NWCDTP
NORTH WEST CONSORTIUM DOCTORAL TRAINING PARTNERSHIP

UK RI | Arts and Humanities Research Council

Standard Application form for students applying for a +2 or +3 studentship in the Arts and Humanities

(September 2023 entry)

1. Studentship applied for (please tick):

⊟ 2 years FT/ 4 years PT funding (for those who have already started a PhD programme)

☐ 3 years FT/ 6 years PT funding

2. Named studentships you wish to be considered for (see guidance for details):

☐ Global Majority studentship

☐ Philosophy Pathway studentship for female Global Majority candidates

☐ Broken Pipeline studentship (UK only)

3. Candidate's details:

Name:	
Application / Registration number:	
Address:	

Town:	
Postcode:	
Country:	
Telephone:	
Email address:	
Nationality/Resident Status:	⊟ UK or Irish National
	☐ UK Settled status
	☐ EU National not resident in the UK
	☐ EU National resident in the UK for the past three years ☐ Other

4. Project details:

Mode of Attendance ☐ a. Full time   ⊟ b. Part time

Project title:	Folkloric Resonances in Contemporary Irish Fiction: Marginalised Voices in a 'PostNationalist' State
Pathway:	English Literature
Institution:	University of Salford

5. PhD Proposal:

5a) Please describe the proposed research (**up to 1500 words**). The word limit includes bibliography or references, tables, figures, table/figure captions and footnotes. Please include a word count.

This thesis will outline a recent shift in approaches to Irish folklore among Irish fiction writers and folklorists. Where twentieth-century Irish writing tended to mobilise and interpret folklore in relation to established ideas about race, ethnicity, state and nation, contemporary writing newly imagines community and identity from perspectives that are critical of, or outside of, these frameworks. My thesis explores representations of marginalisation and systemic oppression in contemporary Irish literature, arguing that recent works dismantle mythologies of nation by utilising folklore as a tradition of subaltern expression, narrativising counter-hegemonic experiences.

This thesis reads primary texts by writers such as Oein DeBhairduin, Dierdre Sullivan and Molly Aitken in relation to trends in folkloric writing and folklore studies in post-2010 Ireland, North and South, to argue that folklore – as a collection of popular motifs, storytelling traditions, and canon of Irish history – expresses subaltern experience and imagines communities beyond nation.

Introduction

This PhD will argue that the emergence of new approaches to folklore demonstrates a renewed interest in exploring marginalisation through folkloric tradition. The development of Irish folklore studies, and popular folkloric literary movements, speak to the development of Irish national identity, with folklore embodying a cultural heritage, ethnic lineage, and imagined community (Ó Giolláin, 2000; 2006; Anttonen, 2005; Del Giudice, 2001). Markey and O'Connor (2014), Baycroft (2012) and Graham (2001) identify an Irish national mythology that is underpinned by folklore. This mythology is characterised by central instabilities (Graham, 2001) that is the basis of anti-nationalist, postmodern deconstructions of myth and legend, particularly among women writers (Markey & O'Connor, 2014). In this context, this thesis makes the following arguments: that trends in approaches to folklore in recent decades have solidified a postnationalist perspective, and that they are a reaction to recent intersecting political movements concerning the legal representation of minorities. It will demonstrate – through review and analysis of post-2010 Irish folkloric writing – an interest in Irish folklore as a cultural presence opposed to hegemonic, predominantly nationalist norms. Contemporary folkloric writing indicates that folkloric tradition is uniquely embedded in subaltern identity; in conceptions of identity and community beyond nation, and voices that are actively silenced within mythologies of nation (based on Ó Giolláin's assertion of folklore as subaltern, 2006). Explorations of the subaltern contribute to a demythologising of Irish folklore and, thus, a demythologising of national identity. This thesis will identify three distinct themes. Firstly, it argues that feminist

YA fantasy utilises uncanny and supernatural motifs to frame young women's experiences of violence, abuse and social isolation. Secondly, it contends that literary fiction and historical fiction mobilises folklore to represent marginalised perspectives and experiences, and explore cultural diversity. Finally, the thesis analyses how the collection, adaptation and translation of Irish folklore re-imagines Irish identities.

