

**Irish Society for the Study of Children's  
Literature (ISSCL)  
Conference Programme  
21st-22nd April**

**Abstracts of Papers**

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**ISSCL**

The Irish Society for the Study of Children's Literature  
*An Cumann Éireannach um Staidéar ar Litríocht na nÓg*

# Day 1: Friday 21st April

Session 1:

13.00-14.30

## *Identity and Narrative Modes: Folklore, Fantasy and Myth*

Dr Jennifer Mooney

*Reconciling the Real and the Magical:*

*Irish Identity and Magical Realism in Caroline O'Donoghue's*

*All Our Hidden Gifts*

"I think a lot of us have just ... assumed that things were getting so much better. So progressive, y'know? We're in this liberal Ireland and all that. I think we all just got a bit too proud of ourselves too soon...I think this is the backlash" (O'Donoghue, *All Our Hidden Gifts* 344).

Caroline O'Donoghue's YA trilogy interrogates the complex nature of societal progress during times of significant cultural and political change, and fictionalises fears about a backlash in the wake of progress. It examines racist, homophobic, and transphobic sentiments in Ireland and the threat that far-right discourse poses to young people and Irish democracy. Within the context of changing attitudes to 'who we are' and what a collective 'we' can or ought to constitute in modern Ireland, this paper argues that O'Donoghue's YA trilogy offers a fitting approach to addressing the ambiguous nature of Irish identity today. The thematic concerns of O'Donoghue's trilogy track the immediate political circumstances of the moment they are published, emphasising the longstanding role that the YA novel plays in understanding the world in real-time. Although not straightforwardly magical realist texts, the conventions of literary realism are set alongside folkloric and fantasy elements in this trilogy in a way that encapsulates magical realism's characteristic disruptive nature and, as Wendy B. Faris describes it, its 'multicultural' and 'postmodern' sensibilities (2004, 1).

### **Biography:**

Dr Jennifer Mooney is an assistant professor in the School of English, Dublin City University. She is chair of its MA in Children's and Young Adult Literature degree programme and co-director of the Centre for Research in Children's and Young Adult Literature. Jennifer's teaching and research interests include gender and sexuality in young adult literature and popular culture, recent critical concerns with posthumanism and ecocriticism, and Irish studies.

## Session 1:

13.00-14.30

### *Identity and Narrative Modes: Folklore, Fantasy and Myth*

Ruairí Kennedy

*The Fairy Folk and the Mud Boy*

*An Examination of the Intersectionality of Implicit Disability, Race and Gender in Eoin Colfer's Artemis Fowl*

This paper investigates the intersectional connections between the overt (if restrictive) presentation of racial and gender structures within Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* series (2001-2012) with a more implicit reading of the character of Artemis as a disabled hero who fits within neither this world nor the fantastical. By performing a close reading of the first three novels in the series: *Artemis Fowl* (2001); *The Arctic Incident* (2002); and *The Eternity Code* (2003), and with acknowledgement to the seventh novel: *The Atlantis Complex* (2010), we can posit that the character of Artemis possesses many of the characteristic traits and narratological elements that are commonly associated with that of a disabled protagonist. Examples of such traits include: social isolation; familial dependence; narrative distance; emotional distance; and a discrepancy between an overcompensated emphasis of either one's physical or cognitive aspects over the other; and, were one to undergo such a reading, supercrip underpinnings. This in turn fosters an alternative critical interpretation of Eoin Colfer's domestic fantasy series, wherein Artemis' search for inclusion and meaning in a disability-oriented discussion juxtapose the hegemonic structures of race and gender as portrayed in the subterranean world of the fairy folk.

#### **Biography:**

Ruairí Kennedy is a PhD candidate in English based in the University of Galway. As a researcher who has struggled with disability with a background in both academia as well as creative writing, his research has drawn him towards understanding the role of implicit disability within young adult literature. He seeks to challenge our understanding of how we interpret disability in such texts, through what he defines in his ongoing research as the 'Disnarrative' framework.

