



Academic Event Report

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Event: The Folklore Society’s Annual Conference: “Folklore and the Senses”

Venue: University College Cork

Date: 20th to 22nd June 2025

This accessible hybrid event, which was organised in collaboration with the Department of Folklore and Ethnology, University College Cork (UCC), marked The Folklore Society’s first conference outside of Britain. It was held across two, tiered lecture halls in UCC’s atmospheric West Wing. Opening the conference, Dr Ciarán Ó Gealbháin, head of UCC’s Department of Folklore and Ethnology, praised the organisation efforts of all involved, while giving a warm welcome to delegates and attendees. Dr Cliona Ó Carroll (Department of Folklore and Ethnology, University College Cork) and Professor David Hopkin (President, The Folklore Society) then welcomed the conference delegates. Delegates, consisting of students, academic teaching staff and independent researchers, hailed from Ireland, the United Kingdom, mainland Europe, Asia, the United States and Canada, and delivered their papers either remotely or on site.

Taking place over three days, and structured over fourteen sessions, with parallel sessions on the second and third days, forty papers were presented. While a full list of papers is provided below, this event report highlights only a selection, primarily chosen to represent the

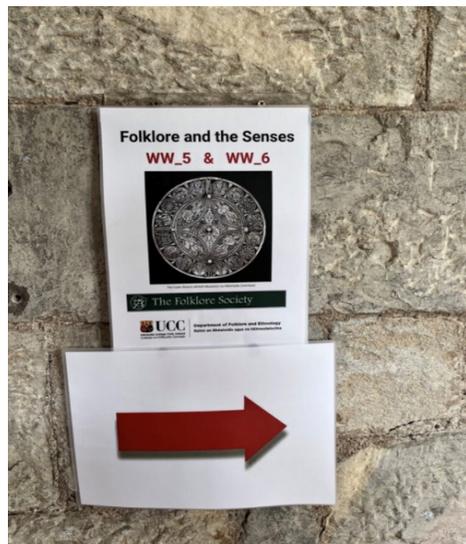


Figure 1

(Photo credit: Dr Ciarán Ó Gealbháin, Head of the Department of Folklore and Ethnology at UCC).

diversity of conference delegates and their interpretation of the theme, “Folklore and the Senses”. The papers, diverse and layered in theory, highlighted important aspects of folklore, collectively surpassing the event’s theme of “the senses” and its disseminative function.

Day One:

Afternoon Sessions 1 and 2

Comprised of two papers on the theme “A Sense of Nature”, the conference’s first session on Friday (20 June) opened with Dr Ryan Lash (University College Dublin) presenting the insightful paper ‘The White Cow, the Crooked Mouth, and the Corncrake: Sensing the Other-than-human in Inishbofin Island’. From within the context of his ethnographic fieldwork with maritime sheep farmers on Inishbofin, Lash argued that folk knowledge functions as an embodied memory, an essential multi-perceptual sensory skill, that should be considered in the development of environmental policies. Following this, Tiernan Gaffney (National Museum of Ireland) presented ‘The Still Murmur: Bee Folklore and Museum Galleries’, which focused on the Country Life exhibition at the National Museum of Ireland in County Mayo. Gaffney highlighted the importance of curating a multi-sensory, interactive exhibition experience in order to retain the sensual significance and cultural richness of bees within folkloric traditions.

In Friday’s afternoon sessions, three presentations were given on the theme of “Proverbial Senses”. This concluded with the paper ‘Sensory Organs in Modern Greek Proverbial Discourse’ by Dr Georgios Tserpes (Hellenic Folklore Research Centre, Academy of Athens). Tserpes outlined the common linguistic root of the Greek words for senses, emotions and aesthetics, and provided examples of traditional proverbs relating to the eyes, ears, nose, hands and tongue. He further highlighted that sensory proverbs also function as metaphorical moderators of emotions within cultural and social mores.

