

# Celtic Identity



In the New  
Millennium

**A SYMPOSIUM**

March 13, 2009

## **SUNY CONVERSATIONS IN THE DISCIPLINES**

Monroe Community College  
Alfred University  
SUNY Oswego  
SUNY Stony Brook  
The University of Rochester

<http://web.monroecc.edu/CelticIdentity>

## **Conference Agenda and Research Abstracts**

**Monroe Community College**

**March 13, 2009**

*“To provide SUNY scholars a venue for sharing Celtic research . . .”*

**R. Thomas Flynn Conference Center  
Monroe Community College  
1000 East Henrietta Road  
Rochester, NY 14623**

## SUNY Conversations in the Disciplines Program

The State University of New York, through the State University Faculty Senate's University Programs and Awards Committee, sponsors intercampus faculty conferences within and across academic disciplines known as "*Conversations in the Disciplines.*" These conferences bring together State University members and visiting scholars to examine new trends, review promising research findings, and become acquainted with professional developments in their fields and other campuses.

The emphasis of the program is *scholarly and creative development* rather than administrative, curricular, or instructional matters. Through such interchange, both the professional and personal growth of individuals and the programs of instruction and research at participating campuses are enhanced.

## MCC Conversations in the Disciplines Project

In broad terms, the purpose of MCC's project is to foster scholarship and the exchange of ideas among Celticists throughout SUNY. Given that there are no Celtic Studies programs or degrees within SUNY (with the exception of study abroad partnerships), this purpose needs to remain broad attract individual scholars and faculty from a variety of disciplines and from a variety of campuses.

This purpose will be achieved through two specific goals. The first goal is to offer SUNY scholars a venue for sharing Celtic research. The second goal is to explore the potential for system-wide collaborative research and discussion about Celtic issues in an online environment.

The first goal will be accomplished through the development and hosting of a one-day research forum. The second goal will be accomplished through the design and development of a SUNY Celtic Research Network.

*To many "Celtic" of any sort is a magic bag, into which anything may be put, and out of which almost anything can come.*

*J.R.R. Tolkien*

## Celtic Identity in the New Millennium

With support from SUNY Conversations in the Disciplines, the purpose of this one-day research symposium is to promote SUNY faculty research in the field of Celtic studies. The symposium will include four research presentations, each presentation delivered by a panel of scholars. The argument for each presentation will be to document how historic Celtic culture serves as a precedent for current explorations of Celtic identity. The four fields of Humanities research which serve as a foundation for the forum include literature, religion, theater and performing arts.

## Research Forum Agenda

- 8:00-9:00 Refreshments, Networking and Opening Remarks  
Dr. Larry Tyree, Interim President  
Dr. Janet Glocker, Vice President of Academic Services, Monroe Community College
- 9:00-10:15 Research Presentation 1  
***Celtic Mythological Seeds of Contemporary Society***  
Ms. Stasia Callan, Professor of English, Monroe Community College  
Mr. Jeffrey Jones, Assistant Professor of English, Monroe Community College
- 10:30-11:45 Research Presentation 2  
***Tellers, Tales and Trances: A Postcolonial View of Celtic Bards from Myrddin to McCourt***  
Ms. Gail Bouk, Assistant Professor of English, Monroe Community College  
***Telling Culhwch and Olwen: Seeking Modern Identity through a Welsh Millennium***  
Dr. Russell Peck, Professor of English, University of Rochester
- 12:00-1:30 Lunch Interlude
- 1:30-2:45 Research Presentation 3  
***The Dilemma of (post)Modernization in Contemporary Irish Fiction***  
Dr. Edward O'Shea, Professor of English, SUNY Oswego  
***Contemporary Irish Literature and the Quest of Identity***  
Dr. Ben Howard, Professor of English, Emeritus, Alfred University
- 3:00-4:15 Research Presentation 4  
***Researching the Traditions After the Second Revival: Does Celtic Music Have an Identity?***  
Dr. David Shaw, Associate Professor of Music, Monroe Community College  
Dr. April Mastern, Associate Professor of American History, SUNY Stony Brook
- 4:15-4:45 Refreshments and Concluding Remarks  
***The SUNY Celtic Research Network and the Multimedia Celtic Resource Library***  
Dr. Jeffrey Bartkovich, Vice President of Educational Technology Services, Monroe

