

**Society for the Study of Nineteenth-century Ireland**

**Conference**

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**Book of Abstracts and Speakers**



**Keynote 1: Prof Marc Mulholland (University of Oxford) ‘Comhar, meitheal, and neighbouring: The ‘emotional economy’ of the Irish Peasantry’**

Biographical Note: Professor Marc Mullholland is Wolfson Fellow and Tutor in Modern History at St Catherine’s College University of Oxford. His research focuses both on Irish History in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and on the history of political thought since the French Revolution. Two of his recent research projects are on Irish peasant activism in the 1880s and on leftist attitudes internationally to the proletarian working-class. He has published very widely on a broad range of topics. His books include *Bourgeois Liberty and the Politics of Fear: From Absolutism to Neo-Conservatism* (Oxford University Press, 2012), *The Murderer of Warren Street, The True Story of a Nineteenth-Century Revolutionary* (Randon House, 2018), and *At the Rising of the Moon: the Peasantry and Ireland from the Tudor Conquest to the Fall of Landlordism* (Eastwood Books, 2025).

**Religious Intimacies**

**Dr Niamh NicGhabhann Coleman (UL) “Safe Confinement, long delayed’: infertility and intercession in nineteenth-century Irish Catholic spaces.’**

Most Catholic churches in Ireland include statues and shrines dedicated to saints, many of which are associated with specific intentions. These spaces are sometimes linked to larger-scale events, such as the annual novena to St Gerard Majella in Dundalk. Several of these devotional spaces and sites are linked to health, and to the practices of intercession in relation to particular concerns. This paper is part of the Locating Loss: Histories of Infertility in Spaces and Landscapes project, which is a broader exploration of the socio-cultural position of involuntary childlessness in Irish life from the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries in Ireland. This project aims to overcome some of the challenges associated with researching historic experiences which are deeply private and often stigmatised through its emphasis on sites and spaces. Focusing on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland, this paper reflects on religious spaces as sites associated with historic experiences of infertility. It will examine evidence for engagement with sites dedicated to specific saints connected to

the experience of infertility, including St Anne, St Philomena, St Anthony of Padua, and by the beginning of the twentieth century, St Gerard Majella. In doing so, this paper builds on the extant research around religion, prayer, and infertility in historic contexts (Oren-Magidor, 2015; Benninghaus, 2017). It will also examine the theme of involuntary childlessness in the context of Irish histories of the family, as well as exploring the intersections between architectural history and health humanities approaches and methodologies.

**Biographical Note:**

Dr Niamh NicGhabhann Coleman is an Associate Professor in the School of History and Geography at the University of Limerick. Her research focuses on aspects of Irish cultural history, with a particular focus on the visual and built culture of the Catholic church in Ireland

**Dr Aidan Mullett (Independent) ‘The Faithful Companions of Jesus in Nineteenth Century Bunclody: Education, Catholicism and Religious Reform.’**

The Devotional Revolution in Ireland is commonly understood as a nineteenth-century transformation within Irish Catholicism, which involved the suppression of traditional Gaelic beliefs and practices and an encouragement of more Romanised forms of religious life. While historians have stressed the importance of women, regional variation and socio-economic interests in helping to propel this process, the experiential dimension of this transformation has received relatively little attention. This paper adopts an intimate approach to explore how ultramontane Catholicism was lived, felt and disseminated in late nineteenth-century Ireland. Focusing on a convent in Bunclody, County Wexford run by the Faithful Companions of Jesus – a French order of women religious with ultramontane leanings – this paper uses spiritual intimacy as a lens for understanding religious reform. Drawing on previously unexamined annals and documents of the FCJ order, it examines the role of spiritual intimacy in maintaining morale among women religious, strengthening the authority of representatives of the Catholic Church and reinforcing devotional practices among the local laity. As well as drawing attention to intimacy in helping to disseminate the beliefs and practices of the Devotional Revolution, this paper also offers further insight into the role that women

religious played in efforts to align Irish Catholicism more closely with Roman Catholicism.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Aidan Mullett completed his PhD at Birkbeck, University of London in May 2025. His thesis examined the relationship between the Irish Revolution and Catholicism. He is currently writing a book on the Faithful Companions of Jesus and their provision of education in Bunclody, County Wexford.

## **Material Intimacies**

### **Jessica White (UCC) ‘Economies of Intimacy in Maria Edgeworth’s Juvenile Fiction.’**

This paper explores the relationship between communal intimacy and the market-place in the third edition of Maria Edgeworth’s *The Parent’s Assistant* (1800), a collection of short stories for children. Edgeworth held a keen interest in political economy, and was a particularly close reader of Adam Smith. The society outlined in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), one built on self-interested commercial exchange, was a clear influence on Edgeworth as she crafted her economically realistic tales. The focus of this paper is how the theoretical mechanisms of commerce are altered and subverted within Edgeworth’s fictional rural communities. Contending that commercial exchange is predicated on sociable interaction, Edgeworth presents a detailed account of the networks of cooperation, generosity and sharing of information that exist between neighbours in intimate communities. She demonstrates how these relationships affect negotiations over the ownership of land and the price of goods, exploring how a system predicated on self-interest contends with the communal good as a distinct economic goal. Edgeworth investigates how commercial capitalism affects lived experience, including where its regulatory mechanisms fail and the poorest in society are left open to financial exploitation. Her remedy to economic misconduct is to promote the responsible use of landed power, which is suggestive of her anxieties about the uninhibited expansion of commercial capitalism. This paper reflects on the forward-facing nature of Edgeworth’s educational project, which sought to ensure that as the United Kingdom, and particularly Ireland, became an increasingly commercial society across the nineteenth century, it would remain a moral one.

**Biographical Note:** Jessica White is a PhD candidate at UCC. Her research explores the contributions of children’s writers, including Maria Edgeworth, Anna Letitia Barbault and Jane Marcet, to the discourses of Enlightenment pedagogy, political economy, and technology. Her thesis examines attempts to use educational practice to increase individual and national happiness.

**Zoe Zavrotny (UCD) 'Affective Narrative: J. Sheridan Le Fanu, Affect, and Narrative Practice.'**

Though affect theory is often used to analyse modern literature, popular Victorian literature provides rich material for the application of affect theory due to its emphasis on heightened emotion and thrill. These works of sensation fiction, such as the work of Irish author Sheridan Le Fanu, centre phenomenological experience, as they draw attention to the workings of the human body and its interaction with the mind in order to create moments of affective significance. In these moments of affective significance, personal sources of fear and anxiety penetrate the text, effectively making a work a piece of life writing as it meditates on personal emotions and affective environments. In this paper, I argue that the anxiety present in Le Fanu’s story “The Familiar” can be understood as a reflection of intimate personal anxieties by utilising affect theory, Margaret Wetherell’s concept of “affective practice”, and narrative practice. Both the emotions and the affective environment of “The Familiar” mirror personal anxieties in Le Fanu’s own life surrounding finances, family, and marriage. I posit that Le Fanu utilises the fictional medium to engage in narrative practice as a tenet of affective practice, using fiction to externalise and meditate on his own anxieties in a manner unsuited for nonfictional communication such as letters or diaries. While this perspective does not discount historical, cultural, and social conditions, it centres individual and intimate phenomenological experience and human emotion to present a microhistorical perspective of Irish Victorian Horror literature, Victorian psychology, and nineteenth-century social trends.

**Biographical Note:** Zoe Zavrotny is a third-year PhD candidate at University College Dublin researching the role of Irish Victorian Horror literature as a form of life writing

through the lens of affect theory. Her current research draws on a range of critical perspectives, including the history of emotions and narrative practice.

