**Call for Papers**

International Conference

# *RIVER TALKS/Paroles de fleuves*

Université d'Angers (France), 17-19 June 2026

In his essay on the imagination and waters, American poet Robert Haas calls rivers "the ecological unconscious" (globalonenessproject.org). Rivers are elemental to our imaginary, to world-making practices, storytelling, and literature. The imagery of rivers spans from the mythic and metaphysical to travel or the political. Hence, rather than being merely a setting or a metaphor they function as dynamic matter and relational spaces in our imagination. This shows the cultural and literary potential in emphasising the relevance of river stories, the resilience of rivers, and their sustenance for communities.

The anticipated international conference of ***RIVER TALKS/Paroles de fleuves*** thus seeks to focus on existent rivers and their local ecologies from literary and cultural studies perspectives. As the title implies, the conference topic thereby touches upon various dimensions of river imaginaries as sustaining an ecological unconscious, from talks about rivers to the voice of rivers themselves.

This international conference invites contributions from **literary and cultural studies scholars** of different languages and areas throughout Europe who focus on rivers from various perspectives – environmental humanities and blue humanities, ecocritical and ecopoetic, ecofeminist and postcolonial, with a focus on cultural heritage, folk cultures, and/or indigenous knowledges. The topic of rivers thereby allows for an array of approaches considering multiple elements (e.g. spring, valley, estuary, canal, boat) or dimensions (e.g. recreation, industry, imperialism). In stimulating debates on the relationships between humans and the bodies of river waters, the conference will itself be representative for the network of rivers traversing the continent and connecting the world, while simultaneously paying heed to the local specificities of regions and languages.

With view to the **different European literatures and cultures**, the river talks of the conference will foreground the richness of literary and cultural practices of river ecologies. Besides local-specific river cultures and products (e.g. Festival de Loire; "Elbkinder" song; Parma and Po regional cultures), literature is of course rife with the representation of rivers and their fluvial landscapes. Writers like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Guy de Maupassant, E.M. Forster, Hermann Hesse, Emmanuel Ruben, Grazia Deledda, Gianni Celati, and many more have set their stories against the backdrop of moving waters.

*RIVER TALKS* not only envisions the traditional personification of rivers in literary and cultural texts (e.g. Father Thames or Father Danube) but also focusses on the **Voice of Rivers** themselves. While the

Whanganui River in New Zealand or the Magpie River in Canada have already been granted personhood, especially postcolonial and indigenous literatures or local lore and folk tales bring into view human/non-human interrelations or the agency of rivers in changing landscapes and reforming communities.

The voice of rivers emphasizes the relevance of rivers as **agents of communication**. From literary and cultural studies perspectives this means that rivers, beyond being symbols for trade and travel, feed into language itself. This discursive dimension of the conference on *RIVER TALKS* touches upon a variety of aspects, such as, among others: the names of rivers, the onomatopoetics of river literature, the languages of rivers and their translations as well as the "flow" of rivers, language, and literary forms. This exploration will be particularly fruitful thanks to the multilingual participation offered by the EU GREEN Alliance and the possibility to foster dialogues among a wide range of European languages, literatures, and cultures.

Last but not least, the voice of rivers also foregrounds communities and their responsibility in advocating the rights of rivers. To this end, (**co-)creative practices** today are used to incorporate myth, heritage, and art in order to work with community groups. To this end, the conference invites experts on co-creation, eco-art, and creative writing as well as on geopoetic, ecocritical, and decolonial walking practices to explore and disseminate these new research methods.

If you are interested in contributing a 20-minute paper, please send your **proposal** (ca. 300 words) and a short bio-bibliography by 23 January 2026. Please email your proposal to rivers-eugreen@ovgu.de, writing 'Abstract Rivers' as object.

Proposals can be written in English, French, German, or Italian. As we wish for a multilingual conference, please indicate in which language of the EU GREEN Alliance you would like to deliver your paper.

PhD students and early-career researchers working on related topics are especially encouraged to participate. One PhD student or early career researcher of each university of the EU GREEN Alliance with the most promising proposal will receive financial support.

**Conference organised by**

Anne-Rachel Hermetet, Professor of Comparative Literature, Université d'Angers, France

Nora Plesske, Senior Lecturer of Anglophone Cultural and Literary Studies, Otto-von-Guericke-Universität Magdeburg, Germany

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