

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: Edge Hill University</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 29 – English Language and Literature</p>
<p>Title of case study: Making a distinctive contribution to the revitalisation of the short story genre</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact This case study is based on critical and creative work on the short story carried out by Cox which has made a contribution to a nationwide revival of interest in a genre that has traditionally been overshadowed by the full-length novel. The Edge Hill Prize, awarded by the University for a published short story collection, was established based on this research. The Prize has made a significant and distinctive contribution to an increased awareness and appreciation, amongst publishers, writers, readers and critics, of the specificity of short fiction as a genre in its own right; and hence increased production, promotion and consumption of the short story collection, providing opportunities for short story writers in the creative economy. In addition, Cox has influenced the teaching and practice of short story writing through a number of key texts that are used extensively.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research The research underpinning this case study brings together the creative practice and critical work of Cox since 2004 at Edge Hill (Reader in Creative Writing), where she has been employed continuously since 01/09/2004. Before beginning a full time career in Higher Education, Cox was already a widely published short story writer and the editor of an Arts Council funded literary journal, <i>Metropolitan</i> (1993-97). Her collection, <i>The Real Louise</i> (1), includes stories that have been shortlisted for awards including the <i>Stand</i> International Short Story Competition, the V.S. Pritchett Award and the Bridport Prize. 'Making It Happen', (<i>London Magazine</i> 2001) also provided the focus for a practice-based chapter in her PhD, <i>Time and Subjectivity in Contemporary Short Fiction</i> (1999). Both the creative and the critical research have generated these key findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The contemporary short story is a distinctive type of fiction, and not merely a truncated form of the novel. • It is especially good at capturing the intensity and immediacy of memory as it is relived within the present moment. • Because it is a condensed form the short story allows writers a chance to innovate and experiment with style. • This dynamic potential is especially evident when a diversity of stories are published together in a single author collection. <p><i>The Real Louise</i> explores and demonstrates ways in which short story single author collections can be used to deal with time and memory. For instance, 'November' switches between impressions of a walk through Sefton Park, Liverpool; newspaper and other factual sources; and images taken from real events, including a hit-and-run incident. Other stories ('Twentieth Frame', 'Sex Etc.') also experiment with form and style, while some ('Her Old Self Again', 'No Problemo') are more conventional. But all the stories have been composed as a type of montage, closely interweaving memories and impressions through the use of vivid imagery.</p> <p>Insights gained from her own practice have shaped Cox's approach to contemporary practitioners. In her monograph, <i>Alice Munro</i> (2), and essays, including her journal article on the British writer Helen Simpson (3), she has discussed the techniques used by both writers to suggest the reliving of memory. Cox has been recognized as an authority on Munro, whose canonical status is now firmly established (for example, she was invited to speak on BBC Radio's <i>PM</i> programme when Munro was awarded the Nobel Prize, Oct. 2013). Her contribution to a recent volume on the postcolonial short story combines a reading of stories by Alice Munro with an analysis of <i>Dead Girls</i>, a collection by another Canadian writer, Nancy Lee. Cox shows the effect of combining stand-alone stories in a collection which is subtly linked by the figure of a serial killer (4). These explorations of the short story's generic specificity drive Cox's public advocacy of a form which has tended to be marginalized by publishers and critics' appraisals. Her Introduction to the edited volume, <i>Teaching the Short Story</i> (5), outlines the developments in literary culture that</p>

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seem to nurture an expansion in short story publishing in the UK, including the popularity of the self-contained short story amongst emerging writers on Creative Writing courses; and the role of the internet both in providing outlets for digital publication and opportunities for publicity and networking amongst writers and publishers. **Cox** is the founding editor of an international, peer-reviewed journal, *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice*; in her editorial for the first issue she addresses the growing community of short story writers, readers and scholars (6).

3. References to the research

The research findings and insights underpinning this case study are embodied in:

1. Book: Cox, A. *The Real Louise and Other Stories* (West Kirby: Headland Press, 2009).
2. Book: Cox, A. *Alice Munro* (Tavistock: Northcote House, Writers & Their Work series 2004).
3. Journal Article: 'Helen Simpson's "Opera"', *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 51 (Autumn 2008), pp.137-48.
4. Chapter in Book: Cox, A. 'Vancouver Stories: Nancy Lee and Alice Munro', in *The Postcolonial Short Story*, ed. P. March-Russell and M. Awadalla (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2012), pp. 64-78.
5. Chapter in Book: 'Introduction', in *Teaching the Short Story*, ed. Cox, A. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.1-12.
6. Journal Article: Cox, A. 'Introduction', *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice*, Vol. 1.1, (Intellect Press 2011), pp.3-5. http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/fict.1.1.3_2

Output 1 is a collection of prize winning and shortlisted works (including the *Stand* International Short Story competition, the V.S. Pritchett Award and the Bridport Prize). Output 2 was published in association with the British Council. Outputs 3-6 are peer reviewed items. Output 3 was published in the key journal in its field. Outputs 1, 3 and 4 are submitted in REF 2. All outputs available on request.

