

CALL FOR PAPERS
LIFE at its Limits: Medicine, Literature, Philosophy
Department of English Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary
10–12 December 2026

The conference aims to explore the limits and crossings between the incommensurable discourses of and on life and its limits in medicine, literature, and philosophy from the Romantic Age to the present. How has “life” been conceptualised, narrated, diagnosed, measured, aestheticised, politicised, and its notion contested across these domains? What happens when biological, philosophical, and literary understandings of life intersect — or fail to translate into one another?

From Enlightenment vitalism and Romantic theories of organism and imagination to modern biopolitics, epidemiology, and posthuman thought, the concept of life has remained both foundational and unstable. Medical science has sought to define and preserve life, philosophy has interrogated its meaning and limits, and literature has explored its experiential, ethical, and narrative dimensions. Yet these discourses often remain partially incompatible, revealing tensions between scientific description, philosophical reflection, and narrative representation.

We invite contributions that explore the **limits and crossings between medical, literary, and philosophical discourses of life**. We are particularly interested in historically grounded as well as theoretically informed approaches. Possible topics include (but are not limited to):

- Life, death, and narration
- Philosophy and the limits of life
- Romantic medicine, science, and literature
- Psychiatry, subjectivity, and the medicalization of life
- Biopolitics and the politics of health
- Race, medicine, empire, and the politics of life
- Indigenous medicine and concepts of life
- Epidemiology, disease, and narrative
- Illness, diagnosis, and representation
- Healing, recovery, and the limits of cure
- Disability and the production of norms
- Ethics of care, ageing, survival, and vulnerability
- Artificial life, technology, longevity, and medicine

Confirmed keynote speakers:

Prof. Hanna Meretoja, University of Turku

Prof. Neil Vickers, King’s College London

Dr. Arthur Rose, University of Exeter

Dr. Danielle Spencer, Columbia University

Dr. Eszter Ureczky, University of Debrecen

The conference will take place at the Department of English, Eötvös Loránd University, in Budapest, Hungary. There is no registration fee; however, participants are responsible for their own travel and accommodation expenses.

We welcome submissions from scholars from various fields, including, but not limited to literature, philosophy, and cultural studies.

Abstract proposals of 250–300 words should be sent to life@btk.elte.hu, accompanied by a 100-word bionote. The deadline for abstract submission is **4 September 2026**.

Conveners:

Dr. Andrea Timár, Dr. Iván Nyusztay, Dr. Kata Gyuris

Paula Goddard, Boróka Andl-Beck, Nóra Kele, Dóra Sági

Conference website: <https://www.btk.elte.hu/en/life-at-its-limits-medicine-literature-philosophy>