

Writing Workshop: Women and Ageing

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That summer saw academics researching in the emerging field of cultural gerontology in Ireland and abroad converge in the **University of Limerick** for an innovative writing workshop in women and ageing.

Focused on women and ageing in Irish literature and film, the event provided a collaborative space for researchers to share and develop ideas, workshop articles and engage in dedicated writing time.

In view of the rapidly ageing society in Ireland (and the rest of Europe), cultural constructions and perceptions of old age take on added significance as they impact society's views on women's identities as well as women's self-image.

While the topicality of the theme of ageing has given rise to a number of sociological studies, there have so far been no large-scale studies focusing on literary and cultural constructions of ageing women in an Irish context.

Furthermore, in Ireland, significant progress has been made in the last twenty years in achievements in marriage equality and gender recognition. However, as testified at the 2015 IRC supported **Women and Ageing Conference** in UL, much remains to be done in terms of promoting the status, visibility and positive ageing of older people in Irish society.

Two striking aspects of the day were, firstly, the immense potential for creative connections across strands of literary, cultural and media studies. Secondly, the sheer productivity that emerges from having time and space to debrief, gather one's thoughts and simply write, after a busy semester, was very much apparent!

The workshop got off to an energetic start with a welcome and introduction by Dr Maggie O'Neill and Dr Michaela Schrage-Früh of UL, who discussed the beginnings and goals of the Women and Ageing Research Network as well as

the aims of the workshop. Dr Íde O’Sullivan, consultant in writing and writing pedagogy and co-director of the Regional Writing Centre in UL, skilfully facilitated the day’s writing activities. Contributors also had the valuable chance to engage with Dr Carmen Zamorano Llena, General Editor of the **Nordic Irish Studies Journal**. The combination of supported activities, dedicated writing time, a focused context and the opportunity to ‘ask the editor’ proved very productive.

We include a copy of the workshop schedule below. Aiming to make the most of the day, we went from 9am to 6pm. The combination of structured activities followed by bursts of writing meant that we were able to keep our energy levels up (of course, lots of coffee helped this!).

- 09.00: Introduction (Íde O’Sullivan)
- 09.15: Introduction to the Women and Ageing Project (Maggie O’Neill and Michaela Schrage-Früh)
- 9.30: Freewriting and open forum discussion
- 10.00: Writing time: Writing/revising the abstract
- 11.00: Coffee
- 11.30: Introduction to *The Nordic Studies Journal* (Carmen Zamorano Llena)
- 12.00: Writing time: Contextualising the paper
- 13.00: Lunch
- 14.00: Writing time
- 15.30: Coffee
- 16.00: Peer review session of abstracts
- 16.45: Writing time: Reviewing the abstract
- 17.30: Strategies to maintain momentum
- 17.45: Next steps (Maggie O’Neill and Michaela Schrage-Früh)

This event is in line with emerging interdisciplinary approaches in research and publishing that overlap with writing projects, bringing together people from different areas to go beyond the boundaries of their usual research, explore ideas and develop innovative discussions.

Feedback from participants include:

It was a fantastic experience. Every publication, where possible should consider a writing retreat. Very valuable, on so many levels. (Brenda O'Connell, MU)

It was sheer bliss. And I learned loads, not just about the art and craft of academic writing, but also about my own processes and development as a writer. (Cormac O'Brien, UCD)

I really enjoyed meeting you all, and hearing about your research. I hope to link up with many of you, and look forward to working towards publications/conference. (Cathy Fowley, DCU)

Such a motivating and inspiring day! (Clare Gorman, WIT)

As well as facilitating the enrichment and timely completion of a special journal issue on Women and Ageing in Irish literature and film, the workshop represents an important stage in our development of an Irish research network on women and ageing.

Other collaborative projects in progress include a book on women and ageing in literature and visual media more generally and a special journal issue on women, ageing and life writing. We recently received the excellent news that our proposed panel on women and ageing in Irish fiction will be included in the forthcoming IASIL Conference (The International Association for the Study of Irish Literature) in University College Cork.