**Dr Ciarán McCabe (MIC) ‘Charitable visiting and intimate encounters in nineteenth-century Ireland.’**

The nineteenth century witnessed the transformation of relief and assistance to the marginalised through the expansion of formal, organised charity. For many voluntary charitable societies that operated in urban centres, the visitation of the poor in their own homes was central to efforts to improve the moral, spiritual and temporal condition of the poor. In his study of philanthropy in modern England, Frank Prochaska identified Methodist societies in the late eighteenth century as the pioneers of domestic visiting, a strategy subsequently embraced by denominational and lay-run voluntary charities. In Ireland, Maria Luddy’s work on philanthropy in the nineteenth century places women (such as Catholic female religious and Protestant bible readers) at the centre of this practice. Domestic visiting took on a greater role within organised charity in Ireland following the establishment in the 1840s of the first Irish conferences of St Vincent de Paul, a Catholic charity of lay men whose efforts centred on home visitation as a means to investigate the temporal and spiritual penury of their prospective beneficiaries.

Our knowledge of such encounters is almost invariably from the perspective of the visitor and not the visited. We do not have first-hand accounts from householders complaining of intrusions into domestic spaces or, alternatively, welcoming material assistance and spiritual succour. However, there is value in understanding how the organisers of such visitations *viewed* these encounters, as, in a period when philanthropy reflected evolving gendered roles and sectarian tensions, the language of charity revealed evolving social and cultural developments.

While much of the existing historiography notes the vibrancy of the culture of associations that prevailed in this period, the opportunities that home visiting held out for the fostering of familiarity between charitable visitor and the poor has been overlooked. The threshold to the poor person’s abode (the tenement landing or the back lane doorway) was regularly represented in charitable literature as a space for familiar, close and even possibly intimate encounters: access to the domestic space had to be

negotiated; a familiar face (even one far removed from the material poverty of the householder) may have been welcome.

This paper explores nineteenth-century representations of the charitable visit as an encounter that held the possibility for intimate relations that defined gender roles, crossed social boundaries and facilitated evangelism.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Ciarán McCabe teaches history at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. He is a social and cultural historian of nineteenth-century Ireland, with particular interest in the histories of charity, philanthropy and women's history. Among his publications are contributions to Bloomsbury's *Cultural History of Philanthropy* and *Cultural History of Poverty* series, as well as a study of privacy and domestic spaces in Dublin's tenements (forthcoming, *English Historical Review* (2026)).

### **Intimacy and the Courts**

**Irene McGoldrick, (Annaghdown Heritage Society) 'Love Laughs at Locksmiths.'**

In 1921 Philip Crossle, through the course of genealogical investigations, transcribed the 1824 – 1828 Prerogative Court proceedings of two Catholic merchant middle-class families embroiled in a dispute over the legitimacy of a marriage and the subsequent right of the disputed widow to the administration of her husband's estate, following his untimely death. The original court documents were destroyed in the Four Court's fire leaving Crossle's transcription as the only surviving record of these testimonies. What remains gives a rare and valuable insight into women's experience of intimacy, consent and marital legitimacy in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century preserved in their own voices.

Flipping the usual narrative on 19<sup>th</sup> century relationships, where abductions centred on women as victims, this particular case presents, perhaps, the only documented role-reversal example where it fell upon the wife to prove the legitimacy of the courtship and marriage in order to be deemed as the legal wife of the deceased, against the raging accusations of the husband's family of abduction, inability to consent to marriage and subsequent denial of the 'mock marriage'. The centrepiece is a striking ego document – a faithfully transcribed 'love letter' sent to the widow by an opportunist

suitor, who was actively involved at every stage of the original courtship and marriage, a mere seven weeks following the death of his dear friend.

This archival source presents a reversal of gendered power in negotiations of intimacy, marriage and inheritance, revealing the complexity of Catholic merchant middle-class relationships in 19<sup>th</sup> century Connacht.

**Biographical Note:** Irene McGoldrick holds an MA-History (NUIG) focused on the 19thC collapse of Lord French's Bank of Tuam and Dublin. She has served as secretary and chair of Annaghdown Heritage Society. She has presented lectures to the Annaghdown Heritage Society, the Old Tuam Society and Galway Archaeological and Historical Society on her research.

**Dr Patrick Maume (Dictionary of Irish Biography (Royal Irish Academy)) 'Lunacy and the lady lawyer: Mary Anne Anthony intrudes on the masculine legal theatre of late Victorian Ireland.'**

Mary Anne Anthony (fl.1880-90), from a Catholic merchant family in Cappoquin (Co. Waterford), became an obsessive litigant after a family legal dispute over her father's legacies; at times she had two cases running concurrently in the Four Court. Sometimes arguing in court with her legal representatives, sometimes representing herself and standing out conspicuously among the barristers, regularly clashing with judges, she became known as "the lady lawyer" and features in several contemporary legal memoirs (though these accounts are often vague on detail and overstate her legal skills). This paper offers an overview of her career, discussing how her physical and verbal breaches of decorum relate to the role of nineteenth-century Irish lawcourts as venue for political theatre and popular entertainment, and discussing her collisions with both sides in the land and Home Rule agitations of the 1880s. (Her most significant legal achievement was to secure a decision that she could claim compensation under a statute dealing with "maiming" for physical injuries received from nationalist demonstrators, establishing that "maiming" was not confined to loss of body parts.) Was she simply a madwoman baited for popular entertainment, or can she be seen as a protestor against the complacent male sociability of the Irish Victorian legal milieu? Did she pioneer or retard the entry of women into the Irish legal profession?

**Biographical Note:** Dr Patrick Maume is a graduate of University College Cork and Queen's University Belfast who is now a researcher with the Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. He has published extensively on nationalism, unionism and the politics of print culture and is a longtime regular at SSNCI conferences.

**Dr Brian Griffin (Maynooth University), 'Love, Litigation, Lies and Laughter: Breach of Promise Cases as Entertainment in the Long Nineteenth Century.'**

Cases of breach of promise of marriage featured frequently in court in nineteenth-century Ireland and were reported upon in great detail in the contemporary press. Historians have shown that these reports are an important source for exploring such subjects as courtship practices, pre-marital sex, dowry negotiations and marriage settlements, women's position in society and the operation of the Irish civil law system. An important topic that has yet to receive extensive scholarly attention is that of the breach of promise case as entertainment. Breach of promise cases were often eagerly anticipated and litigated in packed courtrooms, where lawyers used the frequently scandalous case details as raw material for grandiloquent rhetoric in efforts to sway judges and juries in their clients' favour. Those who could not attend proceedings in person were entertained by reading about them in the press. Contemporaries were gratified not only by hearing or reading salacious details of plaintiffs' and defendants' intimate relationships, but also by witnessing or reading about humorous episodes in the erstwhile lovers' court disputes. Much of the humour derived from lawyers reading aloud extracts from defendants' letters to plaintiffs and from defendants' love poetry. Another source of mirth was the banter between plaintiffs, defendants and lawyers and the comical interjections of judges. As this paper will show, when exposed to the public gaze in breach of promise of marriage cases, the intimate relationships of Irish people were often a source of considerable amusement and entertainment.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Brian Griffin is an adjunct associate professor of history in Maynooth University's history department. His most recent book is *Crime and the Criminal Classes in Ireland, 1870-1920* (Cork University Press, 2024).

## Marital Intimacies

### Rebeca Vital Ramos (Radboud University) 'Happy Ever After? Marriage, Gender, and Political Allegory in *The Wild Irish Girl*.'

Marriage has long functioned in the novel as a social form through which private intimacy negotiates public conflict. In eighteenth-century English fiction, such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, the marriage plot promises social reconciliation, translating moral and class tension into domestic stability. In the Irish context, marriage acquires a distinct political charge, functioning as a site where colonial power is negotiated rather than resolved. Focusing on Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), this paper engages with scholarship on the national tale (Ina Ferris; Katie Trumpener) and allegories of union (Mary Jean Corbett) to examine how romance collapses the boundary between private and public life after the Act of Union. Through close readings of narrative perspective and gendered characterisation, it shows how the novel familiarises English readers with Ireland's landscape, history, and culture through Glorvina, whose body and sensibility become repositories of national meaning. While Horatio's growing emotional attachment gestures toward reconciliation, this paper argues that harmony is achieved only through the containment of female agency. Drawing on feminist theories of gender and affect (Judith Butler; Sara Ahmed), it demonstrates how Glorvina's education and authority do not translate into meaningful choice, as gender norms deny her autonomy. Rather than challenging imperial relations, the novel transforms colonial domination into romantic inevitability, reassuring English readers through intimacy. Read alongside analogous nineteenth-century nationalist romances, such as Brazilian Indianist fiction, where female figures similarly embody the colonised nation, *The Wild Irish Girl* highlights how love and affect circulate to stabilise imperial power across contexts.