## Session 2:

14.45-16.15

### ***Representing South Asian Diaspora in Irish YA: Adiba Jaigirdar's Fiction***

Dr Stefanie Jakobi

"*She's the only other Brown girl in our class...*"

*An intersectional reading of (Irish) adolescence in Adiba Jaigirdar's Hani and Ishu's Guide to Fake Dating*

In their introduction to *Irish Children's Literature and Culture* (2011) Valerie Coghlan and Keith O'Sullivan expound on the problem of the prevalence of conservatism and timidity in Irish Young Adult literature (cf. Coghlan/O'Sullivan 2011, 4) – for example concerning depictions of family, homosexuality or adolescent sexuality in general (cf. *ibid.*). Not mentioned in their assessment are questions of alterity, age, or class – an issue Heather Laird outlines: “Moreover, though gender is to the fore in the literary output of the most recent generation of Irish women writers [...] social class tends to be side-lined.” (Laird 2022, 264)

Using these texts as theoretical input, the proposed talk discusses the representation of selfhood, family, and nationhood in contemporary Irish young adult literature from a distinctly intersectional perspective (Benner 2016; Walgenbach 2012). Adiba Jaigirdar's coming-of-age novel *Hani and Ishu's Guide to Fake Dating* will serve as an example for the discussion, which will focus on the significance of categories of difference such as gender, sex, alterity, class, and age in the text's staging of conflicts of cultural and social identity.

#### **Biography:**

Stefanie Jakobi is a lecturer at the department for Children's and Young Adult Literature at the University of Bremen. Her thesis dealt with analogue and digital writing as a motif in contemporary German young adolescent literature. She did her BA in German Literature and Political Science at the Martin-Luther-University of Halle/Saale and her MA in European Literatures at the Humboldt-University of Berlin. Her recent publications deal with intersectionality and alterity in children's and young adult novels.

## Session 2:

14.45-16.15

### ***Representing South Asian Diaspora in Irish YA: Adiba Jaigirdar's Fiction***

Ashly Isac

*Coming Out of the Alamari: Exploring South Asian-Irish Perspectives on Coming Out in YA through Adiba Jaigirdar's The Henna Wars (2020)*

This paper explores the concept of coming out in the context of South Asian-Irish adolescent lesbian experiences by examining Adiba Jaigirdar's YA (young adult) novel *The Henna Wars* (2020). Informed by the analysis of 'bi-cultural' identity, this paper aims to bring attention to the intersection of this identity and adolescent lesbian experiences. The paper focuses on portrayals of coming out and the repercussions of doing so in a South Asian-Irish diasporic community along with how these portrayals challenge traditional coming out narratives in YA. In doing so, this paper also observes the differences of coming out narratives in queer white Irish YA texts in comparison to South Asian ones in the context of social support. Jaigirdar's queer narrative perspective has been critically acclaimed with *The Henna Wars* being included in Time's list of the 100 Best Young Adult Books of All Time.

#### **Biography:**

Ashly Isac (he/they) is a first year PhD student at the School of English, Dublin City University. They received a bachelors's degree in English literature, psychology and journalism from Mount Carmel College in Bengaluru and a master's degree in Children's and Young Adult Literature from Dublin City University. Their research interests focus on portrayals of South Asian diaspora in YA literature, postcolonial feminist studies, and multicultural studies.

## Session 2:

14.45-16.15

### ***Representing South Asian Diaspora in Irish YA: Adiba Jaigirdar's Fiction***

Iria Seijas-Pérez

*Adiba Jaigirdar's Novels: Representing the South Asian Diaspora in Irish Young Adult Fiction*

In recent years, the writing and publication of Irish Young Adult (YA) fiction has notably increased (Cahill 2020). This has also broadened the variety of its representations, providing a space for the depiction of more diverse characters and their experiences. Nevertheless, the recognition of Ireland's multiculturalism continues to be slow in Irish YA fiction, as current publications still feature an overwhelming majority of white characters (Kennon 2020). It was during the Celtic Tiger period that Ireland saw a significant growth of its immigrant population, a population that has continued to increase and is now conformed by many communities from different regions, cultures and religions. Thus, it is significant to look at the different perspectives of those new generations that are growing up between a variety of cultures, often contesting one or all of them at the same time, and their experiences in Ireland. Recently, a number of Irish YA authors have been concerned with this representation of characters that are often found outside the mainstream white Irish narrative, as is the case of Adiba Jaigirdar. This paper aims to analyse how the South Asian diaspora within the Irish context is represented in Jaigirdar's *The Henna Wars* (2020) and *Hani and Ishu's Guide to Fake Dating* (2021), looking particularly at how the protagonists of these novels navigate their positions as queer South Asians living in contemporary Ireland and their encounters with racism, homophobia and the pressure to meet parental expectations.