## Celtic Identity in the New Millennium Research Focus Presentation Abstracts

### CELTIC MYTHOLOGICAL SEEDS OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

**Abstract:** Most mythological systems, i.e. the systems of beliefs that evolve in a social setting, contain the DNA of the culture values of that group. Such beliefs motivate individuals and group behaviors, define cultures, and shape civilizations. The Celts, who inhabited much of Europe and Asia Minor in pre-Roman times, have their unique cultural DNA contained in their myths and cultural artifacts. We know about them largely through Roman writings that refer to Celts as “barbarians” from the North. We also have archeological findings from their tombs consisting of intricate ornaments, weapons, and domestic objects. As we unearth more of the exquisite Celtic jewelry and metalwork, we acknowledge that the Celts were highly cultured “barbarians,” lovers of gold, wine, and conquests.

Scholars argue that the Celtic dialect emerged about 2000 BCE from the Indo-European family of languages. The Celtic people began to emerge a distinctive culture group in the area of three rivers: the Danube, the Rhine and the Rhone. All three rivers bear Celtic names. Today the Hallstadt, culture dated 1200-475 BCE, and the Latene culture, an extension of the Hallstadt culture, are shown to have existed in the area of today’s Austria and Switzerland.

The mythology, legends, and folklore of the Celts, among the oldest and most vibrant in Europe, survived largely in the British Isles.

In my presentation, I will highlight the archaeological and literary findings from the Celtic culture found in Europe and Asia Minor as well as the stories preserved in the British Isles. The focus of my paper will be on the creation myth that planted the seeds of social roles and culture values, and the Celtic pantheon that defines gender roles that are present even in today’s society.

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### Telling Culhwch and Olwen: Seeking Modern Identity through a Welsh Millennium

**Abstract:** This presentation focuses on the Southbank Cinema’s adaptation of the Welsh tale of Culhwch and Olwen as a male coming of age story suitable for children’s TV in the 1990s. After a brief review of the original Welsh tale, with all its memory devices and fairytale tropes that fit the story into an Arthurian framework of marriage and the winning of one’s bride as a

confirmation of community as well as a personal endeavor, we will concentrate on adaptations that fit the story into an expression of male bonding akin to that of Robert Bly in his analysis of the Grimm Brothers' *Iron John*. But here the emphasis is less on what Bly sees as the receiving of an identifying wound than it is on the exploration of communal bonding and liberations that give a place for many people in the discovery of the right bride and the achieving of her hand in marriage for Culhwch, who certainly has plenty to do for his part, but does not work alone. In this regard the story goes against the grain of many Hollywood stories that emphasize self recognition through private adventure; the emphasis here is on the growth of a greater community through shared labor—a significant medieval Welsh theme for new times, truly an eye-opener given the twenty-first century's love of action/adventure narratives that usually stress the individual apart from "society." The presentation will include a showing of the twenty-minute film.

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## TELLERS, TALES AND TRANCES: A POSTCOLONIAL VIEW OF CELTIC BARDS FROM MYRDDIN TO MCCOURT

**Abstract:** In Plato's *Ion*, Socrates suggests that the excellent poet functions as a magnet: the Gods inspire him and he inspires his listeners so that "from these inspired persons a chain of other persons is suspended, who take the inspiration." Viewed this way, the ancient bards were conduits, experiencing enchantment themselves and enchanting their audiences in turn. And of what did the bards speak? They told stories of the past—glorious tales of warriors and kings, of giants and maidens. But they didn't merely repeat the lines taught to them in the bardic schools. They shaped their tales to fit occasions and audiences.

This paper considers the bardic tradition in ancient times by discussing the Welsh Taliesin and Myrddin and in modern times by discussing Frank McCourt and his *Angela's Ashes*. McCourt may live in the New World, but he writes about his life in Ireland. Diaspora is an integral part of Celtic identity in the new millennium. Just as the ancient bards shaped their material, McCourt shapes his—to the point that he is accused of outright fabrication. Does that matter? With our postcolonial understanding, have we any room to worry about facts where a text is lush with possibilities for opening and opening and opening to us? What kind of an audience does that make us? Are we, like the listeners to the ancient bards simply absorbing the inspired gift? Are we merely links in that chain?

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## CONTEMPORARY IRISH LITERATURE AND THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY

**Abstract:** This session will examine some of the ways in which contemporary authors from both sides of the Irish border have responded to the fast-changing cultural landscape of the twenty-first century. Irish authors have a rich tradition of confronting the most essential questions of history, politics, nature, and language; the authors of the new century are no exception.