**Biographical Note:** Rebeca Vital is a research master's student in literature from Brazil, supported by a merit-based scholarship. She studies representations of love in literature, published her thesis on closet drama with a feminist focus, and completed a research stay in Istanbul on decoloniality. This paper allows her to combine both interests.

**Dr Charlie Jorge, (Universitat de les Illes Balears (UIB)) ‘A Marriage with the Devil: Ireland’s Satanic Union in Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820).’**

An Act of Union has traditionally been regarded as one of the most intimate forms of agreement between two parties, undertaken with the ideal purpose of working jointly toward the success of a shared future, where common welfare takes precedence over individual desires, impulses or ambitions. Much like a marriage, political Acts of Union are often depicted as following similar steps across the world: the formation of a new entity out of pre-existing ones through supposedly cordial and sincere bonds of friendship and coexistence. In literature and the arts, such political unions have frequently been rendered through more human metaphors—most notably, romantic relationships and marriage.

Charles Robert Maturin, a minister of the Church of Ireland, lived in Dublin through a turbulent period in the nation’s history. He witnessed both the 1798 and 1803 uprisings, as well as the contentious and widely perceived as fraudulent process of the Irish Act of Union, which resulted in the dissolution of the Irish Parliament and the effective erasure of Ireland’s political autonomy. This paper seeks to demonstrate how these traumatic events surface within Maturin’s Gothic masterpiece *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). Maturin’s depiction of the marriage between innocent Immalee and the accursed wanderer will be examined as a symbolic reflection of the profound sense of betrayal felt by the Irish people—those who, in Maturin’s allegorical vision, had sold both their souls and their nation to an oppressor more diabolical than the devil himself in an unfair Union and marriage.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Charlie Jorge is a Senior Lecturer at the University of the Balearic Islands. He specializes in Gothic and Irish Studies, and researches authors like Charles Robert Maturin or Regina Maria Roche. He collaborates with the London Centre for Interdisciplinary Research, leading the project “The Uncanny in Language, Literature and Culture”, which has produced two edited volumes.

## **Institutional Intimacies**

### **Dr Judy Bolger (Carlow College) 'The workhouse as a site of intimacy? Pregnancy and pauper relationships in the Tullamore workhouse, 1880s.'**

This paper examines the nineteenth-century Irish workhouse as both a symbol of state authority and as a site of everyday life by using a case study of a woman, Kate Garrett, who became pregnant in the Tullamore union's workhouse. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, vast numbers of paupers passed through the country's network of workhouses and their stories are often only told through statistics and bureaucracy. By focusing on one particular pauper's story, which was reported upon in the press, this paper aims to foreground the human experience of the institution. In doing so, this case reveals how intimate relationships developed within the institutional confines of the workhouse, despite the system being designed to segregate inmates and to enforce strict codes of behaviour. Newspaper coverage of the private encounters of inmate Kate Garrett, turned her pregnancy and childbirth within the workhouse, into a public affair. Through a close reading of her story, this paper draws out some of the wider anxieties relating to sexuality, morality and pauperism that reflected her contemporary society. Using a microhistory approach, this paper argues that such individual stories are crucial in our broader understanding of how nineteenth-century systems that were designed to regulate poverty, increasingly became institutions that sought to moralise the poor, and for women, their sexual behaviours.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Judy Bolger is a social historian and lecturer at Carlow College, St Patrick who specialises in the history of poverty, motherhood, and infant care. She completed her PhD at Trinity College, Dublin (2025), where her doctoral research explored women's use of the Irish workhouse during the late nineteenth-century for childbirth and motherhood. This research was funded by the Trinity College, Dublin 1252 Postgraduate Scholarship. Judy has published works on mothers and the workhouse and is the Book Review Editor for the Women's History Association of Ireland.

**Dr Shelby Zimmerman (Ithaca College London Centre), 'Families, Death, and the Irish Workhouse, 1872-1913.'**

In the late nineteenth century, the professionalisation of medicine resulted in the medicalisation and institutionalisation of death. Medical innovation and the medicalisation of society transferred the working-class deathbed from the home to an institutional setting. The responsibility of caring for the dying shifted from the family to trained professionals. Social theorist Michel Foucault posited that medicalisation resulted in the depersonalisation of the patient and anonymisation in an institutional setting. By the end of the nineteenth century, the workhouse emerged as the largest and most accessible medical institution for the poor. However, the stigma of the Famine era workhouse remained in public consciousness. This paper will challenge the depersonalisation and stigma of workhouse death by analysing institutional death from the perspective of the family. Family members visited sick and dying relatives in the workhouse, served as advocates in the case of misconduct, and were responsible for burial. Using the South Dublin Union as the main case study with examples from other workhouses, this paper will examine how families sought to ensure that dying in the workhouse was not a depersonalised experience and that institutional admission did not sever familial bonds. Approaching workhouse death from the perspective of the family provides insight into working class agency. The research primarily draws upon Poor Law administrative records, burial records, and newspaper articles. This paper ultimately questions how families interacted with the bureaucratic Poor Law and the Board of Guardians who appeared indifferent to the plight of the dying and deceased poor.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Shelby Zimmerman received her PhD from Trinity College Dublin in 2024. Her thesis, 'The Medicalisation of Death in a Dublin City Workhouse, 1872-1920' examined the role the workhouse played in Dublin's medical landscape for the sick and dying poor. Shelby is currently the Programme Coordinator at Ithaca College London Centre.

**Dr Geraldine Curtin (University of Galway) “Dear father I am breaking my heart here’: Petitions to the Lord Lieutenant on behalf of child prisoners.’**

In the nineteenth century thousands of people petitioned the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to have their sentences commuted. The files of petitions, or memorials as they are sometimes called, which are held by the National Archives contain letters from families, friends and the prisoners themselves. This paper will focus on petitions which were sent on behalf of incarcerated children. In the mid-nineteenth century thousands of Irish children were transported and imprisoned. After the passing of the Reformatory (Ireland) Act of 1858 thousands more were sent to institutions for the incarceration of criminal children. Petitions were sent on behalf of children who were imprisoned, transported and sentenced to reformatories. While memorials of adult prisoners were usually initiated by the prisoner themselves, petitions on behalf of children were almost always sent by family members. This paper will examine the letters contained in the files and look at what they reveal about the incarcerated children’s relationships with their families and communities. The letters, while often formulaic and deferential, provide a rare opportunity to read first-hand accounts of the lives of Ireland’s poor and marginalised people in the nineteenth century.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Geraldine Curtin works in Archives & Special Collections in the James Hardiman Library at the University of Galway. Her research interests are in people and crime in the nineteenth century in Ireland. She is the author of *The Women of Galway Jail* (Arlen House, 2001) and *Young Offenders: Children and crime in Ireland, 1850-1908* (Cork University Press, 2025) and has published articles on reformatories and on the imprisonment of children in Ireland in the nineteenth century.

### **Colonial Intimacies**

**Dr Richard Jorge (University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU)) ‘Colonialism and the Intimacy of Public Spaces: The Pub as an Anticolonial Element in J.C. Mangan’s “An Adventure in the Shades” (1833).’**

The modernisation process which shaped much of the nineteenth century implied mass-scale practices which drastically altered traditional communities, as exemplified

by the worldwide expansion of British colonial influence. Colonial appropriations of colonised subjects' lands translated into a deformed portrayal of both lands and colonised peoples, as the continuous pauperisation of the Irish Catholic population or the progressive loss of the Irish language illustrate. Such a radical change affected both the public and intimate spaces colonised subjects inhabited. Postcolonial theory and practice have long attempted to confront these misperceptions, combating such constructs as the civilising mission (Boehmer 2005) or the atavistic nature of colonised subjects. Literary usages of settings have been the spearhead of such counter-colonial registers (Banerjee 2021). Subverting colonial misperceptions of setting is also a conundrum which permeates Irish Gothic, which reverses the fallacy of the Catholic Irish as savage (Gibbons 2004; Khair 2009). In this sense, the short fictions of James Clarence Mangan forestall later appropriations in the genre. In "An Adventure in the Shades" (1833), J.C. Mangan appropriates the communal yet intimate space of the Irish tavern, countering British imperial control of public colonial spaces. A reconsideration of J.C. Mangan's narrative techniques and his usage of location unveils how these attempts at dominance of communal/intimate spaces reveal colonial paranoia and a biased interpretation of the colonial discourse of improvement. Based on this contention, this paper argues that Mangan's narrative questions the legitimacy of nineteenth-century British colonial discourse in Ireland.

