

Section: Irish Communities in a Glocal Context – Literary and Cultural Narratives

Alessandra Boller (Siegen), Sara Strauß (Paderborn)

Contrary to common clichés, the concept and reality of Irish communities are manifold and multilayered and transcends the stereotypical regional and religious small-town community of colonial times, for instance evoked in Maria Edgeworth's *The Absentee* (1812) and Jane Barlow's *Irish Idylls* (1892), or criticised in George Moore's *Untilled Field* (1903). Ireland has gradually transformed into a 'modern' society since its independence: The Republic's entry into the EEC and the later ensuing Celtic Tiger period, as a cultural signifier for newness (Buchanan, 2009), firmly placed Ireland in a globalised world, despite the 2008 collapse of the economy. In Northern Ireland, questions of identity and group belonging are constant reminders of historical unions and divisions, not only since the time of the 'Troubles.' Recently, Brexit has effected a new engagement with these issues and places them in a European context. Communities thus need to be considered in a global – or rather glocal – context today because they are shaped by the interconnectedness of global and local spheres and considerations, which also reciprocally influence one another.

This section considers local, regional, national and transnational layers but also takes into account multiple religious, economic or social constructivist conceptions, such as Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" (1983). Literary and cultural narratives provide, when read through the lenses of the above concepts, opportunities to reflect on Irish, Northern Irish as well as diaspora communities in a glocal context. The role of literature and culture can hardly be overestimated, because such narratives can deal with questions of identity, feelings of belonging and citizenship, engage in the transnational turn and can represent a progressive impetus or a backlash to globalisation. Revisiting the genre of the narrative of community, which, according to Sandra Zagarell's seminal definition, presents "the contrast between community life and the modern world directly through participant/observer narrators" (1988, 503), provides a point of departure for reflection on Irish communities in a glocal context today and in the past. Although narratives of community may not follow the narrow characteristics outlined by Zagarell, they still provide ideas about the creation and maintenance of communities or about how communities fall apart due to political, economic and social developments. Such narratives can construct microcosms to address pressing issues in politics and culture (e.g. Lucy Caldwell's *These Days*, 2022, or Donal Ryan's *The Spinning Heart*, 2012), they can engage in the construction of communities across time and space (e.g. Emma Donoghue's hybrid fiction in *Astray*, 2012), they can present counter discourses or draw attention to exclusionary practices of separation and division (e.g. in Northern Irish Troubles fiction, border narratives or contemporary fiction by African-Irish writers), or highlight the role of storytelling for the maintenance of communities.

This section will revisit diverse narratives of community in film, theatre and prose fiction, engaging with 'new' and 'old' communities, with formation or dissection, with representation and negotiation. It will thus allow for a discussion of in- and exclusion with regard to Ireland's colonial and postcolonial past, the cultural narratives of the Celtic Tiger and the economic crash in 2008, as well as transnationalism. Transnational narratives focus attention on forms of "cultural production that take place in the liminal space between real and imagined borders" (Jay 2010, 1) and place "Irish identity in dialogue with other cultural, national, or

Section: Irish Communities in a Glocal Context – Literary and Cultural Narratives

Alessandra Boller (Siegen), Sara Strauß (Paderborn)

ethnic affiliations” (Tucker and Casey 2014, 2). Furthermore, the section will direct attention to the tensions between local and global levels of community life and to questions of belonging, similarities or alterity. The critical discussion of cultural and literary representations does not only emphasise the polyphony potentially created by different voices but also highlights how diverse forms of cultural production open up spaces for reframing communities beyond geographical and imagined borders or limiting understandings of national identities.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2003.
- Buchanan, Jason. “Living at the End of the Irish Century: Globalization and Identity in Declan Hughes’s *Shiver*.” *Modern Drama* 52.3 (2009): 300-24.
- Jay, Paul. *Global Matters. The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 2010.
- Tucker, Amada and Moira Casey. “National and Transnational Irish Literatures.” *Where Motley is Worn. Transnational Irish Literatures*. Ed. Amanda Tucker and Moira Casey. Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, 2014. 1–25.
- Zagarell, Sandra A. “Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre.” *Signs* 13.3 (1988): 498-527. 31 Aug. 2021. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174170>>.