A review of contemporary authors yields a compelling landscape of voices and images. There are authors who continue to explore the dynamic conflict between country and city life, and yet others who find authenticity in the forms of traditional verse. Other voices record the lives of women and others who continue to delight in the emotional and sensorial play of language. We will still encounter familiar allegorical and mythical forms and we will also be surprised by newer, more globally-inspired poetic traditions.

This introduction will highlight those leading and significant voices and suggest ways in which we can begin to better understand their relationship to both a rich literary tradition and a more bewildering, more fluid contemporary culture.

## Celtic Identity in the New Millennium Research Focus Presentation Abstracts

### THE DILEMMA OF (POST) MODERNIZATION CONTEMPORARY IRISH FICTION

#### RESEARCHING THE TRADITIONS AFTER THE SECOND REVIVAL: DOES CELTIC MUSIC HAVE AN IDENTITY?

**Abstract:** Some would suggest that the late twentieth century revival of “all things Celtic” was precipitated by a resurgence of Celtic music and Celtic dance. Popular bands, both traditional and new age, and popular dance troupes seem to have more influence on what contemporary cultural defines as Celtic than history, than language. That Celticism is defined more by the present than the past is not unprecedented and may be a visage of Celtic tradition and culture.

This presentation will attempt to identify some of the cultural similarities and differences of traditional Celtic music; similarities which define the Celtic cultural groups across time and geography and differences which reflect regional influences of Celtic tribes due to migration and assimilation. Which of these elements can be used to define Celtic music will be assessed; because it has pipes? Because it is Irish? Because it is from Appalachia? The presenters will debate whether, as some might suggest Celtic language and literature, there is no singularity in Celtic music; only Celtic elements which enrich and entice.

## Celtic Identity in the New Millennium Research Presenters Biographies

**MS. GAIL BOUK** is Assistant Professor of English at Monroe Community College. She holds degrees from Empire State College and SUNY College at Brockport. She is a faculty member in the MCC Honors Institute where she teaches a course on Arthurian literature and was a leading participant in the MCC Children’s Literature Conference. Her teaching assignment includes courses in mythology, literature of the Bible, and creative writing. She is the recipient of the prestigious MCC Outstanding Faculty Advisor Award. Her current research interests include Arthurian literature and Robin Hood studies. She most recently presented a paper, “Carola Oman: Outlaw Scholar” at the International Robin Hood Association’s conference in Wales.

**MS. STASIA CALLAN** is Professor of English at Monroe Community College. She holds degrees from Nazareth College and SUNY College at Geneseo. She is the recipient of the SUNY Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching (1997) and Winner of the MCC Award for Writing Across the Curriculum (2001). She is a mythologist and a researcher in archaeological studies. Her background in Celtic Studies facilitated her on-location teaching in the British Isles. She is a specialist in Writing Across the Curriculum, a faculty trainer, and a published writer of numerous professional and personal essays on ballroom and folk dancing. She is a contributing writer to The Greenwood Encyclopedia of World Popular Culture (2007). She has presented at numerous regional, national, and two international conferences – the first one in Prague and the second one in Utrecht, The Netherlands. As the Northeast representative to the National Council of Teachers of English, she served on committees that facilitated research and national and regional conferences on teaching writing and literature.

**MR. JEFFREY JONES** is Assistant Professor of English at Monroe Community College. He holds a B.A. from Manchester College and an M.A. from Boston College where he studied Irish Literature and Culture. Guided by noted Irish Studies scholars Philip O’Leary and the late Adele Dalsimer, Jones’ master work focused on W.B. Yeats’ cycle of plays about the Ulster hero Cuchulain. While in graduate school, Jones co-founded The Bridge, a theater company that frequently produced plays by Irish playwrights as well as verse drama. His essay on directing Yeats’ play “Purgatory” appears in *Types of Drama*, edited by Sylvan Barnet. An adjunct faculty

member at MCC since 2003, Jones and colleagues Maria Brandt and Tony Leuzzi founded The Sixth Act, a group of MCC theatre enthusiasts dedicated to broadening and deepening an interdisciplinary appreciation of drama at MCC and to connecting MCC faculty, staff, and students with events in Rochester's theatre community. Functioning variously as a researcher, presenter, performer, and director, his adaptation is of Alan Lightman's *Einstein's Dreams* is being produced by The Sixth Act this spring. Jones' academic interests include place-based literature; mythology, especially in modern adaptation; Irish drama; and verse drama, including the plays of William Shakespeare. He is currently writing an essay on T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*.