## References

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**Biographical Note:** After graduating in English, Richard Jorge gained an MA in Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama at University College Dublin with a study on the relation of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and the Gothic tradition. He completed his PhD at the University of Santiago de Compostela on the relationship between the short story and

the Irish Gothic tradition. He currently lectures at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU).

**John Doran (Trinity College Dublin) ‘Plant Collection and Informal Empire: An Irish Botanist as an Imperial Agent’.**

The expansion of British imperial influence during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries created opportunities for botanists to collect and study plant specimens globally. The infrastructure of empire changed global realities and expanded horizons for botanists in nineteenth century Ireland. Botany developed as a discipline closely tied to economic exploitation, with imperial regimes shaping environments and populations to create productive spaces. Transporting plants worldwide was central to these efforts. This paper examines Thomas Coulter, an Irish botanist, as an agent of Britain’s informal imperialism in Latin America, focusing on Irish participation in British colonialism and botany’s role as an imperial science. Coulter collected plants in newly independent Mexico and its Californian territories. The herbarium at Trinity College Dublin, formally established in 1840 with Coulter as Keeper, became a hub within a broader imperial network of botanical gardens, herbariums, and collectors, of which Irish institutions formed a part.

As plant specimens were transported across the globe they were accompanied by personal and academic correspondence, forming intimate botanical networks spanning Britain’s empire. Thomas Coulter would continually write to his family in Ireland as well as scientific colleagues across Europe, notifying them of his progress and recounting his experiences on the colonial frontier of another continent. These letters provide an opportunity to study these intimate networks of correspondents and the formation of academic knowledge within the context of empire. This paper explores Coulter’s role as an agent of empire, the tension within Coulter’s correspondence between his botanical interests and his role as an imperial agent, and how imperial botanical institutions and networks provided spaces for intimate encounters.

**Biographical Note:** John Doran is a first year PhD candidate at Trinity College Dublin. His research focuses on Irish involvement in British imperial botany, with a particular focus on the herbarium at Trinity College Dublin’s School of Botany. The correspondence between plant collectors associated with the herbarium and the

specimens themselves provide an opportunity to examine the role of Trinity's herbarium as a hub for imperial plant collecting.

**Dr Rory Corbett (Maynooth University) 'Representing Blacksound: R.M. Levey's "The Banjo Quadrilles" and the Banjo in Nineteenth-Century Irish Print Media.'**

In 1844, Dublin audiences encountered the banjo through the racialised spectacle of blackface minstrelsy when the Virginia Minstrels appeared at R. M. Levey's Theatre Royal as part of their British and Irish tour. Their residency was subsequently commemorated in print through R. M. Levey's "The Banjo Quadrilles," a work derived directly from the troupe's performance repertoire that was republished in at least seven editions. This paper uses "The Banjo Quadrilles" as a case study to explore how blackface minstrel performance and its associated print and visual media shaped popular musical culture in nineteenth-century Ireland. Drawing on sheet music, illustrations, and related materials held in the National Library of Ireland, the paper examines how the banjo circulated within Irish print culture as a highly mediated symbol of racialised sound, performance, and bodily display. Rather than approaching minstrelsy solely as a transatlantic import, the study focuses on its local mediation, showing how global entertainment forms were selectively adapted within Irish commercial and theatrical contexts. The paper explores how "The Banjo Quadrilles" participated in the construction of popular taste in pre-Famine Ireland while simultaneously reproducing racialised imaginaries in the country. By foregrounding largely overlooked print sources, it addresses a longstanding blind spot in Irish cultural historiography concerning the impact of blackface minstrelsy on nineteenth-century Irish popular culture. The paper thus demonstrates how blackface performance was refracted through Irish print media, influencing popular musical meanings beyond the theatre.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Rory Corbett recently completed an IRC- and NUI-funded PhD in the Department of Music in Maynooth University. His research explores the complexly interwoven histories of the Irish and African diaspora that preceded the introduction of the banjo to the Blackface Minstrel Show by Irish American entertainers in the 1840s.

**Roundtable on Race, Violence, and Form:  
Reframing Nineteenth-Century Ireland**

This panel investigates the ways that nineteenth-century Irish writers thought with and in relation to writing from beyond Britain, as well as the ways global thinkers in the nineteenth century turned to Ireland to examine their own colonial, economic, and political crises. More than simply offering examples of comparison between Ireland and elsewhere, however, the papers on the panel all consider the methodological possibilities and stakes of international entanglement: the literary forms such entanglements rely on, the political affordances and occlusions they produce, and the opportunities they offer for exploring networks in place of nations. The panel ranges widely in topic: its papers focus on ways Irish settler colonialism in the Caribbean solidified nineteenth-century understandings of whiteness, on modes of reading Ireland and Palestine relationally, on Irish prison writing as a mode of internationalist nationalism, on translation as an alternative to insular nationalism, and on rethinking how ancient Greece enabled Irish political and sexual knowledge. Taken together, the papers reframe our understanding of nineteenth-century Ireland's inmate literary attachments to the complex matrices of colonial and decolonial politics beyond its shores.

**Dr Renée Fox (UC Santa Cruz) 'Jane Wilde, Translation, and the Politics of International Intimacy'**

This paper focuses on the shift in Lady Jane Wilde's poetics of nationalism between the first 1864 edition of her *Poems* and the second 1871 edition. This second edition includes several new poems that explicitly address the practice, power, and limitations of nationalist poets, but Wilde's move towards this poetics of uncertainty has its seeds in a section of translated poems that Wilde includes in both editions of the book. This paper argues that Wilde's translations from European poets laid the groundwork for her growing awareness of literary agency as a finite form of revolutionary energy. Bringing poetry from other national traditions to life in English allows Wilde to reflect on the efficacy of poetic revival, on the ways that poetry can and can't precipitate national renewal. Arguing that Wilde's turn to a more circumspect view of poetry's power to revive a dying Ireland relies on her intimate entanglements with other nationalisms and

other languages, this paper shows how translations become experimental spaces for Wilde to transform her understanding of the relationship between national politics and poetry.

**Biographical Note:** Renée Fox is Associate Professor of Literature and Jordan-Stern Presidential Chair for Dickens and Nineteenth-Century Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is the author of *The Necromantics: Reanimation, the Historical Imagination, and Victorian British and Irish Literature* (Ohio State University Press, 2023), which won the Northeast Victorian Studies Association's Sonya Rudikoff Award for best first book in Victorian studies. She is co-editor (with Mary Mullen) of *Race, Violence and Form: Reframing Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Liverpool UP, 2026) and co-editor (with Mike Cronin and Brian O'Conchubhair) of the *Routledge International Handbook of Irish Studies* (Routledge, 2021).

**Dr Alisha R. Walters (Penn State University, Abington College), 'Formations of White Supremacy in the Colonial Caribbean: Irish Racial Ambivalence.'**

Nineteenth-century references to the Irish diaspora are striking for how they index global formations of white supremacy. Even more striking is that perceived Irish racial ambiguity became an inextricable part of many colonial constructions of whiteness. As Irish people moved globally in the nineteenth century, such displacements undid and reformed local and international formulations of race and nation. Throughout the empire, especially the Caribbean, national and racial formations were often reformed and reconsolidated because of--not despite--the perceived racial malleability of white Irishness. Indeed, in these colonial settings, the Irish represented a plasticity that was potentially beneficial to bolstering the white supremacist interests of local government structures. This paper argues that contemporaneous references to the Irish in the British Caribbean colonies reveal how perceived Irish racial ambivalence was not a detriment to forming white supremacist state structures throughout the empire. Rather, such ambivalence became a constitutive factor in creating local and national white supremacist formations that were agile, malleable, and locally distinct.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Alisha R. Walters is Associate Professor of 19th-Century British Literature at Penn State University, Abington College. Her book manuscript in progress, *Affective Liberalisms: Brown Caribbean Feeling and Liberal Futures, 1830-1901*, argues

that Victorian narratives about mixed-race Caribbean people—and their feelings—are central to nineteenth century theories of liberal humanism.

