Eye : Four Novellas of Love Gone Wrong . More precisely it seeks to probe into the manifestations of these two concepts and analyze their forms and nature. Good and evil are very complex and are rarely cleanly separated in the novellas under study. The discussion will be based on the analysis of the title story, “Evil Eye” and “The Execution”, which are the most prominent novellas in the collection. However, the other two stories , “So Near Anytime Always” and “The Flatbed” will be referred to in order to highlight specific points. In the discussion I will try to show , among others, how good and evil affect characters . In Evil Eye the confrontation between good and evil is rarely a clear battle between heroes and villains ; instead, it is a complex mix of infatuation , self-deception , and obsessive love disorder . Likewise , the focus will be laid on the theoretical framework of Evil Eye. I will demonstrate that in her novellas Joyce Carol Oates treats good and evil “ as psychological and domestic realities rooted in pathological narcissism and the Gothic invasion of everyday life”.

Understanding Evil: Psychological Explanation and Moral Judgment in the Contemporary Psychological Thriller

Oumeima Barkat

Abu Bekr Belkaid University, Tlemcen, Algeria

This paper examines how the contemporary psychological thriller constructs evil through psychological intelligibility, arguing that the genre places readers in the uncomfortable position of understanding characters whose actions they are expected to condemn. Taking Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* (2012) and Michael Robotham's *The Secrets She Keeps* (2017) as case studies, it traces how access to their main characters' interiority gives readers grounds both to condemn the harm these characters inflict and to understand its origins, complicating the verdict readers are inclined to pass. The paper therefore asks whether psychological explanation humanizes evil or merely lends it a more persuasive voice. Drawing on Nietzsche's question, in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*, of the conditions under which the judgments "good" and "evil" arise and what they are worth, the paper examines how the novels, by placing readers inside the characters' psychological worlds, lead them to attach those judgments to particular characters and actions, and how those judgments become harder to sustain once the actions are situated within psychological histories. The paper concludes that the genre strains the categories of good and evil by exposing their fragility once characters are made intelligible from within, and that much of the genre's unsettling power resides in this tension.

The Construction of Evil and Moral Agency in Rumi's Masnavi and Goethe's Faust: A Comparative Study of Nafs and Mephistopheles

Leman Şen

Dokuz Eylül University - TED İzmir College, İzmir, Turkey

This paper comparatively examines the representation of evil, temptation, and moral responsibility in Jalal al-Din Rumi's *Masnavi* and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust*, focusing on the symbolic imagery through which both authors explore the human struggle between good and evil. Employing comparative literary analysis and close reading, the study investigates the dragon allegory in Book III of the *Masnavi* alongside the dramatic representation of Mephistopheles in *Faust*. In Rumi's narrative, the dragon embodies the nafs (lower self), symbolizing destructive desires that remain dormant until awakened by favorable circumstances. In Goethe's work, Mephistopheles personifies temptation, exposing Faust's inner dissatisfaction, ambition, and moral vulnerability. By comparing the dragon as an image of concealed inner danger with Mephistopheles as an externalized figure of temptation, the paper identifies both parallels and differences in the literary construction of evil. It argues that neither work presents evil as an entirely autonomous force; rather, its influence depends on human desire, individual choices, and the circumstances enabling moral transgression. Ultimately, the comparison illuminates how two distinct literary and intellectual traditions employ symbolic and dramatic representations to question human agency, ethical responsibility, and the possibility of spiritual transformation.