4. Details of the impact

The following impacts arose during the period January 2008 to July 2013:

Impact 1: Influencing the teaching and practice of short story writing

The impact of **Cox's** research in the short story is felt in the writing and publishing community, both within and beyond academia. The central theme of **Cox's** critical and scholarly research on short fiction is temporality: the modern and contemporary short story genre has the particular quality of engaging with the passing moment, and representing identity and experience in relation to the present moment. Two key texts by **Cox**, *Writing Short Stories* (Routledge, 2005) and *Teaching the Short Story* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), build on the discoveries of this research and help to transmit them accessibly to lay readers, teachers of writing, and to other professional writers. The critical emphases of **Cox's** research therefore inform the increasing practice of short fiction in the Anglophone world on a number of levels. **Cox's** book *Writing Short Stories* is particularly well known amongst writers outside as well as inside higher education. For instance, it is required reading for the University of Exeter's Continuing Education course, 'The Art of the Short Story', and also features on the BBC's 'Get Writing' site (Other Source 1, Section Five). As one example, an author/ lecturer at another university confirms recommendation of this work to Creative Writing students (Factual Statement 2). Paul March-Russell's book, *The Short Story: An Introduction*, cites **Cox's** book *Writing Short Stories* as 'the best guide to writing short stories, due to its engagement with both theory and practice' (Other Source 2). Sales figures from *Writing Short Stories* indicate considerable international currency and influence for a book in this context: 6,150 to 30/04/13.

Impact 2: Making a significant and distinctive contribution to the renewal of interest in, and vitality of, the short story as a genre

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in the short story as a genre of fiction. This has been marked by increased attention to and appreciation of the short story amongst literary critics and readers. This renewal may be attributed to many different factors (including the emergence of new publication channels and business/ distribution models enabled by technology), and to the work and influence of many different people and organisations. Within this context, the work of **Cox** has made a significant and distinctive contribution, as set out below.

Drawing on her longstanding interest, creative practice and critical work, **Cox** founded the annual

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Edge Hill Short Story Prize in order to champion the genre. The Prize, which has been awarded annually since 2008, is sponsored by the University and is open to British and Irish writers of short story collections first published in English. Entry is through submission by publishers.

The short story has traditionally been undervalued, sometimes regarded as inferior creatively to the novel and unattractive commercially. Prizes play an important role in changing perceptions of the form, garnering attention and enhancing appreciation of its challenges and possibilities. They can increase demand from readers and demonstrate to publishers that short stories, particularly when published as collections, merit investment and more active promotion. A number of authors, publishers and editors were interviewed as part of the preparation of this case study. Each noted the contribution that the Prize has made in helping to raise the profile of the short story as a genre. One publisher (Factual Statement 3) noted that *"The Prize validates the form/genre and stimulates discussion and debate within the national press and amongst the writers themselves."* Factual statements 1, 2, 4 and 5 support this view.

The writer A.L. Kennedy set out the distinctive challenges and rewards of short story writing and reading and the marketing barriers affecting the genre, as well as the benefits of the Edge Hill Prize in an article for *The Independent*, stating *"And now, after the terrifying and counterproductive efforts to "save" the short story, we have the Edge Hill Prize, an annual award of £5,000 to the author of the year's best collection of short fiction. No gimmicks, no tricks, just respect for the form, the authors who are trying to work with it and the readers who still love it. I'm proud to be one of the judges in this, its inaugural year"*. (Other Source 3)

In light of challenges facing the short story genre, the sustained support for it given by the Prize (awarded every year since 2008) is valued by authors and publishers, particularly smaller independents who specialise in (or devote a relatively high proportion of output to) the short story. As one publisher notes, *"To compete with the novel and other forms of literature, the short story genre more than ever requires continuity. An annual prize provides that and provides the sense of validation required"*. This sustained presence has enabled the Prize to increase its profile and publishers to incorporate it into promotional strategies. As one editor (Factual Statement 5) notes, *"It takes time for any award to become established and the Edge Hill Prize is now an annual staple of the industry"*. The increased profile of the Prize and the wider growth in short story publication is reflected in growth in the volume of entries for the Prize, the range of publishers submitting entries and the profile of authors entered. There was a total of 21 entries in 2008. While only 10 were submitted in 2009, this increased to 18 in 2010 and 20 in 2011, rising to 31 in 2012 and 38 in 2013. Winners since 2008 have been Clare Keegan, Chris Beckett, Jeremy Dyson, Graham Mort, Sarah Hall and Kevin Barry. Mainstream publishers such as Random House, Bloomsbury, Macmillan and Faber now regularly submit entries.