**Dr Mary L. Mullen (Villanova University) ‘Home Demolitions: Ireland and Palestine’**

Writing in 1852 in *Household Words*, Harriet Martineau declares: “There was a time...when almost any child in Ireland would understand the parable of the house built upon the sand better than an English reader of the New Testament; for, until lately, houses as fragile as any mud dwelling in Palestine, and far more wretched than Jew or Arab ever lives in, were exceedingly common in Ireland.” Martineau alludes to this Biblical parable to emphasize the extreme poverty of Irish people: their inability to shelter themselves in times of trouble. But her words unwittingly invite transhistorical connections between nineteenth-century Ireland and twentieth- and twenty-first century Palestine. Studying the connections between the destruction of Irish homes during the Famine and house demolitions in occupied Palestine, I consider two forms of intimacy in this paper. First, the intimate violence of colonialism: how it can force people to destroy their own homes. Second, the intimacy of solidarity across differences: the connections that emerge in the face of such violence.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Mary L. Mullen is Associate Professor of English at Villanova University. She is the author of *Novel Institutions: Anachronism, Irish Novels, and Nineteenth-Century Realism* (Edinburgh, 2019), which won the Robert Rhodes Prize for Books on Literature from the American Conference for Irish Studies. She has published articles on settler colonialism, the politics of time, public humanities, fast-day literature, and nineteenth-century English and Irish writing. She is co-editor (with Renée Fox) of *Race, Violence, and Form: Reframing Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Liverpool UP, 2026) and she is currently completing *The Colonial Politics of Public Interest*, which is under contract at Cornell University Press.

**Prof. Amy E. Martin (Mount Holyoke College) ‘Internationalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Irish Prison Writings.’**

In *Leaves from A Prison Diary* (1885), Michael Davitt writes, “India and Ireland alone of the countries subject to England are virtually ruled outside of the British constitution.” Davitt explores an intimacy between two nations subject to extralegal colonial power, in

particular the shared experience of unconstitutional carceral practices. Davitt and other Fenian writers of prison narratives understood their own experiences as part of the movement of counterinsurgent strategies from one colonial location to the next, linking their own incarceration to British counterinsurgency in India, Jamaica, and Southern Africa in particular. The powerful analysis that emerges in this late nineteenth century archive of prison writings thus articulates an internationalist nationalism. These writers' understandings of extralegal detainment and carceral violence also serve as the grounds for imagining new forms of resistance -- internationalist anticolonialism that moves beyond sympathy or identification towards the deeper intimacy of solidarity and organizing in the face of a colonial state of exception.

**Biographical Note:** Prof. Amy E. Martin is Professor of English on the Emma B. Kennedy Foundation at Mount Holyoke College. She is the author of *Alter-Nations: Nationalisms, Terror, and the State in Nineteenth Century Britain and Ireland* (2012), and has published on nineteenth-century Ireland in journals such as the *Field Day Review*, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, and *Victorian Review*, as well as a number of edited volumes. She is finishing a book project on forms of Irish gothic internationalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She is currently serving as the Director of the Weissman Center for Leadership at Mount Holyoke.

**Prof. Simon Joyce (William and Mary College), 'Trinity Wilde.'**

In efforts to reclaim Oscar Wilde for Ireland, the biggest sticking point has been his sexuality, which is still often thought to have been formed after he left for Oxford. This paper argues instead that Wilde's understanding of sexuality, as well as his understanding of Irish politics, is deeply entangled with his reading on classical Greece at Trinity College. Wilde's commitment to the independent Greek city-states, in opposition to his tutor J.P. Mahaffy's celebration of the imperial phase initiated by Alexander the Great, was partly in service of his belief in Home Rule, but just as importantly an argument for sexual tolerance. As such, this paper positions him as more sexually knowledgeable than we typically credit and link that knowledge to his studies at Trinity. Recognizing that Wilde came to Oxford already aware of such terms lets us re-examine the idea that homosexuality was something he only learned about (and practiced) in England.

**Biographical Note:** Prof. Simon Joyce is Professor of English at the College of William and Mary, where he teaches Victorian and modernist literature, LGBTQ+ studies, and Irish literature and culture. He is the author of four books, most recently *Modernism and Naturalism in British and Irish Fiction, 1880–1930* (Cambridge University Press, 2015) and *LGBT Victorians: Sexuality and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century Archive* (Oxford, 2022; paperback out in August 2025). A new essay on Wilde and sexuality is forthcoming in Kate Hext and Alex Murray, eds., *The Oxford Handbook to Oscar Wilde* (Oxford University Press).

### Domestic Intimacies

**Prof. Elaine Farrell (QUB) “A great deal of dirt’: secrets in nineteenth-century Ireland.’**

One December morning in 1865, Margaret Maguire walked into the bedroom where her employer’s daughter, Jeannie, slept and was startled by the state of the bed that ‘looked greatly tossed; and had the appearance of two persons having been in it’. Maguire also noticed that the bed of a male visitor who had stayed in the house that night, looked like it had not been slept in at all. When Maguire commented to Jeannie on the state of her bed, the teenager blushed but she did not reply. In her role as a servant in the household, Maguire, and other nineteenth-century Irish employees like her, had intimate access to the lives and private spaces of those who paid their wages. As Deborah Cohen has observed in her 2013 study of family secrets in Britain, ‘Servants had always been the best informants as to the secret doings of their masters’. This paper emerges from my current research project on secrets in nineteenth-century Ireland. Using case studies gleaned from archival and press records, it considers secret-keeping, the interception of secrets, and the disclosure of secrets in spaces like the courts and elsewhere. This paper also explores how some secret-keepers sought to negotiate with interceptors in an effort to prevent their secrets and lies coming undone.

**Biographical Note:** Prof. Elaine Farrell is Professor of Irish History at Queen’s University Belfast. She is a social historian with particular interests in crime and gender, and is currently working on a history of secrets in nineteenth-century Ireland. She is *IHS* book

reviews editor (with Andrew Sneddon) and is always happy to chat about potential book reviews.

**Prof. Lucy McDiarmid (Montclair State University) ‘Intimacies in the Cottage: women’s emotions in fairy legends collected by Lady Gregory’.**

The fairy legends collected in Lady Gregory’s *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* are transcriptions of stories she heard between 1897 and 1919 from informants in Galway, Clare, and on Inis Meáin, people she happened to meet or local people she already knew. Those to whom the events are said to have happened are usually at one remove from the teller, someone known to a brother or cousin or neighbor. But whoever they may be, the events in their stories express experiences that have an emotional intensity.

In the sections ‘Away’ and ‘Seers and Healers,’ the stories are notable because no fairies appear in them. Most are set in domestic interiors, the small spaces where families interact in close proximity. Although fairy influence is invoked to explain many of the unusual or unconventional behaviors in the house, fairies never appear. The legends focus on the somatic but reveal the emotional. In one example, a young girl refuses to speak for ten years or to get up from the mat next to the bed where her mother died. In another, a mother-in-law, believing her new daughter-in-law to be lazy, beats her with a piece of flax, and the young woman disappears up the chimney. In yet another story, a drunk husband beats his wife because she won’t get out of bed for seven years after having a baby.

In all of these fairy legends, as my talk will show, the intimate space of the rural house is forcibly restabilized after disorderly emotions are expressed in non-verbal ways.