Keynote / Reading

Lucy Caldwell: Glocal Irishness – Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Abstract: This reading and discussion will highlight the role of fiction for the construction of glocal Irishness. Lucy Caldwell will read from her short story collections *Multitudes* (2016) and *Intimacies* (2021) and, in particular, from her most recent award-winning novel *These Days* (2022), which is centred on the experience of the Belfast Blitz in 1941. The discussion of Lucy Caldwell’s writing in light of both historical and recent developments will be tied to interrogating the simultaneous global and local realities of Irish identities and the Irish diaspora. The focus is, in connection with the related section, on the way that narratives are instrumental in defining Irish communities in a glocal context. Belfast, and its narrativization on the basis of the Belfast Blitz, serve as a testing case for the construction of local identities that are shaped by European as well as global events.

Bio Note: Lucy Caldwell was born in Belfast, but has been living in London for many years. She is the author of four novels, several stage plays and radio dramas, and two collections of short stories: *Multitudes* (2016) and *Intimacies* (2021). In 2019, she edited *Being Various: New Irish Short Stories*, the latest volume of Faber’s series of new Irish short stories. Lucy is a former RLF Fellow, a Visiting Fellow at the Seamus Heaney Centre, Queen’s University, Belfast, and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2018. Among the numerous awards that she has won are the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature, the George Devine Award, the Dylan

Section: Irish Communities in a Glocal Context – Literary and Cultural Narratives

Alessandra Boller (Siegen), Sara Strauß (Paderborn)

Thomas Prize, the Irish Writers' and Screenwriters' Guild Award, the Commonwealth Writers' Award (Canada & Europe), the Edge Hill Short Story Prize Readers' Choice Award, and a Major Individual Artist Award from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. In 2021 she won the BBC National Short Story Award with her story "All the People Were Mean and Bad" and in 2022 she was the recipient of the E.M. Forster Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Her most recent novel, *These Days* was published by Faber in March 2022, and won the 2023 Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction.

Panel 1

Marion Schulte (Rostock): New Irish Communities – Immigration, Multilingualism, and Belonging in the Republic of Ireland

Abstract: Although Ireland is traditionally seen as a nation of emigrants, in the last decades the Republic of Ireland has seen net immigration. People from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds have made Ireland their home and are negotiating their belonging in a society that constructs itself as bilingual with the two official languages Irish and English. This paper explores the narratives that exist in contemporary Irish society with regards to multilingualism and immigration. It aims to find out how different languages are perceived in Ireland, whether they belong to and are seen as contributing positively to this glocal society, or whether they are understood as challenging and problematic. The roles the official languages Irish and English play in this narrative are also considered.

In my talk I will carry out a Critical Discourse Analysis of a column in *The Irish Times*, *New to the Parish*, to reveal attitudes and narratives in the society at large. This is compared to the results from an ethnographic study of a community of recent immigrants to Ireland. This community uses creative writing and thus literary texts as a way to create belonging in their new home. Both the literary texts produced and the wider discourse surrounding them will be analysed.

The analyses reveal that immigrants are generally expected to learn English as quickly as possible, but their rights to use either Irish or markedly local forms of Irish English are very much contested. The comments by participants in the creative writing group, but also the Irish Times column and guidelines produced on the integration of immigrants by the Irish government (Gilmartin 2015; Migrant Integration Strategy 2017) show that the use of languages other than English is not overtly discouraged or even forbidden, but a rich multilingual repertoire is not encouraged or viewed positively. Immigrant languages are relegated to the private sphere, they are used behind closed doors away from the English-speaking Irish majority and are thus silenced in public (cf. Schulte 2022). Bilingualism with Irish and English is only acceptable for people born and raised in Ireland, and multilingualism beyond these two official languages is not (yet?) viewed as an asset for this glocal society.

Section: Irish Communities in a Glocal Context – Literary and Cultural Narratives

Alessandra Boller (Siegen), Sara Strauß (Paderborn)

Bio Note: Marion Schulte is a sociolinguist interested in language contact and language change, multilingualism, and sociophonetics. She works primarily on Irish English and has extensive experience collecting data in Ireland. She has published widely on the sociophonetics of Irish English and in this work connects the phonetic realisation of speakers of this variety, both L1 and L2, with identity construction and stance-taking in a third wave sociolinguistic framework. Marion also explores language use beyond phonetics, however, and has conducted linguistic landscaping and ethnographic studies to find out how multilingual speakers and the Irish society at large negotiate questions of social meaning linked to different languages and repertoires. Marion is Chair of English Linguistics at the University of Rostock. Before taking up that position, she worked at Bielefeld University, where she completed her PhD and her Habilitation, and studied at the Universities of Siegen and Maynooth (Ireland). She has been a visiting scholar at University College Dublin and regularly visits Ireland for ethnographic data collection.