Cox's contribution to the renewal of interest in and vitality of the short story genre through the Edge Hill Short Story Prize has been distinctive in two ways. Firstly, drawing directly on her research insights into the dynamic potential of the short story form when stories are published together in a single author collection, the Prize is the only one for a single author collection. Authors, publishers and editors interviewed for this case study stated the distinct benefits of a prize for short story collections rather than individual stories. One (Factual Statement 5) notes that the Edge Hill Prize is *"...the only short story prize that focuses on a collection, I believe this possibly validates the genre more than the other prizes"*. Secondly, unlike other prizes for work in the short story genre, the Edge Hill prize is for collections by new British and Irish authors. This contrasts with and complements the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award for short story collections which is open to all writers (new and established) from across the world. The focus of the Edge Hill Short Story Prize enables new writers from the British Isles to gain the attention of readers, publishers and critics. The publication of the longlist and the shortlist for the Prize, and its award, each create opportunities for the validation, promotion, and recognition of new British and Irish talent.

By focusing on short story collections from new British and Irish writers the Prize has helped to generate benefits for authors and publishers, including:

- **Increased profile often has an impact on the sales of shortlisted books.** Sales of short story collections are relatively low but within this context the Prize has had a noted impact.

One independent publisher (Factual Statement 3) specialising in short stories reported that being shortlisted always results in a modest rise in sales. Another independent, focused on short story anthologies by emerging writers, reported that a winning collection they had entered had, to date, exceeded sales volume expectations by a factor of eight (4,000 rather 500) and continues to sell strongly, attributing this to the Prize (Factual Statement 4). An author and editor (Factual Statement 1) interviewed for this case study reports the positive impact that the Edge Hill Prize has on the careers of individual British authors.

- **Publishers are more interested in short story collections:** An independent publisher (Factual Statement 4) comments that “*authors are not afraid to go to major publishers with short stories anymore, practices and policies have changed*”. A shortlisted author (Factual Statement 2) adds that: “*In the past, it was kind of a golden rule that you couldn’t go to a publisher with a collection of short stories, it had to be a novel. This has changed and this change of perceptions is down to the work of people such as Ailsa*”.
- **Recognition through the Prize has a positive impact on the careers of authors:** One shortlisted author (Factual Statement 2) reports that “*the Edge Hill prize, however, focuses on new writers and this provides a highly significant service for the genre and for those individuals wishing to get established*”. An independent publisher reports the impact that winning the Prize had on the career of one of his authors, noting “he now has a couple of book deals off the back of the Prize” and that this can be attributed to his involvement with the Edge Hill Prize (Factual Statement 4).
- **Increased profile within the publishing industry and related creative fields can bring work to the attention of dramatists.** For example, an author shortlisted for the Prize in 2013 confirms that this put the work in the public eye and contributed to one of the stories in the collection being dramatized for television (Factual Statement 2).

The prize also promotes the reading of short stories, particularly through the Readers’ Prize, initiated in 2008. For the first two years, this was judged by reading groups run by the *Get Into Reading* project, which works with a range of local groups, including recovering substance abusers, young homeless men and isolated single parents. In 2010-11, the Readers’ Choice was judged by sixth-form students; and in 2012, 2013, by undergraduate students.

Both the prize and the underpinning research increase public awareness of the specificity of the short story writing, and the interconnections between reading, writing and publishing. Its role in promoting the careers of short story authors has been recognized in media coverage (Other Source 4). There were 1007 comments on Louise Doughty’s *Daily Telegraph* Short Story Club when she mentioned the unique status of the prize as an award for a whole collection (Other Source 5). Video footage from the 2011 award ceremony shows a range of authors and publishers testifying to the significance of the prize, with one author making specific connections with the underpinning research through the journal, *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice* (Other Source 6).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1) BBC Get Into Writing

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/learning/getwritingni/resources/bibliography.shtml>

2) Paul March-Russell, *The Short Story: An Introduction*, p.87 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2009)

3) “*Why the short story is still alive and well*” by AL Kennedy, *The Independent*, 12 June 2007.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/why-the-short-story-is-still-alive-and-well-452805.html>

4) Guardian Books Blog 2009 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jul/06/sf-outsider-edge-hill-award>

5) Daily Telegraph Short Story Club, April 2012

<http://my.telegraph.co.uk/theshortstoryclub/louiseatmyt/250/week-15-can-you-write-a-short-story-in-100-words-or-fewer/>

6) Authors’ and publishers’ comments from video footage, Edge Hill Prize Award Ceremony 2011 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SidHoGDfieg&feature=youtu.be>.

Factual Statements: issues addressed identified in Section 4.

1) Author and editor (independent); 2) Author; 3) Founder, Publisher & Editorial Manager, Comma Press; 4) Founder, Elastic Press; 5) Editor, Gollancz Press.