



Academic Event Report

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Event: UCC Bookends Conference

Venue: University College Cork

Date: 2nd May 2025

Bookends is an annual conference held at University College Cork (UCC), organised by PhD students from the School of English and Digital Humanities. The 2025 conference was organised by Ailish Brassil, Gabrielle Dufrene, Laura Mulcahy, Hope Noonan-Stoner and Charlotte Troy. Since its inception in 2005, the UCC Bookends Conference has showcased the research of postgraduate students from the School of English and Digital Humanities, affording them opportunities to receive feedback from peers and faculty members of the School of English and Digital Humanities. Though the conference is organised by students registered in the School of English and Digital Humanities, students from the School of Film, Music and Theatre are also encouraged to participate. To ensure that all postgraduate students can take part in the event, the UCC Bookends Team does not assign a particular theme or topic for the annual conference. The 2025 Bookends conference featured three panels, a plenary talk and a roundtable discussion.

Panel One: Challenging Confinement and Marginality

Chaired by Gabrielle Dufrene, the first panel focused on forms of media that explore diverse representations of marginality and attempts to resist confinement. Ailish Brassil (Department of English) examined alternating depictions of motherhood in media with a particular focus on *Matilda* (1988) by Roald Dahl and the film adaptation (1996) directed by Danny DeVito. The topic of motherhood and relationships with children was continued in the next paper titled “‘It’s good luck, or anyway it’s supposed to be’ Sowing Satan’s Seed in *Rosemary’s Baby* by Ira Levin”, which was presented by Charlotte Troy (Department of English). Pivoting from the topic of motherhood, Laura Mulcahy (Department of English), presented a

paper on the intersection of monstrosity and the atrocities of American history through an analysis of *IT* (1986) by Stephen King. The final panellist was Hope Noonan Stoner (Department of English), who delivered a presentation entitled “‘Here and there a woman....’: Redefining ‘We the People’ from the Margins of Lola Ridge’s and Julia de Burgo’s Modernist Writing’.

Plenary: Queering the Family in Science Fiction: An Overview of My Thesis

Beth Aherne, a final year PhD student from the Department of English delivered the plenary talk. She offered a clear and concise talk, titled ‘Queering the Family in Science Fiction: An Overview of My Thesis’, which summarised the main points of each chapter of her thesis. While her research project primarily focuses on the representation of the American family in science fiction, Beth also examines the portrayal of queer families in Afrofuturist, feminist and Indigenous futurist science fiction novels.

Panel Two: Trauma and the Body

The second panel of the day explored interconnectedness between themes of trauma and the human body and was chaired by Laura Mulcahy. To begin the panel, Gabrielle Dufrene (Department of English) delivered a presentation on *Small Things Like These* by Claire Keegan to analyse the relationship between the Irish female experience and trauma narratives. Following this, MA student Luca Cavallo (Department of English) discussed the poetry of Ciaran Carson in his presentation, “‘Two Time-worn Notes’: Postcolonial Memory in the Poetry of Ciaran Carson’. Due to unforeseen circumstances, Cathie Cowhig (Department of English) was unable to attend the conference and deliver her presentation on *The Book of Margery Kempe*. In her absence, Hope Noonan Stoner delivered the paper on Cathie’s behalf, presenting it alongside her presentation slides. The final panellist was Chiara Valcelli, a PhD student at the School of Languages, Literatures & Cultures and the School of English and Digital Humanities, whose paper was titled, ‘Digesting Dante: Cannibalism, Appetite, and the Esophagus in Joyce’s *Ulysses*’.

Panel Three: Creating and Critiquing Masculinity

This panel was chaired by Ailish Brassil and offered a cross-cultural examination of masculinity, focusing on its representation in Old Norse texts, Nordic mythology and American literature. Rosemary Kelly's (Department of English) paper looked at the connection between *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* and the narrative structures of Old Norse-Icelandic Sagas. The second presentation was given by MA student Tess O'Regan (Department of English), who looked at the representation of gender in Cormac McCarthy's *The Crossing*. The final paper, titled 'From God of Mischief to God of Stories: How Marvel put Loki at the Heart of the New Creation Myth', was given by Kevin Fylan (Department of English).

Roundtable: PhD Experiences

For the final portion of the conference, the UCC Bookends Team organised an interactive roundtable discussion on PhD experiences. For this roundtable, doctoral candidates from the School of English and Digital Humanities were asked to participate (Beth Aherne, Ailish Brassil, Kevin Fylan and Hope Noonan-Stoner). This session touched upon a variety of topics including funding opportunities, career and training development, as well as the impact of imposter syndrome on research outputs. Attendees were also encouraged to participate in this event, which allowed for further in-depth questions to be asked.

Conclusion

The success of the UCC Bookends 2025 Conference reaffirms its importance to the professional development of postgraduate students from the Department of English and Digital Humanities. Since 2005, UCC Bookends conference has demonstrated the depth and diversity of research being conducted by postgraduate students. This event affords students the opportunity to disseminate their research endeavours, network amongst peers, and gain invaluable feedback from staff and students from the Department of English and Digital Humanities. For the Department of English and Digital Humanities, UCC Bookends is a source of pride, as it continues to encourage and inspire postgraduate students as they explore their research interests. On the 1 May 2026, UCC Bookends will return, taking place in the Dora Allman for another exciting and engaging event.

CHARLOTTE TROY is a third year PhD student in the Department of English at University College Cork. Charlotte is a recipient of the Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship, which funds her research project titled “EcoGothic Gardens and the Collapse of Social Binaries”.