#### **Biography:**

Iria Seijas-Pérez is a PhD candidate at the University of Vigo (Spain). She is a member of research group BiFeGa: Literary and Cultural Studies, Translation and Interpretation. In 2021, she was awarded a pre-doctoral grant from the Galician Government to work on her thesis. Currently in progress, her thesis focuses on LGBTQ+ Young Adult fiction written by Irish women. Her main research interests are Irish literature, LGBTQ+ and feminist studies, and young adult literature.

## Day 2: Saturday 22nd April

### Parallel Session 1:

11.30-13.00

### *Picturebooks, Affect and Diversity*

Barbara Katharina Reschenhofer

*Perspective against prejudice: Wordless construction of affect, in-group psychology, and intergenerational change in Fitzpatrick's Owl Bat, Bat Owl*

Originally published in 2018 and newly updated in 2022, the "Together with Refugees Reading Guide" comprises a list of children's and young adults' literature about refugees and displacement, compiled by Children's Books Ireland and the UNHCR. *Owl Bat, Bat Owl* (2017) by Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick represents a unique addition to this list, as it is a wordless picturebook which covers complex themes of otherness, community, and intergenerational change in the face of adversity. In my analysis of *Owl Bat, Bat Owl*, I draw on theoretical frameworks, such as Painter et al.'s (2013) approach to conducting multimodal analyses, and interdisciplinary concepts, such as visual literacy (Nikolajeva 2010, Salisbury & Styles 2012) and emotional literacy (Nikolajeva 2018), to highlight in how far the text in question is able to construct a wordless narrative and convey legible affect through various visual strategies, including anthropomorphism (Fraustino 2014) and compositional design (Painter et al. 2013). In order to more effectively demonstrate how abstract themes are made comprehensible to young readers, I moreover compare and contrast Fitzpatrick's book to other visual texts listed on the "Together with Refugees Reading Guide". Using Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick's (2016) *Owl Bat, Bat Owl* reading guide, I furthermore explore the didactic potential of the text via the application of visual thinking strategies (Zapata et al. 2017) and other relevant frameworks.

### **Biography:**

Barbara Katharina (Katie) Reschenhofer is conducting her PhD on refugee picturebooks at the University of Vienna, where she obtained her MA in Anglophone Literatures & Cultures and her BA in English & American Studies. Her research interests include multimodal children's literature, ecocriticism in popular culture, and attachment theory and literature in prose and poetry. Aside from her literary research, Reschenhofer also specializes in teaching English for Academic Purposes at universities across Austria and the United Kingdom.

## **Parallel Session 1:**

**11.30-13.00**

### ***Picturebooks, Affect and Diversity***

Saibh Ní Loingsigh

*"Books for My Children and Yours": Exploring Diverse Racial Representation in Contemporary Children's Picture Books*

Access to a diverse range of quality children's literature, depicting universal and distinct experiences and perspectives, can broaden children's cultural awareness, global understanding and support positive identity formation and reading engagement. Young children are exposed to a large number of books, and picture books in particular, during significant periods of their identity formation and early years education. Contemporary International research highlights the importance of young children having access to inclusive, representational literature, which embraces racial and ethnic diversity, to reflect their own and the wider world.

Drawing on key tenets of Critical Race and Reader Response theory to create a framework for analysis, this study explores the representation of racial and ethnic diversity in popular children's picture books available in Ireland. Combining qualitative (semi-structured interviews with publishing and book organisations) and quantitative (content analysis of popular children's picture books) research approaches, complex and urgent issues of representation, authenticity and identity in Irish children's literature are explored.

