

CALL FOR PAPERS

Anecdotal Narratives: Forms, Functions, and Poetics of Natural Storytelling

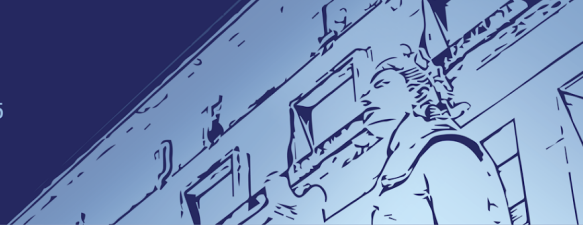
PANEL ORGANIZATION:

ORGANIZER 1:

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ORGANIZER 2:

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PANEL SYNOPSIS:

This panel explores the role and nature of anecdotes in antiquity. Anecdotes, while not a distinct genre, represented a pervasive storytelling mode across a variety of texts, including historiography, biography, scientific and philosophical writing, and even poetry. While exemplarity has received much scholarly attention in recent years, the anecdotal form, as a special type of narrative, remains underexamined. By considering anecdotes as an intergeneric mode of “natural narrative” (Fludernik), the panel aims to define their unique characteristics and epistemic and societal functions. Approaching this mode as an integral component of a broader discourse network, we will assess the operation of the anecdote from a dual perspective: on the one hand, anecdotes can be viewed as a strategy of coping with contingency, presenting exceptional or subversive cases that resist generalization; yet on the other, anecdotes also foster social cohesion by reaffirming shared cultural norms and traditions. The anecdote became an essential *modus narrandi*, particularly in times of crisis, serving both as a unifying device and as a way to anchor innovation within tradition. Exploring this double role—challenging convention while simultaneously reinforcing it—the panel will present papers from researchers at different career stages that address these key areas:

1. The Rhetoric of Anecdotes: We invite papers that analyze the rhetorical strategies that shape anecdotes, such as figurative speech, “plausibility,” and “realism.” We also seek papers that explore techniques of “experientiality” (Fludernik) - e.g., conceptual orality, temporality, and immersion - help naturalize the narrative and make anecdotes resonate by tapping into the audience’s cognitive pool of experiences. Furthermore, we encourage papers that undertake ‘symptomatic’ readings, uncovering what remains unspoken, as well as papers that analyze how rhetorical devices like metaphor and allegory transform singular events into exemplary, repeatable anecdotes.

2. Wandering Anecdotes: The inherent flexibility, ambivalence, and latencies of the anecdote, which allow it to migrate across different historical and cultural contexts, will also be an area of focus. Many well-known anecdotes appear in multiple versions or have been attributed to different individuals. Rather than viewing these variations as errors, the panel will examine how such shifts can result from conscious adaptation to new contexts. Contributions are encouraged which analyze different versions comparatively and examine their intersection with oral traditions (Ash, Langlands).

3. Poetics of Anecdotal History: The panel will analyze the poetic and narrative structures of anecdotes in a meta-historical perspective. We posit that the interpretation of history is significantly influenced by the tropes (e.g. metaphor/allegory and metonymy/symbolism) and narrative schemata (e.g. comedic, tragic) chosen to structure it. We invite semiotic analyses that uncover the ways in which anecdotal narratives shape the experience and perception of history and explore the relationship between individual anecdotes and the larger historical narrative.

This panel aims to enhance our understanding of how anecdotes functioned within ancient texts as more than amusing decorations. By examining their rhetorical, cognitive, and epistemic functions, the panel seeks to place anecdotes at the center of discussions about knowledge production, cultural memory, and the representation of history in antiquity.

Observations:

16th Celtic Conference in Classics

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