**Biographical Note:** Prof. Lucy McDiarmid’s most recent monographs are *At Home in the Revolution: what women said and did in 1916* (2015) and *Slightly Magical Irish Poetry and the Long 1990s* (2025). She is a recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library, a former president of the American Conference for Irish Studies, and an Honorary Member of the Royal Irish Academy.

**Dr Maeve O’Riordan (UCC) ‘Letters, intimacies and death: Jane White’s loss and Elizabeth Leigh’s death in letters.’**

Jane, Countess of Bantry purposefully kept the letters she received relating to the death of her thirty-three-year-old eldest daughter, Elizabeth Leigh, in 1880. As Jane was not present when Elizabeth died, and was unable to travel to her funeral, the correspondence with Elizabeth’s husband, brothers and sisters-in-law, mother-in-law, servant, godmother and wider circle of mourners serve as an intimate record of Elizabeth’s last hours and days, her repose, burial and the inquest which followed. They are a memorial to a mother’s love and loss - and a window into nineteenth-century views on death, opiates and mental health.

This was the second time that Jane was in a different country when one of her daughters died. Thirty years earlier, she was in Germany when her second daughter, Emily, died at twelve years old. In both instances, it was a servant – first a governess, and then a lady’s maid, who was able to provide the most intimate picture of her daughters’ last hours.

This paper will examine these letters as a means of creating an intimate space of grief – of cutting the distance between a woman and a deceased daughter. The letters provided directions on final acts of kindness to be shown, a means of transporting locks of mother and daughter’s hair, and also as objects in themselves to be preserved, opened, read and re-read, and passed on after Jane’s own death.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Maeve O’Riordan is lecturer in women’s and cultural history at University College Cork.

## **Friday 19th June**

**Keynote 2: Dr Leanne Calvert (UL), 'Edible Intimacies: Reconstructing intimate histories through food in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Ireland.'**

**Biographical Note:** Dr Leanne Calvert is Assistant Professor in Irish History and Director of the MA History of Family. She is a historian of family, gender and sexuality, whose work focuses on Presbyterian families in Ireland and North America across the

eighteenth and nineteenth century. She has published extensively on Irish family life on topics including courtship, sex and the making of marriage; illegitimacy and the family; youth and adolescence, marriage and marital breakdown; siblinghood; the material culture of sex; fatherhood and pregnancy; and queer approaches to the Irish family. She is current President of the International Federation for Research in Women's History. Her most recent book is *Pious & Promiscuous; Love, Life & the family in Presbyterian Ulster* which was published in 2025 with the Royal Irish Academy. She is currently working on a new book *Sexuality and Social Control: Presbyterians in Ireland and North America, 1717-1830*.

### **Romantic Intimacies**

**Sara Álvarez Díaz (University of Oviedo) 'Ahead of its time: *The Sons of Erin or Modern Sentiments* as a Play on Challenging Gender Roles, Class Conflict and Love.'**

This paper explores Alicia Sheridan LeFanu's *The Sons of Erin or Modern Sentiments* (1812) as a play concerned with love and class conflict in nineteenth-century Ireland, arguing that LeFanu uses intimate relationships to explore how social change was lived and negotiated in everyday life. The comedy locates its dynamics within courtship, marriage, and emotional dependency, revealing how romantic relations become a primary site where gendered and class-based power is exercised and contested. LeFanu's portrayal of love resists sentimental idealization. Romantic attachment is shaped by economic calculation and familial pressure, particularly for women whose social value is tied to marriage. Through moments of private conversations, emotional disclosure, the play foregrounds intimate knowledge—desire and vulnerability—as a means of navigating restrictive social norms. Lady Elinor challenges prescribed gender roles, not through open defiance but through her management of affection and moral judgment, exposing the unequal emotional labour demanded of women within romantic relationships. Class prejudice further shapes the possibilities of love, delimiting which attachments are socially permissible and which must remain secret, deferred, or sacrificed. In an Irish context marked by anxieties about lineage, inheritance, and belonging, romantic relations acquire political significance, linking private desire to

broader questions of social legitimacy. Through the lens of affect theory and intersectional gender theory, this paper argues that *The Sons of Erin or Modern Sentiments* offers a valuable literary account of how love and romantic intimacy functioned as experiences through which ordinary people confronted social hierarchy and change.

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**Biographical Note:** Sara Álvarez Díaz is a fourth year PhD candidate and teaching assistant at the University of Oviedo, Spain. Her line of research and interest is deeply rooted in the study of female emotions and trauma in Irish literature. She has presented several papers at seminars and international conferences and has a couple of forthcoming articles in indexed academic papers.

**Jonathan Wright (Maynooth University) ‘Slavery, love and death in the Green Atlantic: the life and letters of Mary Cumming.’**

In autumn 1811, a young Ulsterwoman named Mary Cumming left Ireland for North America with her husband William, an Ulster-born merchant who had established himself in Petersburg, Virginia. In the four years that followed, Cumming wrote regularly to her father and siblings in Ulster. Conforming to the broader patterns of Atlantic World epistolary practice, her letters served to sustain the bonds of familial affection and offer a vivid picture of life among the middling ranks in Antebellum Virginia. But beyond this, Cumming’s letters also offer an intimate picture of a young woman struggling to adjust to the ‘peculiar institution’ of slavery, grappling with the pain of infant mortality and confronting the reality of her own mortality. While the Atlantic World is often approached from the perspective of soldiers, statesmen, merchants and migration, this

paper will seek to use Cumming's letters as a means to open up its 'inner life', highlighting just one of the countless intimate histories that lie behind the broader patterns of movement and exchange that brought it into existence.

**Biographical Note:** Jonathan Jeffrey Wright is an associate professor of history at Maynooth University. His work focuses on politics and political culture in the age of revolution and reform; Irish connections with empire (with a particular focus on slavery and the Atlantic World); and Irish urban history.

**Dr Clodagh Tait (MIC), 'More like one that tuck love powders, than a reasonable being': passion and poison in nineteenth-century Ireland.'**

Many men and women in nineteenth-century Ireland believed in the potential of charms and potions to spark feelings of love and desire, and we find them deploying a variety of strategies to direct the affections of others. Love magic might be suspected when eligible men became besotted with women considered to be socially below them, or when they become ill or insane. So-called 'love powders', almost tasteless when disguised in drinks or food, were cited in a number of cases of alleged murder. Love fraud was potentially all the more consequential in a society where marriage arrangements were about economics as much as love, and implicated a wider group than the couple themselves. As well as revealing concerns about deceit in emotional and financial relationships, accounts of love magic and love potions thus hint at the complexities and pitfalls of building relationships in a status-conscious society where one's romantic prospects were often dependent on factors beyond one's control. But with changes in regulations, policing and forensics, the days of love potions were numbered.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Clodagh Tait lectures in history in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. She has written extensively on Irish social and cultural history, including the history of women and men; pregnancy, childbirth and child-rearing; death, violence, martyrdom and protest; emotion and religious devotion and popular belief. She is working on an anthology of Irish women's folklore and a book on cursing and blessing.

## Unromantic Intimacies

### **Dr Kyle Hughes (UU) ‘Sir Schomberg Kerr McDonnell (1861-1915): Intimacy and Friendship in High Society.’**

Sir Schomberg Kerr McDonnell was born at Glenarm in 1861, the fifth son of the Earl of Antrim. His was a life interesting to the point of romance. A varied career that began as bear leader to the Earl of Carnarvon’s son, later as secretary to the Duke of Buccleuch, then as private secretary to Lord Salisbury during his various tenures as Foreign and Prime Minister, and eventually to the permanent secretaryship of the Office of Works, was marked by a series of intimate friendships. One of the ‘Souls’, the elite and fashionable set so prominent in intellectual and political life during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, McDonnell was a trusted confidant of Salisbury, Balfour, Edward VII, Curzon and numerous others. A respected and admired public servant, he was also a soldier at heart. His long career in public life was punctuated by periods of active military service, including a tour in South Africa in 1900, from where Queen Victoria herself urged him to return, and a secret decision to enlist (at 54 years of age) for the Western Front in 1915, where he met his end only a few days after arrival. Shortly before his death, he was cited in a divorce suit, married an American society heiress, and had taken up residence at his new Scottish estate, earlier bequeathed to him by his life-long correspondent, Mrs MacDonald Stuart, the last of the MacDonalds of Glencoe. Focusing primarily upon the suggested themes of ‘intimate sources’ and ‘intimate knowledge’, and drawing from his private correspondence at PRONI, this paper will examine McDonnell’s relationships, both public and private, offering a new view from within of political and high society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Kyle Hughes, Lecturer in British and Irish History, Ulster University. Publications include *The Scots in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast* (Edinburgh, 2013); [with Donald M. MacRaild], *Ribbon Societies in Nineteenth-Century Ireland and its Diaspora* (Liverpool, 2018).