Key research findings raise questions regarding the authenticity of voices heard, physical representation of racially diverse characters, and whether popular picture books risk promoting mono-cultural viewpoints and perspectives. The study highlights how adults, who overwhelmingly represent dominant culture, strongly influence both content and access to children's picture books. This research challenges those involved in children's book production to recognise themselves as 'gatekeepers' and to explore proactive responses to the need for greater representation of racial and ethnic diversity within children's books and the children's book industry in Ireland.



**Parallel Session 1:**

**11.30-13.00**

***Picturebooks, Affect and Diversity***

**Biography:**

A part-time lecturer and research assistant in the School of Stem Education, Innovation and Global Studies in DCU, Saibh previously worked as a Speech and Language Therapist within mainstream education and adult neurology in England, Ireland and Australia.

Earning first class honours in a Master of Education in Literacy (MEdLPP) in 2021, Saibh presented findings from her research thesis "Books for My Children and Yours" at the European Conference on Literacy in Dublin, July 2022.

**Parallel Session 1:**  
**11.30-13.00**  
***Picturebooks, Affect and Diversity***

Sarah Ghelam

*Free to Be Me: Non-white Characters in Irish and French Recommended Reading Guides*

Children books have one particularity: they are addressed to children but picked by adults. The books that are available to them are chosen with a variety of criteria for them. In 2021, the Children's Books Ireland, the national charity and arts organisation that champions every child's right to develop a love of reading, published the Diversity, Inclusion and Representation Reading Guide. For this guide particularly, racial representation was one of the main criteria.

Because race is constructed within a social system, the racial identities vary from one context to another. Ireland, for so many reasons, is a particular case: because white people have been racialized, because it has been studied has a potential case of successful deracialization, etc. In France, some say that Critical Race Theory has been imported from the United States of America and that race doesn't exist here, even though we have a French literature about race, even though we have literature about racism in France.

Because France is colourblind, no guide exists with representation as a main criterion. But the CNLJ (Centre national de littérature pour la jeunesse) do publish every year a list of recommended children books.

As both countries have drastically different racial systems, we can assume that the racial representations within their books are also drastically different.

In this presentation, using both literature analyse and racial studies, we will look at the construction of racial identities within picture books that are recommended by those institutions: the ones that have been chosen as the ones to get.

**Biography:**

After a master thesis on the representation of non-white children characters in picture books published in France between 2010 and 2020, Sarah Ghelam is preparing her PhD on the production and reception of those picture books.

## Parallel Session 2:

11.30-13.00

### *The Irish, Ireland and Irishness: National and International Orientation of Irish Children's Literature*

Valerie Coghlan

*Looking In: Looking Out*

This presentation proposes an examination of representations of the Irish, Ireland and Irishness through the medium of picturebooks of Irish origin and those produced outside Ireland by non-Irish artists. As well as considering who we think we are, 'who do others think we are' will be scrutinized.

Many novels now feature Irish young people set in varied modern-day contexts, and the number of picturebooks published in Ireland or originated by Irish artists and published elsewhere is steadily increasing. Both developments are welcome, but there is still little representation of modern Ireland in fictional picturebooks produced in Ireland, or indeed elsewhere.

Historically, there have been visual representations of the Irish, mostly from outside Ireland, varying from downright offensive to overly romantic, with a continuous iteration of the comic Irish as a running theme. While the intentionally offensive is generally in the past, many publications do not offer alternatives to a romanticized, pastoral landscape where the animals are all free-range and the humans mostly pale-skinned, red-haired and freckled.

So how do we look at cultural authenticity and representation in books featuring Irish characters, especially those set in the present day? And is the societal enrichment by those who are from ethnic minorities noticed in picturebooks?

Additionally, by focusing on the above questions Irish readers can evaluate how accurately characters and ways of life in other parts of the globe are interpreted in picturebooks.

#### **Biography:**

Valerie Coghlan is an independent researcher and lecturer with a particular interest in visual narratives, children's book history, and Irish children's literature. She is the President of Bookbird, Inc., the management body of IBBY's journal, *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature*. She currently teaches on the MA in Children's literature in DCU.