Life Without Form, Form Without Life: Privation and the Tragic in Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina

Rahil Dellali

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In its daring symptomizing of infidelity and doubt, Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* embodies a rather aesthetic and religious awakening that is both inflicted and inflicting throughout its lengthy page count. The study proposes that the novel operates in two parallel 'happy' and/or 'good' and 'unhappy' and/or 'evil' waves of family-oriented narratives. Tolstoy, in fact, doesn't locate evil in a person nor does he place it in the transgression of social and religious order; he rather unveils the evil that results from the severance of life from the forms and patterns that hold it. This resonates with

the Augustinian conception of evil as privation, where life and form cannot align under the same circumstances as the good that ought to be present dissolves and disappears. Tolstoy blends moral awakening cues with natural elements; Levin's final realization and affirmation of the existence of God is closely drawn within an agrarian setting. The same pastoral background, however, does not prevent the tragic ending of Anna's amorous excursions. Tolstoy's rapprochement between man and nature is reminiscent of the Apollonian and Dionysian theodicy that Nietzsche has explored in *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which he expressed humanity's 'profound compulsion' to create gods (23), a man's own way of linking form with life and of creating a balanced order for good and evil. Yet where Nietzsche's tragic wisdom affirms life together with its terror, Levin's affirmation is a theodicy, and Anna's death lies outside it. Tragedy, ergo, is what remains in the novel when the good that ought to bind form and life is absent.

11:00 – 12:00

Beyond Good and Evil: Nietzschean Moral Genealogy and the Politics of Judgment in *Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca*

Haneen Amireh

The University of Jordan

The opposition between virtue and vice becomes gradually unstable in *Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca* (1938), where moral identities emerge through competing narratives of innocence, transgression and culpability. Henceforth, this paper utilizes Friedrich Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), to examine how du Maurier's Gothic narrative destabilizes conventional moral binaries through the exposure of power relations underlying moral judgment. Employing Nietzsche's genealogical critique of moral valuation, considerably resentment, master and slave moralities and bad conscience, the study interrogates the ethical positioning of Rebecca, Maxim de Winter, and the unnamed second Mrs. de Winter. Through comparative textual analysis, it argues that Rebecca's posthumous condemnation reflects the intersection of feminine transgression and patriarchal authority, while Maxim's social respectability and justification of murder expose the disjunction between moral legitimacy and ethical culpability. Conversely, the second Mrs. de Winter's apparent innocence and submissiveness unveil how conventional virtue may coexist with moral complicity. By examining the narrative mediation of guilt, innocence, and transgression, the paper demonstrates how Rebecca challenges the presumed universality of moral categories, revealing goodness and evil as contested valuations shaped by power, perspective and interpretive authority.

Beyond Good and Evil? The Ethics of Exile and Self-Effacement in Milan Kundera's "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" and Marek Bińczyk's "Rondo Wiatraczna"

Jacek Bielawa

University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

Can the pursuit of good become a form of evil when it is subordinated to ideological certainty, collective identity, or the supposed necessity of History? This paper explores the unstable boundaries between good and evil in Milan Kundera's "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" and Marek Bińczyk's "Rondo Wiatraczna", focusing on the ways in which both works challenge conventional moral frameworks through the motifs of exodus, kenosis, and the rejection of fixed identity. In the fictional worlds of these two Central European writers, the promise of a universally shared good is often compromised by the violence of totalizing ideologies, which impose artificial forms of solidarity and turn historical suffering into a justification for further sacrifice. Drawing on Kundera's critique of kitsch and Agata Bielik-Robson's interpretation of the Marrano as a figure of perpetual exile, the paper examines how Tomas and Sabina in Kundera's novel, alongside Bińczyk's enigmatic Prophet, seek freedom from the moral and existential obligations attached to stable identities. Their acts of withdrawal, self-effacement, and ironic detachment resist the binary logic

through which individuals and communities distinguish themselves as representatives of good against an allegedly evil Other. Biblical motifs of the Exodus and kenosis further complicate this ethical landscape: liberation requires not the triumph of an established moral order but a departure from the systems of necessity and belonging that claim to embody absolute values. The paper argues that these narratives offer a postsecular reconfiguration of the relationship between good and evil, in which ethical freedom emerges through openness, contingency, and the refusal of ideological certainties. Rather than proposing a new universal morality, Kundera and Bieńczyk explore the possibility of resisting the violence committed in the name of the good and of remaining open to alternative ways of being.