Day Two:

Morning Session 3B and 4B

Across four morning sessions on the second day, twelve papers were delivered on the themes of “A Feel for Old Media”, “Death and the Senses”,

“Embodying the Intangible” and “Food, Taste and Memory”. In ‘Smelling Death: English Funeral Customs, c.1850–1920’, Dr Helen Frisby (University of the West of England) demonstrated the olfactory onslaught of this period’s death customs through comparative materials: decaying pork flesh, rosemary, thyme, caraway, tobacco, beeswax, musty wool, lavender, camphor and port wine. Frisby explained the odoriferous folkloric and scientific connections related to traditional customs and rituals in the past that provided a sensory processing of grief through the cleansing of spirit and scent. Leading into the lunch break, Dr Julia Bishop (University of Sheffield) explored the relationship between senses and emotions in children’s lore and adult recollections regarding British school meals in her paper ‘The Good, the Bad, the Picturesque and the Revolting: The Lore and Language of School Dinners as Sensory History’.

Afternoon Session 6A

One of two parallel sessions concluding the second day was entitled “Sensing Ghosts and Spirits”. The first paper delivered was Dr Adam N. Coward’s (Independent Researcher) ‘Empirical and Emotional Evidence for Apparitions in the Writings of the Rev. Edmund Jones (1702–1793)’. Delving into the work of empiricist Rev. Edmund Jones, Coward presented the sensory aspects of Jones’s recordings regarding metaphysical beings, while conveying the depth of his religious fanaticism in the quest for confirmation of the divine. Continuing the Christian theme, PhD student Fiona O’ Driscoll (University College Cork) presented her paper ‘Otherworldly Sensations: Exploring the Female Spirit “Petticoat Loose” as the Epitome of Human Sensory Experience’, which examined the afterlife of a corporeal spirit as portrayed through the National Folklore Collection. Interpreting their exaggerated sensory aspects, she outlined how the narratives—through manipulating the senses—didactically conveyed the perils of sin and the importance of piety to their 1930s rural audience, highlighting the era’s supernatural-orientated religious fervour. The final paper of the day, ‘The Celestial Nocturnal Sensorium of War: Night Battles, Folklore and the Senses in History’, was presented by Professor Sarah Covington (City University of New York) who merged historical events with testimonies involving spectral-filled sky-battles. Illuminating the role of the senses in oral tradition—including

misinterpreted natural phenomena—Covington demonstrated how combining history, folklore and human experience can advance contemporary folkloristics.

Day 3:

Morning Session 7B

The third day of the conference commenced with PhD student Angela Byrne (University College Cork) and her paper 'Sensing the Past: Personal Effects and the Sensory Archive of Asylums and Industrial Schools in Ireland'. Engaging with the theme "Seeking the Senses in Collections", and by examining interview data, Byrne communicated the importance of access and knowledge dissemination regarding the sensory experiences of those who resided in Ireland's past institutions.



Figure 2

(Photo credit: Dr Ciarán Ó Gealbháin).

Revealing the collective microculture of former institutional residents, her paper transgressed the boundaries between folklore studies and sociology. Later that morning, pertaining to the theme of "A Sense of Self and Extensions of Self", Dr Fionnán MacGabhann

(University College Cork) presented the penultimate paper of the conference 'Sensing the Self in Contemporary Folklore from Connemara'. Exploring narrative material collected from Catholic priest Fr Éamonn Ó Confhaola, MacGabhann theorised how personalised nuances within Ó Confhaola's reimaginings reflect his unique worldview and effectively communicate a discernible 'sense of self'. He further explored the general overlap and semi-autonomous coexistence between tradition, society and the concept of 'self'.

Conclusion

The wide spectrum of sensory themes and topics of The Folklore Society's Annual Conference evoked visceral responses, from the opening presentation's call to action to align environmental policies with sensorial folk knowledge, through to one of the final papers of the conference, closing Session 8A, by Dr Clodagh Tait (Mary Immaculate College), "More like one that tuck love powders, than a reasonable being": Potions, Passion and Poison in Ireland, C. 1820–1940'. This presentation's reflections on the sensual illuminated the dangers of navigating love in an era of belief in potions, magic, and rituals. Within this broad array of themes, epochs and perspectives, the conference's collective focus on the senses successfully held not only a collaborative and academically educational function, but also a deeply relatable insight for its audience; it revealed the underlying yet all-encompassing sensory facets of oral history—consciousness, perception, and emotion: the ever-present human undercurrents of the folk tradition.

REBECCA L.+ HALL MORAN is a PhD student in the Department of Folklore and Ethnology, University College Cork. Rebecca is a 2024 Puttnam Scholar and a 2025 PhD Excellence Scholar. Her research focuses on exhuming and examining Kathleen Hurley's forgotten contributions to the Irish Folklore Commission, particularly women's lore, investigating her role and impact as a female collector, and restoring Hurley's folklore to its origins in oral performance.