Franca Leitner (Würzburg): “There is no one here” – Ghost Estates and the Impossibility of Community in Conor O’Callaghan’s *Nothing on Earth* (2016)

Abstract: As Jason Buchanan notes, “[i]deas of home, space, nation, and community are reduced to a system that uses land as a mechanism to accumulate capital” (53) in Post-Celtic Tiger Irish literature. This process becomes particularly obvious regarding the phenomenon of the so called “ghost estate”. Ghost estates have become a powerful symbol for Ireland after the financial crisis in 2008 – as “places of collective mourning . . . a constant and painful reminder of economic failure and future indebtedness” (Haughey 302), they express a feeling of trauma and loss prevalent after the end of the Celtic Tiger boom. Yet, the space of the ghost estate is not only a reminder of the crash but also a space where the lack of social cohesion Ireland experienced after the crisis becomes most evident. While some novels centring on ghost estates such as Donal Ryan’s *The Spinning Heart* (2012) have gained much critical acclaim and academic interest in recent years, Conor O’Callaghan’s *Nothing on Earth* (2016) has so far been given only marginal scholarly attention. *Nothing on Earth* tells the story of an Irish family returning to the country after having spent several years abroad. Lacking any viable social network, they move into a show house in a newly built estate, surrounded by a landscape that over the course of the novel becomes more and more dystopian. The family in the estate experiences both geographical isolation through the estate’s remote location as well as psychological stress through eerie noises and, later, the unexplained disappearance of one family member after the other. The novel touches upon topics such as displacement, migration, and the impossibility of community – the family’s only neighbours being Eastern European builders with whom no form of communication seems possible while the inhabitants of the nearby village prefer to observe and speculate about the family from a distance. This paper will argue that the microcosm of the ghost estate as portrayed by O’Callaghan makes apparent the breakdown of the idea of community and speaks of a more and more disjointed society in Ireland after the financial crisis.

Section: Irish Communities in a Glocal Context – Literary and Cultural Narratives

Alessandra Boller (Siegen), Sara Strauß (Paderborn)

Bio Note: Franca Leitner is a PhD candidate in Irish Studies at the University of Würzburg (ISWÜ). She graduated from the University of Freiburg with an M.A. in British and North American Cultural Studies in March 2022. Her PhD dissertation will focus on the representations of precarity and homelessness in contemporary Irish fiction of the post-Celtic Tiger period.

Yana Lebedeva (Paderborn): Irish Communities in a Glocal Cinematic Context – The Representation of the Irish Rural Community in the Film *The Banshees of Inisherin*

Abstract: The presentation pursues the analysis of the representation of the Irish rural community in the glocal cinematic context of the Irish national and transnational cinema of the 21st century. It reflects on the depiction of this community in its relation to the subjects of space and place, to nature and landscape in its cultural and political dimensions. The topic of the presentation addresses the complexity of the processes of mythologizing, romanticizing, politicizing, and constructing a utopian Irish landscape in the international cinema (particularly British and American) and Irish national cinema in the historical perspective of the 20th century. This applies to both feature films and documentaries (for example “Man of Aran” by Robert J. Flaherty). A crucial point is the juxtaposition of rural and urban landscapes, which includes political, social, and cultural aspects. On the one hand, a stereotypical and mythologized constructed view from abroad created cinematic space of Ireland as a sacred, utopian, imagined rural space that stood in contrast to the developed urban metropolises of the Western world (McLoone, 2000) and had a more direct relationship to the country of its production than to Ireland itself (O’Brien, 2004). On the other hand, Irish national cinema born in the context of colonial past was influenced by national (cultural) politics, ideology, and religion by the construction of Irish identity, its cinematic representation and rural landscape in the postcolonial contexts of the 20th century. Following these historical and theoretical issues I focus on the co-production *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022) made by England-born Irish filmmaker Martin McDonagh in collaboration between Ireland, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The film reflects on a rural Irish community on the fictional island of Inisherin, which exists as an isolated community in the historical context of the Irish Civil War. This mythologized and imagined reality of the island gives rise to an analysis between isolation and borders, belonging and non-belonging, staying and leaving, individuality and community, and its relationship to the landscape. The presentation ends with a problematization of crucial issues about Irish film and cinematic construction of Irishness in the transnational and international context of the 21st century.