Chapter One
Young Adult Fantasy Fiction : young women, dark fantasy and the uncanny

In this chapter, I will examine three works of feminist fantasy literature: **Deirdre Sullivan's *Perfectly Preventable Deaths* (2019)**, the sequel **Precious Catastrophe (2021)**, and **Maria Griffin's *Other Words for Smoke* (2019)**. These texts explore gender, sexuality and adolescence, utilising Irish folkloric themes and motifs in the creation of dark, strange young adult fantasies. The uncanny and supernatural are poetic manifestations of trauma, mundane violence and inherent conflict (Fisher, 2006; Caxon & Hirst, 2021). Despite Irish political writing tending to lean towards realism, there is significant interest, in feminist women's writing, in folklore about deviant women and households (witches, banshees, hauntings and abduction) (Káli-Rozmis, 2020; Kimpton, 1993; Nic Dhiarmada, 2020). This chapter argues that the texts discussed appropriate these conventions in the context of the adolescence and trauma of young women, in the tradition of feminist folkloric writing.

This chapter will consider the overlapping of YA fantasy tropes (outlined in Ebarvia, 2016; Alsup, 2010; Eiss, 2009) and folkloric motifs, pertaining to themes of adolescence, queer identity and women's marginalisation. It will explore the use of escapism in Sullivan's series, and how this trope is unsettled by threats of exploitation and predation through the presence of folkloric child-snatching motifs. It will also explore Griffin's coming-of-age narrative, arguing that the haunted house motif merges two generations of adolescence, facing queer oppression and death caused by teen pregnancy, and the lingering trauma of this discrimination. It will argue that there is an intersection of young women's adolescence, queer sexuality and gender non-conformity, expressed in the seduction of dark magic and in-human creatures. Kennon (2020) asserts that Irish YA fiction in the twenty-first century has shifted to focus on more realistic and empathetic portrayals of adolescent struggle. In line with this, I will argue that the texts examined display a clear interest in identifying with women's adolescence and queer sexuality, and utilise folk as a thematic device that embodies unsettling normalities and shared trauma. The chapter will demonstrate that these texts embed folk into discourses of marginalisation and representation within the canon of European fantasy.

Chapter Two
Historical and Literary Fiction : cultural diversity, historicity and creative expression

This chapter will analyse three life stories, **Molly Aitken's *The Island Child* (2020)**, **Lynn Buckle's *What Willow Says* (2021)**, and **Niamh Boyce's *Her Kind* (2020),** that incorporate superstition, folkloric tradition, learning and oral storytelling into biographical or otherwise realistic writing. These texts vary thematically but the chapter identifies them all as narrativising marginalised struggles (Aitken with gender and sexuality in rural Ireland; Boyce with witch trials and murdered women; Buckle with disability and language). The chapter will demonstrate that the texts utilise folklore as an exploration of marginalisation within community, and promote approaches to folklore that engage with marginalisation and enable diversity.

This chapter argues that Aitken's work destabilises the functionality of the image of rural Ireland in folklore study (based on the Aran Islands studies; Ó Giolláin, 2014), by narrativizing the experiences of women, queer men, and the rural community that itself sits on the cusp of Irish society, expressed through the conflicted overlapping of different traditions, superstitions and religious beliefs. The chapter positions Aitken within a wider discourse surrounding the conceptualisation of rural Ireland (Graham, 2001; Trower, 2012; Anttonen, 2005). On the other hand, Boyce's work, a fictional retelling of a witch