## Parallel Session 2:

11.30-13.00

### ***The Irish, Ireland and Irishness: National and International Orientation of Irish Children's Literature***

Jennifer Horan

*Feasts for the famine: the importance of Irish narratives for fostering empathy and identity in Scotland's young readers*

The inclusion of Irish voices in British children's literature has been historically absent and recently platitudinal. The need for young people to read about authentic Irish experiences is great in Scotland, where children of the diaspora are taught little of their own race and identity, and where anti-Irish racism is still prevalent within society.

Responding to McNamara (2018), this paper compares portrayals of the Great Hunger in *Under the Hawthorn Tree* by Irish author Marita Conlon-McKenna, a relatively unknown book in Britain, and *Twist of Gold* by British author Michael Morpurgo, which is highly popular. It considers the impact these opposing retellings have on young Scottish readers, with reflection on my own practice of facilitating reading groups for young people in rural Scotland. It also reflects on contemporary children's literature that authentically represents Irish identity, and discusses how increased awareness of Irish authors' work will help develop empathy towards, and understanding of, Irishness.

#### **Biography:**

I am a librarian with extensive experience of working with young people in school and public libraries. Born into an Irish Catholic family in the west of Scotland, I have a keen interest in Irish literature and culture. In 2022 I gained an MPhil in Children's Literature from University of Glasgow. I am chair of the UK's Youth Libraries Group, and past-chair and past judge of the Carnegie Medals.

**Parallel Session 3:**  
**14.00-15.30**  
***(Re) Imagining Ireland***

Dr Siobhán Morrissey

*Unsafe, Unwelcoming Ireland: The Experience of Migrant Children in the short story collection Once Upon A Place*

The *Once Upon a Place* collection of short stories, compiled by Eoin Colfer in 2015 as part of his role as Laureate na nÓg, emphasises the importance of place, with Colfer telling the reader in the introduction that “we all have our personal spots”. Two stories featured in the collection, written by Paula Leyden and Jane Mitchell, focus on the “personal spots” discovered by migrant children in Kilkenny and Dublin. In both stories, non-Irish individuals and families are represented as outsiders, as marginalised characters, for whom Ireland is at once a beautiful country, but a country which is not fully open to them. These personal spots in nature are a place of solace and respite for the characters, places they can claim as their own in a new and unfamiliar country. Mitchell’s story “There and Here” is a representation of a family’s experience in direct provision which highlights the denial of freedom families experience within these centres. Leyden’s “Beautiful Dawn” focuses on a young Japanese boy’s desire to explore his new surroundings in rural Kilkenny, but it is only in death that he becomes free to explore Ireland.

This paper analyses the representation of immigrants and asylum seekers as existing not fully within Ireland but confined and trapped to liminal spaces. The characters are unsafe within Ireland and only experience peace in the country’s natural beauty – through the discovery of “personal spots” in nature – rather than in its institutions or through interaction with its people.

**Biography:**

Dr Siobhán Morrissey completed her PhD at the University of Galway where she currently teaches modules on children’s literature, children’s film, and fairy tales as part of the Children’s Studies course. Her research interests include 20th century imperial and colonial children’s literature, whiteness, and the modification of 19th and 20th century children’s books. Siobhán completed her PhD thesis on the works of Enid Blyton, analysing the changes made to Blyton’s original texts.

**Parallel Session 3:**  
**14.00-15.30**  
***(Re) Imagining Ireland***

Catherine McCarthy

*The Figured Worlds of Children's Literature as a Site for Identity Formation*

One way of interpreting one's world and place in it is through engaging with literature, as novels are "living sourcebooks" that individuals can look to for insights into various facets of society, including the self (Merrill 1967, p.656). For example, children's literature has the ability to serve cultural functions and transmit values (Myers 1986; Hintz and Tribunella 2019), act as a mirror and window (Bishop 1990; Sipes 1999; Braden and Rodriguez 2016), and impact how children see the world and how it is structured (Singer 2011; Braden and Rodriguez 2016).

This paper explores the usefulness of figured worlds theory as an approach to understanding 'who do we think we are?' and identity formation in children's literature, and addresses its usefulness in helping children navigate identity in relation to race and ethnicity specifically. Described as "as-if realms" (Holland et al 1998, p.49), Figured Worlds are culturally-created imaginary spaces that provide a space for identity formation, where individuals "come to 'figure' who they are" via a process of interaction and participation (Urrieta 2007, p.107).

