



Academic Event Report

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Event: Inkwell Symposium: “Narratives Through Time”

Venue: University College Cork

Date: 15th March 2025

Inkwell Symposium is a one-day conference open to students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels across the College of Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences at University College Cork (UCC). Inkwell has been organised annually by the Old, Middle and Renaissance Officer (OMR) of the English Literature Society at UCC since 2016, a role that the author fulfilled for this year’s symposium. The ninth annual symposium, held at UCC in March 2025, explored the theme of “Narratives Through Time”. This conference was generously funded by the Societies Executive and the School of English and Digital Humanities. Over the course of three panels and a keynote address, speakers explored a variety of different narrative types, overlapping themes across form and language and their use in the modern world.

Panel One: Artistic Narratives

The first panel of the day, titled “Artistic Narratives”, featured two History of Art students who explored women in late medieval art. The session was chaired by Cathie Cowhig, a PhD student from the School of English and Digital Humanities. The first paper, ‘Disciples of Mary and Daughters of Eve: Female Martyrs of Renaissance Florence’ was delivered by Chloe Rudolph, a PhD student from the Department of History of Art. This paper examined how female martyrs were depicted as the example of an ideal woman, understood as the antithesis of Eve. She argued that female martyrs can be divided into three categories: chastity, obedience and corporal sacrifice. The second paper in this panel, entitled ‘The Increase in Women’s Participation in Literature Throughout the Medieval period’, was delivered by Roisin Pavie, a first-year undergraduate History of Art student. She opened by stating that women writers are often reduced to a category of

their own despite covering a variety of topics and genres. She focused on three key women; Heloise (c. 1100–c. 1163), Mechtild (c. 1207–c. 1282), and Christine de Pizan (1364–c. 1430) to examine how religious contexts created opportunities for women to become literate and engage in literary production.

Panel Two: Narratives of Medieval Britain and Ireland

The second panel explored narratives written in Britain and Ireland, along with the varying themes and interpretations offered by scholars and was chaired by Robyn McAuliffe, a PhD student in the School of English and Digital Humanities. The first paper of this panel was ‘Terra Incognita: The Otherworlds of *Sir Orfeo* and *Serglige Con Culainn*’ by first-year English student, Jake Griffin. He asserted that the otherworld can be depicted in wildly different ways and can intersect with the everyday lives of the audience. *Sir Orfeo* (c. 1290–1330) and *Serglige Con Culainn*, (c. 1200) though written in Middle English and Middle Irish respectively, contain portrayals of the otherworld that align more than they diverge.

The second paper was delivered by second-year English student Bláithín Smiddy, whose paper ‘Allegory and Admonishment in Chaucer’s “Clerk’s Tale”’ examined issues of female autonomy in the text, alongside its issues of generic classification. She argued that ‘The Clerk’s Tale’ and ‘The Wife of Bath’s Tale’ from *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1387–1400) are set in dramatic opposition, despite both dealing with issues of female autonomy. Griselda, in ‘The Clerk’s Tale’, is depicted as a model of virtue and the tale’s style is dictated more by its intended audience than by its content. She further argues that the tale rejects the idea that genteelness is inextricable from noble birth.

Liam McDonagh, who is currently undertaking a postgraduate diploma in ancient and medieval languages, gave the final paper of the panel, titled ‘Perceived, Transformed and Incidental Narrative in *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*’. His paper defined an incidental narrative as one that exists outside the main text and depends on the specific version a reader possesses. He claimed that physical evidence tells a story of its own and this dictates how an audience experiences a text. He drew attention to lines 1730–1732 in the manuscript that preserves the text of *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* (c. 1225–1230), which are marked in red ink. This scribal

intervention highlights Diarmait Mac Murchada's (c. 1110–1171) death and makes this a special mark within this point of the narrative. It is also the only death that receives this treatment in the text. Liam pointed out that the example of this preservation of this text in a single surviving copy suggests that further incidental narratives like this one may not have appeared in earlier versions that are now lost.

Panel Three: Modern Interpretations

The final panel examined modern interpretations of medieval narratives and was chaired by Jack Conroy, an MA student from the Department of English. The sole paper of this panel was “‘No Dishonourable Tale Will Ever Be Told About Me’: The Function of Tragedy in *The Song of Roland* and Firefighter Education’ and was delivered by Eleanor Lynch, a PhD student in the School of English and Digital Humanities. Her paper discussed how *The Song of Roland* (c. 1040–1115) teaches soldiers of the first crusade lessons of morality; Roland makes the wrong choices, and everyone dies as a result. She compared this to the Yarnell Hill Tragedy Fire (2013), in which nineteen of twenty firefighters were tragically killed. Video accounts of the tragedy are used to train wildland firefighters in leadership roles. She contended that these videos have similar themes to *The Song of Roland*; they both feature entrapment in a hostile landscape and use tragedy to motivate its audience.

Keynote Address

The keynote address took place at the end of the day and was delivered by Professor Andy Murphy of Trinity College Dublin's School of English. His paper ‘Shakespeare Repurposed: *Coriolanus* in Irish’ discussed the translation of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (c. 1608) into Irish and its interpretations by Irish fascists in the 1930s and 1940s. He stated that Irish translations first appeared in 1926 with an Irish performance of *Coriolanus* being staged in 1938. There were ideological purposes to these nationalist gatherings. Alongside this, a rise in fascism across Europe led to *Coriolanus* being in vogue. Murphy argued that many of those attending Irish renditions of the play may have seen *Coriolanus* as a model figure, with the play reinterpreted as pro-fascist instead of anti-fascist.

Conclusion

The ninth iteration of Inkwell facilitated compelling discussions and allowed undergraduate and postgraduate students alike to share their research and engage in critical discussions with one another. This symposium provides a wonderful opportunity for UCC students to present their own unique research in an encouraging and relaxed environment among peers. It allows for interdisciplinary exchange and showcases research on the medieval and renaissance periods across CACSSS.

ROSEMARY KELLY is a PhD student in the School of English and Digital Humanities at UCC and organiser of the 2025 Inkwell Symposium. Her research examines how Old English literary genre creates space for the expression of multiple masculinities that may contradict or counteract one another. She is also interested in translation and reception in Old English and Old Norse literature.