Bio Note: Yana Lebedeva is a PhD candidate at Paderborn University, Germany, at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Department of Media Studies. In 2017 she graduated from the international master’s programme “Film and Audiovisual Media” at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum in Germany, the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris III and the Université Paris Oest Nanterre La Défence in France. Currently she works at the Film Education / Film Literacy Department of the Filmmuseum Düsseldorf.

Section: Irish Communities in a Glocal Context – Literary and Cultural Narratives

Alessandra Boller (Siegen), Sara Strauß (Paderborn)

Panel 2

Raphael Zähringer (Tübingen): The ‘Border People’ – Mapping Community in Garrett Carr’s *The Rule of the Land*

Abstract: The paper investigates Garrett Carr’s *The Rule of the Land* (2017) as a community-mapping project. Bent on walking the entire borderline between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland, Carr produced both a journal and a bottom-up map of his endeavour. As the paper will argue, among the remains of conflict-related borders, Carr found a borderland community that is worth discussing in the context of contemporary border studies (e.g. Gerst, Klessman and Krämer 2021; Frenk and Steveker 2022). The paper will trace Carr’s process of building an understanding of the Irish borderlands and its community. This process hinges on the interplay of two operations. First, Carr needed to come to terms with his own position as an intruder vis-à-vis the ‘border people’ as well as the conventional hegemonic of border logics in general. The paper will address this by drawing upon established notions of transgressive border performances as well as techniques by which human beings claim a territory. Second, Carr’s map of the borderlands bears witness to the challenge of having to find the appropriate cartographic means of what he found during his journeys: connections rather than separation. By venturing into the concept of border aesthetics (Fellner 2021) as well as Carr’s own contemplation of his artistic process, the paper will elaborate on Carr’s inventory of cartographic icons, the most important of which he simply calls “connections” (Carr 2017b, 254): blank spaces that interrupt the black borderline. Taken together, Carr’s writings and the map that sprung from his project document a sense of community that tends to be neglected in the grand scheme of discussions of the Irish border and the communities it has facilitated. “The line on the map divides, but on the ground, it is often a meeting place” (Carr 2017b, 255). As a whole, Carr’s project thus stands as a valuable contribution to the debate about the Irish border(lands) because it productively complicates established border(line)-related narratives and notions of exclusion and division.

Bio Note: Raphael Zähringer received his Ph.D. from Tübingen University and is now a postdoctoral researcher in English Literatures and Cultures. His major areas of research are English and Irish contemporary literature and culture, Science Fiction and Dystopian Fiction, space/maps and/in literature, and popular culture (graphic narrative and adaptation). His current research project (‘Habilitation’) called ‘Writing Moments of Crisis: Ireland, 1596-2018’ focusses on the interplay between narrative representations of crises and crises of representation in Irish literature.

Ann-Christine Herbold (Kassel): “The Same Old Theme Since 1916”? Music of Division and (Re)Union in Bernard MacLaverty’s *Grace Notes* and Jez Butterworth’s *The Ferryman*

Abstract: Communities in Northern Ireland have long been marked by “animosities and unresolved issues of nationality, religion, power and territorial rivalry” (McKittrick and McVea 1) that saw their most violent expression in the Troubles 1968-1998. Music has since the

Section: Irish Communities in a Glocal Context – Literary and Cultural Narratives

Alessandra Boller (Siegen), Sara Strauß (Paderborn)

beginning of these animosities served Irish republicans and Ulster unionists to unite in communities, celebrate their culture, and voice dissent. This importance of music in/for communities is mirrored in Bernard MacLaverty's novel *Grace Notes* (1997) about a Northern Irish female composer negotiating music and identity and Jez Butterworth's play *The Ferryman* (2017) about an Irish republican family struggling to cope with past trauma and sectarian violence in 1981 rural Armagh. In my paper, I examine the unifying and dividing qualities of music (and silence) within and between communities in both works, considering the cultural and gender implications of (Northern) Irish republican and unionist music traditions. Whereas in MacLaverty's *Grace Notes* music acts as a unifying element for unionist and nationalist culture, in Butterworth's *The Ferryman* it remains a divisive element. Within the communities, however, the music of *Grace Notes* sparks division, while the music of *The Ferryman* serves to unite the Catholic characters and to solidify their nationalist culture. The same songs that have united generations of Irish republican communities also unite the characters of *The Ferryman* in their identity and community, but at the same time they painfully illustrate the division of the country and foreshadow how the past glorified in those songs comes back to haunt the characters.