Taking the worlds within children's literature as examples of these imaginary realms, and considering how children's literature can teach us about ourselves, this paper facilitates an exploration into how the figured worlds of children's literature can act as a site for identity formation, and how interacting with these texts can thus enable individuals to navigate these questions of identity, with an aim towards developing a sense of self and ultimately an understanding of 'who we are'.

**Biography:**

Catherine McCarthy is a PhD student in SETU Waterford's Department of Arts. Her research interests include identity formation, children's literature as a cultural object, and the impact of reading for pleasure on the individual. Catherine's current research explores the role of children's literature in identity formation from a literary sociological perspective, and seeks to investigate the impact of reading for pleasure within the context of young readers in Ireland.

**Parallel Session 3:**  
**14.00-15.30**  
***(Re) Imagining Ireland***

Dr Róisín Ní Mhulláin

*Who Do We Think We Are?*

This paper will look at the period from the establishment of An Gúm (Irish language publishing agency) in 1926 until the early 1950s and Irish language publications for young and teenage readers. In it's early years An Gúm translated many books for young Irish readers, however a change of direction in the 1940s brought new beginnings and many Irish language authors were encouraged to write for young readers. During this period Irish language authors began to explore and to imagine a new Ireland, a sense of place and identity in the language, at home and outside of Ireland and to share this with young readers. In this exploration many narratives of identity were presented, many interactions between Irish and other races happened, explorations and interactions that were both positive and negative on both sides. This paper will discuss these explorations and interactions of race and identity in Irish language books and stories for young people. The paper will focus on the writings of Cathal Ó Sándair, the most prolific and most published Irish language children's author during this period and stories where his heroes met with other races and nationalities. In many of Ó Sandair's books his characters travelled internationally (and to various planets) and met with other characters; Black and African American, American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander. Ó Sándair's characters were respectful of others and showed an openness to new ideas and experiences while maintaining and presenting a confident and self-assured Irish persona and identity. Other authors, genres and books will be also referenced, including Mairéad Ní Ghráda, Seán Mac Maoláin, Éamonn Ó Faoláin.

**Biography:**

Dr Róisín Ní Mhulláin is a scholar of children's literature and culture. Her areas of research include the development of children's literature in the Irish language, post-colonial theory in children's literature, and the work of Cathal Ó Sándair, an Irish language children's author. She spent 15 years as Irish language lecturer in St Angela's College, Sligo and is currently working with COGG Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta.

**Parallel Session 4:**  
**14.00-15.30**  
***Irishness In and Outside of Ireland***

Fahmeda Naheed

*Challenges of Migrant Children and Schools of Sanctuary Initiative*

What we think we are is a question which everyone asks in many capacities. A migrant child, who recently arrived in Ireland, attending schooling in Ireland has similar questions in his mind when he looks around his classroom and tries to understand the language of the teacher and his class fellows along with understanding the culture around him. It is equally difficult for adults in similar situations. Ethnicity, migration, refugees, asylum seekers, race, and different languages and cultures are all associated aspects that put significant challenges in the lives of individuals and all formal and informal settings.

Schools of Sanctuary (SoS) is a lifelong initiative that is committed to creating a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment that benefits everybody, especially families seeking sanctuary. It is a school that helps its students, staff, parents, and the wider community to understand what it means to be a refugee and to extend a welcome to everyone regardless of their immigration status. It is not a project, nor a short-term school initiative. It is a culture that schools achieve over time to ensure everyone feels welcomed, safe, and included in the school and beyond. It begins with 3 core principles: learn, take action and share. In this paper, I will be discussing the School of Sanctuary initiative and how it helps in lessening the gaps in Irish academic settings which does not represent the notion of identities of new Irish communities within the concept of social inclusion.

**Biography:**

Fahmeda Naheed holds several academic degrees, including an M.Phil from UCC, Certification in Mental Health in Communities from UCC and Policing and Human Rights Law in Ireland from the University of Limerick. Fahmeda Naheed is a former Graduate Intern for Diversity, Executive Officer, An Garda Siochana, Regional Office, Anglesea Street, Cork, Ireland. She writes for Garda Review Magazine. She is a tutor of Fusion Cooking (Irish-Pakistani food) with Cork City Partnership. She is a member of Faith of Sanctuary and an Ambassador of Schools of Sanctuary.