FIONA O' DRISCOLL is a PhD candidate and assistant lecturer in the Department of Folklore and Ethnology, University College Cork (UCC). She also works as a course coordinator and lecturer for Adult Continuing Education (ACE) at UCC. Fiona's doctoral research centres on the mostly unknown, yet multidimensional Irish 'witch figure', as evidenced through the oral tradition (c.1750–c.1940). With a particular focus on vernacular perceptions—fuelled by political, religious and sociological concerns—her thesis aims to uncover the factors which led to the construction of 'woman as witch' in rural Ireland.



Figure 3

Amanda Clarke at the podium (Independent Scholar) presenting 'Tobar na Súil: A Site for Sore Eyes: The Gift of Sight at the Holy Wells of Ireland'. Helen Frisby (University of West of England), chair of panel on the right (Photo credit: Dr Ciarán Ó Gealbháin).



Figure 4

Tiber Fizett (University College of Dublin) presenting 'Leig air falbh i!' ('Let it fly!'): Sensing (E)motion in Scottish Gaelic Aesthetics' (Photo credit: Dr Ciarán Ó Gealbháin).

Full List of Panels and Papers at Folklore Society's Annual Conference 2025:

Day One

Session One- A Sense of Nature

- Ryan Lash (University College Dublin): 'The White Cow, the Crooked Mouth, and the Corncrake: Sensing the Other-than-human in Inishbofin Island'.
- Tiernan Gaffney (National Museum of Ireland): 'The Still Murmur: Bee Folklore and Museum Galleries'. [Online]

Session Two- Proverbial Senses

- Fionnuala Carson Williams (Independent Scholar): 'Walls have Ears: The Role of the Senses in Everyday Proverbs'.
- Tulika Chandra (Shiv Nadar University, India): 'Savouring Wisdom: Food, Taste, and Sensory Representations in Hindi Proverbs as Living Folklore in India'. [Online]
- Georgios Tserpes (Hellenic Folklore Research Centre, Academy of Athens): 'Sensory Organs in Modern Greek Proverbial Discourse'.

Day Two

Session 3A- A Feel For Old Media

- Catherine Bannister (University of Sheffield), Paul Cowdell (Independent Scholar) and Abbi Flint (University of Oxford): 'Excursions into a twilight world': Taking a Critical, Creative, and Sensorial Approach to the Reader's Digest Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain'.
- Gianna French (PhD student, Courtauld Institute, London): A Visual Séance: Materializing the Spectral Imagination in Pre-Raphaelite Drawings. [Online]
- Anthony Bak Buccitelli (Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg): "'Fairytale as Fuck": Anti-Modern Media, Sensory Experience, and the Folkloresque'.

Session 3B- Death and the Senses

- Helen Frisby (University of the West of England): 'Smelling Death: English Funeral Customs, c.1850-1920'.
- Simona Kuntarič Zupanc (PhD student, University of Ljubljana): 'Sensory Experiences of the Dead in Rural North-Eastern Slovenia'.
- Penny Johnston (Manchester Metropolitan University): "'Three tastes of salt to ward away the fairies": Salt and the Senses in the Irish Folk Tradition'.

Session 4A- Employing the Intangible

- Lucija Biličić (Independent Scholar) and Lea Biličić (Independent Scholar): 'The Museum of Lost Tales: Transforming Slavic Folklore into an Embodied Experience'.
- Ian Brodie (Cape Breton University): 'Joy and the Senses in Folklore: Feeling Vernacular Performance'.
- Cozette Griffin-Kremer (Centre de Recherche Bretonne et Celtique, Brest, France): 'Bringing Luck, with a Flower in France'. [Online]

Session 4B- Food, Taste and Memory

- Siobhán Browne (University College Cork): 'Making Sense of the Research: Research Methodologies and the Senses in an Ethnographic Study'.
- Regina Sexton (University College Cork): 'The Hungry Grass: An Féar Gorta'.
- Julia Bishop (University of Sheffield): 'The Good, the Bad, the Picturesque and the Revolting: The Lore and Language of School Dinners as Sensory History'.