The silence(ing) and invisibility of women in the music of the Troubles – and sectarian violence in general – and classical music, all male-coded fields, is subverted by the works' female protagonists. Catherine in *Grace Notes* transcends the boundaries of the 'woman's place' and sectarian divide by writing a successful piece of classical music that incorporates elements of both Catholic and Protestant culture and Caitlin in *The Ferryman* ultimately transcends the boundaries of the 'woman's place' into the men's world of violence. In contrast to the devastating end of *The Ferryman*, *Grace Notes* ends on a hopeful note: Catherine is able to create a liminal non-space from which the vision of a new, hybrid and peaceful Northern Ireland emerges. However, the division her music causes in her own community illustrates the time and effort needed to achieve a reconciliation of Northern Irish communities.

Bio Note: Ann-Christine Herbold has studied English and History at Universität Kassel, where she is currently working on a PhD dissertation on Scottish crime fiction. Her fields of interest are contemporary Scottish fiction, literary representations of the Troubles as well as depictions of death and gender in literature.

Dennis Henneböhl (Erlangen-Nürnberg): Negotiating between Traditional Irishness and Modern European Identities – Narratives of Glocal Irish Community in Contemporary Fiction

Abstract: In the wake of the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union that also significantly impacts life on the Emerald Isle, Europe has become of increasing interest in Ireland as well. This can for instance be observed in the number of cultural products, especially literature, dealing with Ireland's relationship to Europe. My paper thus investigates how contemporary Irish fiction engages with this issue. More specifically, I will read the novels *The Butchers* (2020) by Ruth Gilligan and Audrey Magee's *The Colony* (2022) as case studies of what can be referred to as 'narratives of glocal Irish community'. In order to do so, I draw on

Section: Irish Communities in a Glocal Context – Literary and Cultural Narratives

Alessandra Boller (Siegen), Sara Strauß (Paderborn)

Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' as well as Sandra Zagarell's concept of 'narratives of community' and combine them with an approach that also takes into consideration the glocal context which shapes modern Ireland. Although not set in the present but at the onset of the increasing influence of globalisation on Irish communities (the 1970s in the case of *The Colony* and the 1990s for *The Butchers*), the two historical fictions – as is characteristic for the genre – reflect as much on the current state of the nation as they do on the past.

A key focus of my analysis lies on how these texts negotiate between traditional notions of rural Irishness and the identities connected to a modern European Ireland. In the novels, this becomes apparent by looking at two levels: First, on the level of the local communities as a whole which are depicted from the point of view of multiple focalising characters. Here, the relationships and interactions across different generations of the same community as well as the contact with people from outside communities play a crucial role. Second, that of individual characters trying to (re-)construct their own identity in a changing Ireland. In fact, both novels feature among their main focalisers adolescents caught between the expectations and customs of their rural communities and a more urban, continental lifestyle. My paper will study these representations with an interdisciplinary combination of methods from both literary and cultural studies.

Bio Note: Dennis Henneböhl received his PhD from Paderborn University and is now working as a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer in English Literature and Culture at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. His dissertation entitled '*Taking Back Control*' of *the Nation and Its History? Contemporary Fiction's Engagement with the Master Narrative of Nostalgia in Brexit Britain* is about to be published later this year with Brill | Fink. In his postdoc project, he investigates the interactions between science and theatre during the Victorian era. Among his other key research areas are the BrexLit genre, political rhetoric, Britain's as well as Ireland's relationship with Europe, border studies, and Northern Irish Troubles Fiction.

Panel 3

Dilâra Yilmaz (Kiel): Narratives of No Community – Longing for Belonging as a Female Experience and Literary Mode in Contemporary Irish Fiction since 2017

Abstract: Narratives of community and themes of in- and exclusion have long characterized Irish fiction and its academic discussion. Latest narratives, however, provide a new emphasis on the idea of communal belonging: The lack thereof. Recent publications, i.e. debuts by Irish women writers since 2017 (all of them millennials), highlight community by ellipsis. I argue that since Sally Rooney's debut *Conversations With Friends* (2017), there has been a massive literary outburst of female-authored fiction negotiating ideas of community in a radically different way. These novels are deliberate narratives of no belonging: The (almost exclusively) female protagonists describe, in a greatly disaffected manner, their unsuccessful quest for belonging to any sort of community, none of which they can find in categories such as age,

Section: Irish Communities in a Glocal Context – Literary and Cultural Narratives

Alessandra Boller (Siegen), Sara Strauß (Paderborn)

gender, or class. The protagonists linger – or are stuck – either in-between or outside groups that could possibly generate a sense of communal identity.