**Parallel Session 4:**  
**14.00-15.30**  
***Irishness In and Outside of Ireland***

Méabh Ní Choileáin

*Cumhacht agus Dóchas i Nóinín le Máire Zepf / Power and Hope in Nóinín by Máire Zepf*

In 2020, *Nóinín*, an Irish-language verse-novel for young adults by Máire Zepf, won the Book of the Year Award at the Children's Books Ireland KPMG Book Awards. Telling the story of a young teenager lured to her death by a paedophile she meets online, the novel was praised by judges for its "rich imagery," "poetic language," and "empowering manifesto on the right of young girls to full life and liberty." Despite this recognition, however, there has been little critical engagement with the text, which is not only boundary-pushing in terms of Irish-language publishing, but young adult literature generally, in academic or public discourse. As bleak and gritty as young adult literature can be, the gruesome, graphic rape and murder of a young girl at the hands of an adult man in Zepf's novel distinguishes it from most other texts in the genre. Indeed, the hopeless, harrowing nature of *Nóinín* arguably aligns it with such controversial children's novels as *The Bunker Diary* by Kevin Brooks, which won the Carnegie Medal in 2014. This paper seeks to examine the representation of contemporary Irish-language literature in Irish children's publishing through analysis of what is arguably the most controversial children's novel ever to have been published in Ireland. The fact that *Nóinín*, which breaks every established "rule" in writing for children, has not been engaged with more critically raises many questions. For example, how loudly must Irish-language publishing shout before it is heard in a predominantly English-speaking industry? Can Irish-language publishers take risks with children's and YA literature that English-language publishers cannot? Would *Nóinín* likely have been published if it had been written in English? Would there have been a stronger reaction to it if it had? What are the benefits and challenges of Irish-language publishing for writers? This paper will explore these questions and more.

**Parallel Session 4:**  
**14.00-15.30**  
***Irishness In and Outside of Ireland***

Méabh Ní Choileáin

*Cumhacht agus Dóchas i Nóinín le Máire Zepf / Power and Hope in Nóinín by Máire Zepf*

**Biography:**

Méabh Ní Choileáin is a PhD student at the School of English, Trinity College Dublin. Her research, which is funded by the Irish Research Council, examines nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish American children's literature. She holds an M.Phil with Distinction in Children's Literature from TCD and was awarded the Biennial Award for an Outstanding Master's Thesis by the Irish Society for the Study of Children's Literature in 2022. She is also a primary school teacher and children's writer.

**Parallel Session 4:**  
**14.00-15.30**  
***Irishness In and Outside of Ireland***

Anna McQuinn

*Developing a particularly Irish response to discussions around race and ethnicity*

As Emma Dabiri says in *What White people Can Do Next*, "As Ireland becomes a more racially diverse country, it would do well not to take too many cues from either the US or the UK, and to invest instead in the development of a culturally and geographically specific response to racialization on the island of Ireland."

Having been a member of *The Working Group Against Racism in Children's Resources* in London for many years in the 1990s, and working for Sure Start for 14 years through the 2000's, I was part of the development of our anti-racist practice. Over time, the group moved away from viewing anti-racism through the American lens of enslavement history. Our resulting book lists, activities, programmes and training developed and shifted direction as a result

I would be really interested to discuss how we might similarly develop an Ireland-specific approach to anti-racist work and specifically the language around it.

**Biography:**

Anna McQuinn read a B.A., H.DiP Ed (specialising in Children's Literature), and M.A. at U.C.C.

Since 1989 she has worked in publishing, founding her own independent, Alanna Books in 2006. In 2017, Anna joined Ken Wilson-Max to create Alanna Max, enabling her to return to her native Kerry in 2018.

Alongside publishing, Anna volunteered with WGARCR in London and worked with disadvantaged families, refugees and immigrants with Sure Start. This work has been a huge influence on her writing and publishing.

Anna now focuses on her writing. She has written over 50 picture books.

Her most recent Lulu and Zeki series has sold almost two million copies.