trial, imagines the lives of women who were vilified and ostracised, asserting the importance of the fictionalising of events to identify with voices that were silenced. This chapter argues that this approach creates opportunities to explore historical marginalisation; particularly significant to witch trails (Sneddon, 2014; 2015) given the physical voicelessness of the subjects. Meanwhile, Buckle explores language and folklore in the context of disability. Folklore studies has traditionally identified the

value of oral language (Oral History Network Ireland; Harrington, 1991), while recent outreach projects have utilised oral storytelling for creative expression among marginalised groups (such as Pavee Point). This chapter argues that, while discourse regarding disability in folklore studies is relatively new and under-served (Blank and Kitta, 2015; Eberly, 1988), Buckle's exploration of oral storytelling and poetic sign language situates disability at the heart of folklore's core themes.

Chapter Three   Adaptations, Translations and Folklore Collections : re-imagining community and identity

This chapter will contend with **Dierdre Sullivan's** work, *Tangleweed and Brine* **(2017)** and *Savage Her Reply*
(2020), **Oein DeBhairduin's** *Why The Moon Travels* **(2020)**, and a collaborative work by DeBhairduin and Sullivan,
Weave **(2022)**, and the ways that folklore documentation excludes certain groups. Ó Giolláin (2014), demonstrated that early cataloguing of folklore was carried out by men, while feminist critics (Kimpton, 1993; Radner, 1993; Conrad, 2008; Káli-Rozmis, 2020) explored the ways that women's traditions are misappropriated. Recent discourse has also contended with the systemic exclusion of Travellers from Irish culture, including the vilification of their role in the preservation of folkloric tradition (Joyce, 2015; 2018; 2021; O'hAodha, 2011). The texts considered in this chapter approach folklore documentation with the intention of representing these excluded groups.

This chapter will argue that Sullivan's work displays an interest in identifying silenced voices. *Savage Her Reply* (retelling of The Children of Lir) imagines the voice of the malevolent villain alongside those of her victims. The chapter argues that this perspective dismantles the perceived heroism of the male figures in traditional retellings, and their authority over narrative. Similarly, DeBhairduin's approaches to folklore documentation centre on the history and traditions of Mincéirí community. The chapter will demonstrate that folklore here functions as an imagining of community, with the sharing of stories as a key aspect of memory and tradition. While analysis surrounding these texts have noted their significance in cultural representation (Rodríguez Bonet, 2022; Mianowski, 2020), I will assert that, through this interest in adapting folklore documentation, they reimagine Irish history and identity. Folklore studies in the late 19th/early 20th centuries was driven by a pressure to preserve Irish culture through systematic cataloguing of folklore, due to the cultural damage caused by colonialism (Ó Giolláin, 2014). These texts mirror the same sense of injustice within the Irish nation state, and seek to assert marginalised Irish identity. Thus, as this chapter will argue, folklore, traditionally forming the basis of Irish national mythology, is used in these texts to imagine community beyond hegemonic perceptions of nation.

5b) Please provide information on how the proposed research engages with issues relating to Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Sustainability (max 100 words)

This PhD engages with ongoing discourses pertaining to representation of minority groups – Traveller and LGBTQ+ communities – in Ireland, and how folklore speaks to intersecting political movements for equality and inclusion (legal recognition of Traveller ethnic minority status, women's equality, Repeal the Eighth, queer legal equality and disability rights).
It will engage with and adapt to the practical and traditional uses of folklore, forming an informed perspective of its purpose in marginalised communities, including language use.
I have a background in community-based teaching work. I have centred my research and work on equality and diversity and will apply my PhD research to community outreach projects (see CwEP section).