The absence of communal belonging is not simply a coincidental feature permeating recent debuts. Its vast occurrence (or rather, emphasized presence) in numerous texts suggest a more profound role. I argue that these new texts by new writers do not merely offer a collection of a new female experience in Irish society, but provide a distinct lens through which contemporary Irish identity and community is narrated. I argue that it is this lens, this narrative mode of no community, that appears necessary to illustrate the contemporary negotiation of female Irish identity and community.

Bio Note: Dilâra Yilmaz is an early career researcher and lecturer at the Chair of English Literature at Kiel University. After obtaining the M.Ed. in German Studies, English and North American Studies, and History, she completed a subsequent Master of Arts in English and American Literatures, Cultures, and Media. Her research interests include contemporary Irish literature, literary neurodiversity, and boredom and disaffect in literature and film. She has been working on her PhD (preliminarily) titled ‘Conditions of Contemporary Irish Women’s Fiction Writing’ since 2021. She teaches Irish and British literature and media studies.

Sarah Busch (Freiburg/Cologne): Negotiating Irishness at the Abbey Theatre – Audience Engagement in Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins’ *An Octoroon* (2014)

Abstract: When Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins’ adaptation of Dion Boucicault’s melodrama *The Octoroon* (1859) came to the Abbey Theatre in April 2022, Anthony-Simpson Pike was the first black director ever to put on a play at Ireland’s national theatre. Though not surprising given the Abbey’s historically nationalist and often conservative programme, this is rather shocking thinking about Ireland as a modern, multicultural capital of the globalised world. My paper will demonstrate the many ways in which *An Octoroon*, a piece about the history of slavery in America, can become a socio-political commentary on issues of racism in contemporary Ireland. Methodologically the paper relies on a phenomenological close-reading of the performance and paratexts such as the programme or interviews with the creatives while also focusing on the play’s reception through audience perspectives expressed on Twitter and in post-show interviews conducted with spectators of the performance. In contemporary Irish theatre, feelings of belonging, citizenship and nationhood are re-evaluated as concepts such as Irishness are endowed with new meaning by migration, multiculturalism and neoliberal capitalism. Similarly, Fintan Walsh prompts to leave behind conceptions of a unifying Irish identity and to start speaking of cultural ways of belonging with a focus on marginalised communities (2016, 16). The Abbey’s production of *An Octoroon* stirred up the sentiment of a new Ireland that confronts its racist past and present and makes room for diversity. As one of my interviewees commented on seeing people of colour on stage: “you feel like there’s a chance for me to also prove myself. Sometimes you are just pushed to the peripheries as an artist, as an art worker. So it’s good to see more and more representation”. As the paper argues, every theatre piece is brought to life by the audience, who come together temporarily

Section: Irish Communities in a Glocal Context – Literary and Cultural Narratives

Alessandra Boller (Siegen), Sara Strauß (Paderborn)

as an affective community and actively form part of the creation and meaning-making process of the performance. In *An Octoroon*, this co-presence becomes especially pertinent as characters repeatedly break the fourth wall and address spectators directly, thus implicating them into the performance and the ways in which it explores racial discrimination, othering and, eventually, genocide – highly topical issues in the context of Ireland’s recent (post)colonial past. Spectators, therefore, ponder their own responsibility within the social structures of (post)colonialism and assume their role as the “audience-as-witness” (Pine 2020). To cite Walsh again, contemporary theatre “forces us to confront our most heinous crimes and our most shameful failings. But it also propels us closer to one another...– offering comfort, reflection, and sometimes hope. All of it is us” (2013, 19).

Bio Note: Sarah Busch is a PhD student at the University of Freiburg and *Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin* at the University of Cologne with a teaching degree in English and Spanish Philology. Her PhD project combines English Literary and Cultural Studies with Performance and Audience Studies as it investigates how affective theatre experiences shape the spectators’ understanding of text and engagement with performance. She teaches at the University of Freiburg and has directed, acted and managed Public Relations for the English Department student drama group. In 2022 she did fieldwork for her PhD project with University College Dublin in which she interviewed spectators of contemporary Irish performances about their viewing experiences. Audience engagement and participation in performances that treat feminism, queerness and ethnicity are of particular interest in order to discuss issues of intersectional identity and new forms of Irishness in the 21st century.