



## Call for Papers for the 2025 conference of the Association for Franco-Irish Studies

### 16<sup>th</sup> AFIS Conference

University of Caen Normandy (May 22-23, 2025)

#### Consolation(s) in France and/or Ireland

**Confirmed Keynote speakers: Dr Brigitte Bastiat & Frank Healy (Université de la Rochelle), Dr Amanda Dillon (Trinity College Dublin) and Dr Eamon Maher (TU Dublin).**

Date of submission of proposals: November 30, 2024

#### Outline

‘Comfort, comfort my people, says your God, speak to the heart of Jerusalem, tell her that her bondage is over...’ (Is. 40:1-5). The first words of the second book of Isaiah strike the tone for what is to follow. God ‘consoles’ His people by giving them freedom and the possibility of rebirth. It is a message of hope and good will, an assurance that better things are to follow. Consolation is presented as the transitional phase between suffering and rehabilitation: it dries one’s tears and opens the path that leads to joy. This 16<sup>th</sup> hosting of the AFIS conference seeks to explore many of the facets linked to the theme of consolation(s) in an Irish, French or Franco-Irish context.

How to live the life to which one is called in times of crisis? How to remain or become oneself when individual or collective crisis events throw us off course? In this post-pandemic, recessionary, eco-anxious and conflict-ridden world, are individuals and societies faced with new forms of crises as they navigate individual and collective life? Or does Boethius’s famous text, *The Consolation of Philosophy* (523 AD), the *ur*-text of consolatory literature, still have something to say to us today?

Unsurprisingly, in recent years, the theme of consolation has inspired a new flowering of essays and exercised the minds of academics seeking to situate this search for consolation in a theoretical framework. In 2023, a conference was held at the ENS of Lyon on “Consolation in contemporary British and postcolonial literatures.” For that occasion, the harvest of recent interest in the theme of consolation included “Michaël Foessel (*Le Temps de la consolation*, 2015), literary critics David James (*Discrepant Solace: Contemporary Literature and the Work of Consolation*, 2019) and Jürgen Pieters (*Literature and Consolation: Fictions of Comfort*, 2021), essayists Anne-Dauphine Julliand (*Consolation*, 2020) and Michael Ignatieff (*On Consolation: Finding Solace in Dark Times*, 2021) or psychiatrist Christophe André (*Consolations*, 2022).”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/cfp/2022/09/21/consolation-in-contemporary-british-and-postcolonial-literatures>

The theme certainly inspires. And yet it remains elusive. Etymologically, to console means to restore something to its wholeness (*solari*). But the endeavour seems doomed from the start: how can we ever hope to restore what has been lost by the person we are trying to console? What are we trying to do when we offer consolation? Are we operating in an 'ethics of care'? But as the 2023 Lyon conference rightly pointed out, interconnectedness does not enable on its own – or anything else, perhaps – to achieve consolation with any kind of tangible certainty.

At this point, a critical distinction needs to be made between the consolation one gives others, and the consolation one seeks for oneself – the latter not necessarily through interconnectedness with others.

The process, the mechanisms and the possibilities and limits of consolation will appear more clearly by exploring genres. What form does consolation take in literature, and in other cultural expressions, taking T. S. Eliot's anthropological definition of culture as any form of self-expression ranging from the fine arts to the way one prepares one's food and drink, celebrates, engages with others and with nature, or even still expresses one's desire for connection with the supernatural through liturgies and spiritual traditions?

At the intersection of literature and spirituality, the other consolatory tradition developing in Western Europe stems from St Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. In this manual for spiritual discernment, St Ignatius famously uses his own experience to show his readers that they can also discern in themselves the motions of the spirit as they consider their options in life: an energy-depleting spirit of desolation, or an energy-increasing, peace-filled spirit of consolation. What has become of this spiritual compass with which St Ignatius equipped Christendom in the 16<sup>th</sup> century? Do we have traces of its internalization in culture in more recent times?

The AFIS 2025 conference will take all these interrogations into the multidisciplinary field of Franco-Irish Studies. Accordingly, we would welcome contributions on theme of consolation(s) from scholars in the following areas with reference to Irish, French or Franco-Irish contexts:

- Comparative literature (all centuries): consolation from bereavement, illness, and exile
- Food and drink as sources of consolation
- Consolation and conflict resolution
- Consolation, interconnectedness and the ethics of care
- The consolation of art (artistic practice and relationship to art)
- The consolation(s) of nature
- Beauty as consolation in church architecture and liturgy
- Expressions of need for spiritual consolation

The 2025 AFIS conference will be held at the University of Caen Normandy on May 22-23, 2025. Caen will be celebrating its millennium in 2025, and a number of other events will be taking place in the city at the same time, so we would ask you to keep this in mind as you make reservations.

Please send your abstracts of approximately 250 words to Eamon Maher ([eamon.maher@tudublin.ie](mailto:eamon.maher@tudublin.ie)) and Alexandra Maclennan ([Alexandra.maclennan@unicaen.fr](mailto:Alexandra.maclennan@unicaen.fr)) by **November 30, 2024**.