Session 5A- Experiencing the Supernatural

- Clodagh Doyle (National Museum of Ireland, Turlough Park): 'In the Blink of an Eye—Vulnerability of Being “Overlucked” by People Possessing the Evil Eye'.
- Solveiga Šlapikienė (PhD student, Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore): 'The Sense of a Guardian Angel in Lithuanian Belief Narratives'.
- Andrea Kitta (East Carolina University): "'I Just Had a Feeling"--The Senses and Experience in Supernatural Narratives'.

Session 5B- Healing and Revival

- Meg Nicholas (American Folklife Center): 'Crying in the Archive: Connecting Archival Research and Creative Grief Therapy'.
- Cecily Gilligan (Independent Scholar): 'Traditional Cures, Intuitive Bonesetters and Colourful Rag Trees'.
- Amanda Clarke (Independent Scholar): 'Tobar na Súil: A Site for Sore Eyes: The Gift of Sight at the Holy Wells of Ireland'.

Session 6A- Sensing Ghosts and Spirits

- Adam N. Coward (Independent Scholar): "'Here was a proof of the being of evil spirits to 3 of his senses": Empirical and Emotional Evidence for Apparitions in the Writings of the Rev. Edmund Jones (1702 1793)'. [Online]
- Fiona O' Driscoll (PhD student, University College Cork): 'Otherworldly Sensations: Exploring the Female Spirit "Petticoat Loose" as the Epitome of Human Sensory Experience'.

- Sarah Covington (City University of New York): ‘The Celestial, Nocturnal Sensorium of War: Night Battles, Folklore and the Senses in History’. [Online]

Session 6B- A Woman’s Touch, Hair and Smell

- Ailbhe Nic Giolla Chomhail (University of Galway): ‘Sensory Experience in “Scéal an Anró”, an Irish and Scottish Wonder Tale Ecotype’.
- Saeedeh Niktab Etaati (Canadian National Museum of History): ‘Women’s Hair: Outraged Protest and Embodied Solidarity in the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement’. [Online]
- Ciara Joyce (PhD student, Open University): “‘The Precious Air of Romance’: Folkloric, Historical, and Contemporary Views on Vaginal Odour’. [Online]

Day Three

Session 7A- Music, Metaphor and Emotion

- Tiber Falzett (University College Dublin): “‘Leig air falbh i!’” (“Let it fly!”): Sensing (E)motion in Scottish Gaelic Aesthetics’.
- Olha Petrovych (Estonian Literary Museum) and Mari Väina (Estonian Literary Museum): ‘Sweetness and Bitterness: Symbolism of Taste in Ukrainian and Estonian Folk Songs’.
- Ciara Thompson (University College Cork): ‘Traditional Lullabies as House, Hearthkeeper, and Sensorium’.

Session 7B- Seeking the Senses in Collection

- Angela Byrne (PhD Student, University College Cork): ‘Sensing the Past: Personal Effects and the Sensory Archive of Asylums and Industrial Schools in Ireland’.
- Liam Doherty (National Museum of Ireland): ‘The Catalogue, the Poet and the Irish Folklife Collection at the National Museum of Ireland’.
- Susanne Österlund-Pöttsch (Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland): ‘Movement, Body Memory and the Senses in the Folklore Archive’.

Session 8A- Love and the Senses

- Alessandra Curtis (Independent Scholar): ‘Making Sense of Military Folklore’.
- Emmanouela Katrinaki (Hellenic Folklore Research Centre, Academy of Athens): ‘The Senses of Love in the Folk Distichs of Eastern Crete (1900-c.1950)’. [Online]
- Clodagh Tait (Mary Immaculate College, Limerick): “‘More like one that tuck love powders, than a reasonable being’”: Potions, Passion and Poison in Ireland, c.1820-1940’.

Session 8B- A Sense of Self and Extensions of the Self

- Aphrodite-Lidia Nounanaki (Hellenic Folklore Research Centre, Academy of Athens): 'What If Our Senses Are Not Enough? Technology as a Tool to "Sharpen Perception": The Tesla Car Case'.
- Fionnán Mac Gabhann (University College Cork): 'Sensing the Self in Contemporary Folklore from Connemara'.
- Kristiana Willsey (University of Southern California): 'Ritual and Embodiment in Online Self-Diagnosis Narratives'. [Online]