6. Qualifications, professional/ practical experience

Year awarded	Qualification type	Qualification Subject	Awarding institution	Class or GPA
2019	BA	English and Creative Writing	University of Salford	1
2021	MA	Literature and Culture	University of Salford	Distinction

Description of professional/ practical experience (max 350 words):	**Publications:** My article, "Is There No Alternative?: Capitalist Realism and Genre in Contemporary Political Fiction" was published in the peer-reviewed journal, *Alluvium* [issue no. 10.2, 08/09/2022] I have another article entitled "Twenty-First Century Irish Folklore Beyond Nationalism : DeBhairduin's *Why The Moon Travels*, Groarke's *Lament for Art O'Leary*, and Sullivan's *Savage Her Reply*" under consideration with a leading journal in my field, *Irish Studies Review*. Reader reports are expected in April 2023. **Conference organisation/papers:** I co-organised and participated in a virtual academic conference as part of my Masters. I researched and presented work related to my dissertation on the topic of Irish folklore, identity and nationalism in the early work of W.B. Yeats. Lecturers described it as "offering a unique perspective", "clear" and "accessible", and showcasing a "wide knowledge of Irish folklore". Through this conference I have gained the skills that I will later apply to future conferences (ADEI 2023 conference, and SPARC conference at Salford, in order to secure funding), workshops (in association with the Frea Charity), and seminars at the University of Salford. **Funding:** I received funding [£500] from a competitive internal scheme at the School of Arts and Media at the University of Salford to present a research paper at the Spanish Association for Irish Studies at the University of Valencia in May 2023. **Training:** I completed a PGR training programme between October and December 2022, that covered research skills, research methods and library training. **Teaching and Public Engagement:** I have worked on several community projects in Greater Manchester since 2017 – including teaching English and supporting asylum seekers at the Bolton Destitution Project. This is part of a wider community hub and provides me with insight into the experiences of a broad spectrum of people who are displaced or marginalised, as well as the importance of 'voice' and cultural awareness in this context.

7. Supervision

Please propose the supervisory team for your project:

Institution	Supervisor
University of Salford	████████████████
University of Salford	████████████████

8. Research Training and resource needs (max 150 words for this section)

Please give details of the anticipated research training needed for your PhD project, including difficult language training. Please give details of the kind of resources you will potentially need during your PhD. Please also indicate whether your research project will require you to undertake research abroad.

In addition to the training sessions provided by the NWCDTP and Salford, I will also pursue the PgCAP qualification through my institution ahead of contributing to teaching in the English department in my second year.

If I get PhD funding, in addition to applying for conference funding for the EFACIS conference, I will apply for SDF funding via the NWCDTP for Irish language training with the Manchester Irish Language Group and online language classes in my first and second year. Although my primary research will be in the English language, knowledge of Irish will help me engage with etymology, syntax and vernacular of hybrid language texts.

9. Collaboration with External Partners (max 150 words for this section)

Please give details of any potential collaboration you will develop with external organisations during your PhD programme (industry, cultural organisation, government bodies etc) including possible placements.

In 2024 I will research the National Folklore Collection and present my findings at Salford for the English community, library and archivists via SPARC conference.

Through my supervisor (at a later stage in my research), I will engage with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Government of Ireland and work with the new Consulate for the North of England on their plans for academic engagement with diasporic Irish communities to outline recent trends in folkloric practice and folklore studies.

I have established connections with the FRÉA Charity partnership and, through my initial research, will develop folklore workshops with a focus on diversity. I will collaborate with them in September 2025 to propose workshops with elder care residents (via Leeds Irish Health & Homes organisation; later via Irish Community Care Manchester), discussing memory and community. I will also propose workshops on LGBTQ+ outreach and contemporary queer folklore, initially via the London Irish LGBT Network. At a later stage, through FRÉA, I will conduct talks on folklore, storytelling and outreach.

10. References / Transcripts

⊟ Your institution will need to attach two references and your transcript(s) from your programme application to this application form.

I confirm that the information I have provided in this form is complete and accurate to the best of my knowledge at this date. I fully understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the relevant forms are submitted to the relevant office in due time and that any missing information may render my application incomplete and ineligible. I authorise the North West Consortium DTP to disclose to the AHRC any information that is relevant to my application.

Signature: **(Type Name if submitted electronicall)**	
Date:	02/02/2023