ASMCF Funded Conference Report:

The Freak and its Discontents

On October 29th and 30th, 2019, the Trinity Long Room Hub hosted a two-day interdisciplinary conference called ‘The Freak and its Discontents’, organized by a postgraduate committee. This conference engaged in a cross-disciplinary exploration of what society finds shocking in order to illuminate the cultural norms that the hegemony considers its constituent pieces, and to raise a critical awareness of the processes that define ‘normalcy’. An interdisciplinary approach allowed for the vantage point of multiple academic perspectives into various understandings of what constitutes ‘freakishness’. Conference papers touched upon topics from psychology and clinical studies, to literature and film. Speakers traveled from across the globe to present at this conference; in addition to local participants from Ireland, speakers traveled from Germany, France, Hungary, the UK, and the United States of America to present. In this sense, the conference provided a unique opportunity for postgraduate researchers to network with fellow researchers in adjacent disciplines.

Our keynote lectures consisted of presentations by two senior academics; from Oxford University and from Trinity College Dublin. Our first keynote speaker was Professor Wes Williams (from St Edmund Hall, Oxford) who spoke about monstrosity in the early modern period. Professor Williams discussed how monsters in early modern literature have the potential to reflect political perspectives, particularly through an analysis of the figure of Nero in Racine’s *Britannicus,*as well as how monstrosity is portrayed in a public and private realm, on and off stage. Our second keynote, Dr Jean-Paul Pittion (from Trinity College Dublin), led a private exhibition of early modern medical treatises from Trinity’s archives. Dr Pittion discussed the symbolism of monstrosity in the early modern period as reflected in these medical texts, including monstrous births and their potential to represent omens.

The conference provided a distinctive opportunity for early career researchers and senior academics to explore the concepts of monstrosity and freakishness in an interdisciplinary milieu. This allowed for discussions of what constitutes normalcy in society from the early modern period up until the present day, and how depictions of ‘freakishness’ may allow for a more refined conception of cultural norms in various disciplines, from science to the arts.  The attendance was of 35-40 people.

Social medias:

Twitter: @Freakconference (pictures taken and published during both days)

Facebook: @freakconference (“Freak and its discontents” page and event)

This project was awarded a prize through the Initiative Fund. More information on the deadline for applications can be found [**here**](http://asmcf.org/funds-prizes-awards/initiative-fund/).