**Dr Shannon Devlin (University of Galway) “These love affairs are too hard for me’: siblings as sources of intimacy in Irish singlehood.’**

In November 1885, Anne Wakefield Richardson wrote of the dramatic courtship antics of her younger sister, Gertrude: ‘these loves affairs are too hard for me’. Anne acted as chaperone, matchmaker, and agony aunt for her younger siblings as they navigated courtship opportunities in their rural home in County Armagh and new, exciting social urban spaces of Dublin and London. Considering herself a ‘spare’ in her family of nine siblings, Anne eschewed marriage to dedicate herself to her career and formed a close relationship with her sister-in-law, friend, and suspected lover, Constance Maynard.

In the wake of dramatic social and demographic upheaval following the Great Famine, the image of the rural bachelor or dependent spinster has become pervasive in Irish culture. Historians of Irish sexuality are beginning to chip away at the potential for non-heteronormative relationships within this cohort but as Rachel Bayer has recently argued, the assumption of ‘compulsory sexuality’ means historians have failed to grapple with the possibility that celibacy was a conscious choice due to a lack of sexual desire.<sup>1</sup> Instead, other types of intimate bonds are formed between siblings throughout the lifecycle and depending on the marital decisions within the extended family. Taking a horizontal family approach, this paper aims to explore attitudes and experiences of so-called celibate and ‘surplus’ siblings in nineteenth-century Ireland. It argues that viewing society through the lens of siblinghood can complicate our understandings of (a)sexuality, intimacy, and the importance of singlehood within the wider family network.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Shannon Devlin is Lecturer in Irish History at the University of Galway. An historian of the Irish family, her research explores the horizontal relationships between siblings and cousins. Her first monograph on *Siblinghood and Sociability in Nineteenth-Century Ulster* was published by Liverpool University Press last year.

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Bayer, ‘Asexual geographies: the allosexualisation of space in Ireland’ in *Gender, Place & Culture*, (ahead of print, 2024), pp 1-21.

**Konrad Zaręba (University of Warsaw), 'Becoming Oscar Wilde: Queer Intimacy, Hellenism, and Irish Identity.'**

Before leaving Ireland for Britain, Oscar Wilde was educated at Trinity College Dublin, where his intellectual and emotional formation was profoundly shaped by his tutor, the classicist J. P. Mahaffy. Their relationship, at first affectionate and later hostile, offers a revealing lens through which to examine the intimacies of self-identification in nineteenth-century Ireland. Mahaffy introduced Wilde to Greek antiquity and instilled in him a lifelong devotion to Hellenism for which Wilde remained grateful, yet the two later diverged sharply over Irish Home Rule, with Mahaffy opposing nationalist aspirations and Wilde expressing sympathy for them.

This paper situates Wilde as a figure marked by what may be termed a double marginalisation: as Irish and as homosexual in the late nineteenth century. It argues that these intertwined identities shaped the intimate ways in which Wilde engaged with ancient Greece, both as a source of homoerotic precedent and as a political analogue to Ireland's own struggle for autonomy. Drawing on representations of same-sex intimacy in classical culture and on nineteenth-century Greece's resistance to imperial domination, Wilde fashioned a personal discourse that fused sexual self-understanding with nationalist feeling.

Through close readings of Wilde's writings and reflections on his relationship with Mahaffy, the paper demonstrates how intimate sexual identity and political worldview intersect in Wilde's classical reception. Viewed from within these negotiations of identity, Wilde emerges as a figure whose literary Hellenism functioned not only as aesthetic devotion but as a means of emotional self-definition and subtle resistance within the pressures of nineteenth-century Ireland and Britain.

**Biographical Note:** Konrad Zaręba is a PhD candidate in literary studies at the University of Warsaw. His dissertation explores decadent and Hellenistic influences on homosexual aesthetics in *fin de siècle* English-language literature. His research interests include queer studies, Gothic fiction, aesthetics, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish, British, and American writing.

## Cultural Intimacies

### **Dr Ian D’Alton (TCD) ‘Clouding the goldfish bowl? – Somerville and Ross meld the private intimacies and public lives of the Anglo-Irish.’**

The modern public eye is relentless and sleepless. The elites of politicians, entertainers, sportspeople, royalty are all fair game. That’s not new; thus it was for the Anglo-Irish gentry in the long nineteenth century. Caught in the headlights of a telegraph and newspaper age, their private lives were often hardly private at all. To avoid salacious, malevolent and just plain curious observers they had to construct serpentine pathways to the intimate and personal by disguise, sidestep or distraction. A brittle society often seen by contemporaries as tottering on its last legs, eventually all that was left to the gentry was a Cheshire Cat’s grin of abstract loyalty and a vacuous social existence, the boredom of a perpetual Protestant afternoon tea. The problem was that – still the arbiters of style and fashion and irresistibly slightly mad – they weren’t left in peace, even by their own literary exegesis like Edith Somerville and Violet Martin.

Navigating life for the gentry involved a complex peregrination around the public and the private. Discussing Somerville’s and Ross’s fictional works such as *The Real Charlotte*, *The Big House of Inver*, *An Enthusiast* and the iconic Irish R.M. stories, this paper raises a quizzical eyebrow about how, why and where they interrogated the gentry’s journey during the dying of the light, these twilight years. The purpose of this paper is to show how, through literary fashioning and stylish storytelling, Somerville and Ross constructed narratives that melded public *personae* with private intimacies which still inform our image of the Irish gentry today.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Ian d’Alton, a graduate of UCC and Cambridge, is an historian of southern Irish Protestantism. A particular interest is what the Irish gentry and aristocracy thought they were, and were *for*. Sometime a Visiting Fellow at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge (2014), he is a Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for Contemporary Irish History at Trinity College, Dublin. His latest book is *Southern Irish Protestants – Histories, Lives and Literatures* (Eastwood, 2024).

**Dr Helen Williams (Northumbria University) ‘Bookish Intimacies: The Illustrations of the Book of Kells by Margaret McNair Stokes and Helen Campbell D’Olier.’**

The nineteenth and twentieth-century reception of the Book of Kells (800AD) was significantly shaped by the artistry of two women, Margaret McNair Stokes (1832–1900) and Helen Campbell D’Olier (1829–1887). Stokes was celebrated in her lifetime, being the first Irishwoman to be elected an honorary member of the Royal Irish Academy, though her work as an antiquarian has attracted more scholarly attention than the labour she shared with D’Olier, of bringing the illuminations of the Book of Kells to wider public audiences.

Stokes and D’Olier independently undertook the intimate labour of tracing or sketching from the highly prized volume whilst it was in situ in the library, bringing ink and paint into the reading rooms. They then provided access to the resulting images, proffering to new audiences bookish intimacies of different kinds: Stokes through lithography and D’Olier through magic lantern entertainments. It was D’Olier’s images of the manuscript that adorned Edward Sullivan’s *The Book of Kells* (1914), a volume which became ‘a required possession in Irish Households’ and which sold well on both sides of the Atlantic (de Hamel, 2015).

This paper reflects on the contributions of these women to a modern appreciation of the Book of Kells. It reflects upon the intimacies involved in the creation of their works – relationships with the manuscript that scholars find difficult to imagine today – as well as how their reproductions enabled readers to appreciate one of the most remarkable medieval manuscripts of the Christian tradition, prompting transnational intimacies of knowledge about the volume, and helping make it a household name in Ireland and abroad.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Helen Williams is Associate Professor of English at Northumbria University. Her most recent books include *Laurence Sterne and the Eighteenth-Century Book* (CUP, 2021), *The Cambridge Edition of the Correspondence of John Cleland* (2024), and *Literary Heritage* (Routledge, 2025). She is a UKRI Future Leaders Fellow working on a global women’s book history, 1600-1900.