**DR. BEN HOWARD** is Professor of English in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Alfred University. His undergraduate degree is from Drake University and his graduate degrees are from Syracuse University. His teaching interests include imaginative writing, Irish literature, modern poetry and Buddhist meditation. He is an accomplished poet and essayist and has authored six books as well as over 300 contributions to literary journals and anthologies. At Alfred University, he directed the Visiting Writer Series for 25 years, and has been awarded the Excellence in Teaching Award, the Fred H. Gertz Chair in Writing, and the Hagar Chair in the Humanities. Dr. Howard's post-doctoral research focused on eighteenth-century literature and contemporary poetry. His 1996 volume *The Pressed Melodeon* offers a cultural reading of modern Irish literature.

**DR. APRIL MASTEN** is Associate Professor of American History at Stony Brook University. She holds a Ph.D. in History from Rutgers University, an M.A. in Social History of Art from Leeds University, and a B.A. in Music from San Francisco State University. Masten's scholarship explores the interplay between cultural production and political economies. In 2005, she was invited by the Council of Editors of Learned Journals to speak on the challenges of interdisciplinary writing at the Modern Language Association Conference in Washington, D.C. The research for her first book was supported by a "Drawn to Art" Fellowship from the American Antiquarian Society and a grant from the American Association of University Women. Her current research explores the exchange of dance and music among African, Irish, and Native North Americans.

**DR. EDWARD O'SHEA** is Professor in the Department of English and Creative Writing at SUNY Oswego. He holds degrees from Loyola University, University of Wisconsin, and Northwestern University. His areas of specialty include 20<sup>th</sup> century British and Irish literature, critical theory, and Yeats studies. Recently, he directed a NEH Summer Institute for Colleges and University Teachers on the eminent Irish poet William Butler Yeats. This was a four week program in Ireland which featured a distinguished faculty of Yeats scholars.

**DR. RUSSELL PECK** is John Hall Deane Professor of English at the University of Rochester. His academic interests range from medieval aesthetics to myth and fairytales and the history of

drama. With support from the NEH, he is currently editing a series of Middle English texts; sixty volumes have been published since 1990 and fifteen more are in process. His research ranges from John Gower and Chaucer to romance literature and folk motifs in Middle English. Among the courses he teaches are Arthurian Traditions, Medieval Drama, Chaucer, Romance: Tradition and Performance, and Theater in England. Dr. Peck has received numerous teaching and research awards, most recently the John Hurt Fisher Prize from the John Gower Society and the Goergen Award for Distinguished Achievement and Artistry in Undergraduate Education.

**DR. DAVID SHAW** is Associate Professor of Music at Monroe Community College. He holds degrees from the Berklee College of Music, the Peabody Conservatory of Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Northern Colorado. He has been a faculty member at SUNY Oneonta, the University of Colorado, and was a DSP Algorithm Engineer for Applied Research and Technology. Shaw has composed and produced music for film, television and multimedia, with diverse clients such as PBS, Apple Computer, the Smithsonian, and the Cousteau Society. His live works have been performed throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Russia, and Australia. Shaw's current research interests include computer-aided composition, the history and development of music theory, and the role of technology in the evolution of musical styles and aesthetics.

### SUNY Celtic Research Network - Part I

With support from SUNY Conversations in the Disciplines, MCC proposes to test the viability of Web 2.0 technology for collaborative research development. The SUNY Celtic Research Network is intended to incorporate a preferred list of Celtic Studies Multimedia sites that can be used for research and instruction.

[Rezabek Link](#)

### SUNY Celtic Research Network - Part II

With support from SUNY Conversations in the Disciplines, MCC proposes to test the viability of Web 2.0 technology for collaborative research development. The SUNY Celtic Research Network is intended to incorporate SUNY campus data and faculty links to College-related materials and Celtic research.

[Wilkinson Link](#)

### SUNY Celtic Research Network - Part III

With support from SUNY Conversations in the Disciplines, MCC proposes to incorporate an interactive Website to allow collaborative Celtic research projects such as: creating and editing group documents, holding online meetings, sharing media and data and other online tools.

[Burritt Link](#)

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Web  
Audiovisual  
Finances and Budget  
Logistics  
Graphics  
Printing  
Audiovisual  
Document Production

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