**Dr Declan O’Keeffe (Clongowes Wood College) ‘The Young Writers’ Saint: Women writers in the *Irish Monthly*, (1873 1898).’**

When Katharine Tynan called Matthew Russell ‘The Young Writers’ Saint’ she was speaking on behalf of many female writers, whose work might never have seen the light of day were it not for the literary journal that he founded and which is an example of intimate sources: letters, diaries, and memoirs.

Late nineteenth-century Ireland has often been seen as a mere trough before the brilliance of the Anglo-Irish Revival, when in fact it was a vital seedbed, both in poetry and realist fiction, that featured a mix of writers from a *mélange* of religious backgrounds and from both sides of the gender divide. Matthew Russell was a Jesuit priest who founded a literary journal, the *Irish Monthly* in 1873. Russell was particularly successful in getting women such as Tynan, and Rosa Mulholland to contribute to the journal.

Nineteenth century Ireland was a fertile period for Irish female writers, with over five hundred women publishing in all genres and the *Irish Monthly* was especially diligent in promoting writing by women as well as recording important biographical information about the authors. In its first twenty-five years, the magazine published novels by nineteen writers, of whom thirteen were women, showing Russell’s commitment to providing them with an outlet for their work in an age that still decidedly saw their place as in the home.

**Biographical Note:** Dr Declan O’Keeffe is the College Historian at Clongowes Wood College. He has just completed his PhD: *Jesuit Publications, 1873-1918: A Mirror and a Spotlight*. Since 2009 he has been published in: *Engendering Ireland: New Reflections on Modern History and Literature*, and *Periodicals & Journalism in Twentieth-Century Ireland, (Part II)* as well as in several issues of *Studies*.

### **Intimacies and Crises**

**Prof. Marguérite Corporaal, (Radboud University) ‘Community in a Time of Cholera: Intimacy and the 1832 Pandemic in Irish Writings.’**



A pamphlet issued by the Belfast Board of Health on 18 February 1832 warned of the imminent outbreak of ‘Epidemic Cholera’, admonishing citizens to ‘maintain cleanliness of person and clothes’, prevent wetness as well as sudden changes of temperature, and to avoid ‘all parties in small close rooms’. Exactly one month later cholera morbus broke out in the city (Farrell 2021), soon spreading to every corner of the country, and especially Sligo town (Gallagher 2020),

While some pamphlets criticised the governmental policies of strict quarantine on travel to towns and ports, such as William White’s *The Evils of Quarantine Laws, and Non-Existence of Pestilential Contagion* (1837), overall the miasma theory was still prevalent (Creighton 1894: 732), leading people to escape from their stricken towns and to avoid contact with others. Restrictions on mobility and fear of contagion left their imprint on literary texts as well, as this paper will demonstrate. It will examine how Irish writers, such as John Banim in *Chaunt of the Cholera* (1831), William Carleton in *The Squanders of Castle Squander* (1852), and Charlotte Thornley Stoker’s *Experiences of the Cholera in Ireland* (1873), prefigured, reflected on and remembered the 1832 cholera morbus pandemic.

As will be revealed, in their writings these authors translate the impact of cholera on society in terms of intimacies. The spread of the disease is imagined as the result of physical proximity, and these texts bear witness to panic about communal contacts, fed by ignorance over the fact that the disease was water rather than airborne. As Cormac Ó Gradá and Jennifer Slivka argue, in Ireland the diseased body historically ‘represents larger social ills’. Pandemics generate mechanisms of exclusion, as well as concerns over class and ethnicity (2023: 3), and this is witnessed in literature about the 1832 cholera disaster which represents neglect of the dying, violence towards the sick,

stigmatisation and expulsion. While these literary works represent the pandemic as a crisis in intimacies, at the same time they reveal disturbing intimate details of disease and death. In so doing, this paper will analyse the recurrent ‘narrative templates’ (Wertsch 2002: 9) and (often Gothic) tropes – such as the ‘miasma’ (Robins 1995) that these authors used, in order to give shape to pandemic trauma.

**Biographical Note:** Prof. Marguérite Corporaal is Professor of Anglophone Literature and Culture at Radboud University. In 2010 she obtained a ERC Starting Grant for Consolidators for a project that researched literary memories of Ireland’s Great Famine. From 2019-2025 she led the consortium project Heritages of Hunger which was funded by the Dutch research council NWO through an NWA-ORC grant. She was also the principal investigator of the VICI project Redefining the Region (NWO, 2019–25). Corporaal is the author of *Relocated Memories: The Great Famine in Irish and Diaspora Fiction, 1846–1870* (2017), and co-editor of, amongst others, *The Great Irish Famine and Social Class* (2019), *The Famine Diaspora and Irish American Women’s Writing* (2024), and *Famines and the Making of Heritage* (2024). Her monograph *Redefining the Region: The Transnational Dimensions of Irish Local Colour Fiction, 1880-1920* is forthcoming with Liverpool UP at the end of this year.

**Davide Lamparelli (University of Edinburgh) ‘Reconstructing the Intimate Experience of Famine Relief and Solidarity in Ireland and the Scottish Highlands: A History of Emotions Approach.’**

The humanitarian crisis caused by the Great Famine inspired unprecedented solidarity for Ireland and the Scottish Highlands from across the globe. Recent studies by scholars such as Kinealy, Gray, and Shroul have greatly contributed to reconstructing the domestic response to the crisis and the networks of transnational philanthropy. The current scholarship, however, largely focuses on the charitable efforts of the donors, overlooking the perspective of the aid recipients. This paper is an overview of my ongoing doctoral research, which aims to address these gaps by examining the emotional, cultural, and political impact of solidarity on different sections of Irish and Scottish societies during the Famine crises of the 1840s. It sheds light on the victims’ intimate experience of Famine relief by analysing their emotional responses to receiving solidarity, or having it denied when expected, during different stages of the crises – the

famine, the 1848 Young Ireland rebellion and the Scottish food riots, and the mass emigration. Indeed, receiving or not receiving support caused different emotional reactions, ranging from gratitude to shame, indebtedness, or resentment, impacting not only donor-recipient relationships but also the recipients' intimate perceptions of themselves. By applying Reddy's concept of emotion words as speech acts (emotives) to tenants' petitions to landlords, newspapers, and documents by political actors, my research restores the agency of aid recipients, examining not only how they reacted to the solidarity they did or did not receive but also how they acted on it, using it to redefine their identities and political relationships.

**Biographical Note:** Davide Lamparelli, is a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, researching famine, solidarity, and emotions in Ireland and the Scottish Highlands. Previously, he studied history in Aberdeen and Utrecht, writing a thesis on soft power and solidarity in US newspapers during the Great Famine and completing an internship with Heritages of Hunger.

**Keynote 3: Prof. Fionnuala Dillane (UCD), 'The Emotional Press: Intimate Politics of the Page in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals and Newspapers'**

**Biographical Note:** Professor Fionnuala Dillane is Professor at the School of English, Drama, and Film, University College Dublin. She works predominantly in the field of nineteenth-century British literature and culture; periodical studies, memory studies and gender with a particular expertise on George Eliot and the periodical and newspaper press. She is currently editing the *Handbook of Transnational Periodical Research* with Marianne Van Remoortel (Ghent University) to be published with Brill in 2026. Her other main area of interest concerns the dynamic interplay of memory, genre, affect and narrative and her publications in this area include a collection of essays co-edited with Naomi McAreavey and Emilie Pine, *The Body in Pain in Irish Literature and Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); a co-edited special edition of the journal *Slavery and Abolition* with Maria Stuart and Fionnghuala Sweeney republished in 2018 by Routledge; and a collection of essays on Ireland, Iceland and Memory with Gunnthorunn Gudmundsdottir, *Iceland-Ireland: Memory, Literature, Culture on the Atlantic Periphery* (Brill, 2022).