

Institution: University of Essex

Unit of Assessment: 29 - English Language and Literature

a. Context

Essex Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies combines critical with creative practice. As regular participants at literary festivals, our dramatists, novelists and poets share with their audiences what has inspired and driven their work. The short treatise *On Poetry*, for instance, which distills Maxwell's thirty years' experience as a poet, is testament to the public's interest in the process of poetic creation: it sold out its initial print-run, and is now Oberon's most successful ever e-book. Our writers actively promote their craft by inviting the public's contribution to writing ventures such as through the Victoria and Albert Museum *Memory Maps* project (section d) or *The Guardian* online Glyn Maxwell Poetry Workshop. Our translation theorists and practitioners work with professionals, and engage the public in cultural dialogue about translation. Our film scholars share their work with the public, using the medium of their research in the service of human rights NGOs, psychotherapists, and film production companies.

We see it as one of our key roles as archivists of the literary and visual arts and as creative practitioners to instruct, delight, and move our audiences. We do this with the firm belief that our interdisciplinary and transcultural research has particular contemporary relevance in the cross-culturally sensitive environment we inhabit, as evidenced in Lichtenstein's plays about racial and religious tensions, Chaudhuri's use of her research on torture for Amnesty International, or Warner's on *The Arabian Nights* to address Western perceptions of Arab culture in the media. We achieve impact by direct public engagement (public lectures, readings, workshops, post-show sessions, curating, interactive websites), and by contributing creative writing to the programmes of a variety of cultural institutions around the world, especially theatres. In doing so our research has enriched the intellectual and emotional lives of audiences and increased cultural capital and revenue in the culture and publishing industry.

Of **21 category A staff** in the Unit, **10** have worked repeatedly, and **6** on a one-off basis, with the following cultural institutions or venues: **Theatres (total of 28)**: including Shakespeare's Globe, Oxford Playhouse, Sherman Cymru Cardiff, Wild Project New York, Viaduct Theatre Chicago; **Opera Houses (total of 3)**: Royal Opera House, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Zürich Opera House; **Broadcast Media (over 40** different radio and TV programmes): including *Woman's Hour*, *Today Programme*, *In our Time*, *True Tales from the Crypt*, *Front Row*, and a 10-part series on *Grimm Thoughts* devised for BBC4; **Theatre Festivals (total of 7)**: including Latitude Festival, Almeida Festival, Edinburgh Festival, Edinburgh Fringe; **Literature Festivals (total of 20)**: including Cheltenham Literature Festival, Hay-On-Wye Festival, Edinburgh Book Festival, Vilenica International Literary Festival Slovenia, BOCAS Literature Festival Trinidad, Mumbai Book Festival India, Wellington Poetry Festival New Zealand; **Museums, Galleries, Arts Centres, and Film Companies (total of 6)**: including firstsite Colchester, Kettle's Yard Cambridge, Aldeburgh Music, National Portrait Gallery, Getty Museum, Adventure Picture Company; and **Charitable Trusts, Charities, and Educational Foundations (total of 3)**: including Amnesty International, Centre for Psychotherapy and Human Rights, Cumberland Lodge.

b. Approach to impact

The UoA has developed four approaches to achieving its impact on audiences, specialist practitioners and cultural institutions.

(1) Cultural Production: Combining our talents in creative writing with partnerships our staff have established with theatres and the BBC, we contribute a significant amount of work for performance. Our writing benefits the audiences of these institutions and the institutions themselves benefit from writer residencies, such as Lichtenstein's and Prichard's **attachments to the National Theatre**, or Maxwell's **residency with New York's Phoenix Theatre Ensemble**. Theatre companies get the opportunity to work closely with our playwrights and their repertoires are enriched by the playtexts that ensue from such collaborations. During this REF period we took the proactive step to increase the visibility of our creative writing and Caribbean programmes by appointing Derek Walcott as Visiting Professor. The **University's Lakeside Theatre** has staged

three of his plays under his direction, supported by their production team, and co-produced by our staff: the world premiere of *O Starry Starry Night*, the UK premiere of *Moon Child*, and the UK's second performance of *Pantomime*. All were accompanied by book signings and Q&A sessions with the public. The University's **Communication Office** released and collated press releases about each of these events. In addition to our work in the creative industries, we have also contributed to the revenue of the publishing industry by consulting as **literary prize judges**: Chair of the *Man Booker International Prize 2015*, *Warwick Prize for Writing*, *John Florio Prize Awards* (Warner), *The Foyle Young Poets Awards* (Maxwell), and *The Chinese Universities Shakespeare Festival* (Gillies).

(2) Cultural Consultation: This has involved disseminating our research to **specialist practitioners**. The Unit has given **public lectures** on the challenges of new media technologies to professional translators, consulted on works to be translated from Arabic, and developed contacts with theatres and the media to advise on translation and on which French plays to stage for UK audiences. Finburgh, a practicing translator herself, has led public conversations with **directors, actors and practicing translators** at various London theatres during the yearlong festival *Paris Calling* to stimulate debate about current translation practices. She has also convened post-show Q&A sessions at the Barbican, Tristan Bates Theatre, and Southwark Playhouse on French playtexts. For French audiences she delivered **monthly radio bulletins** for the *Comme au théâtre* programme (2008-10) on contemporary UK theatre affairs. She is also a **member of the selection committee** for France's leading new playwriting festival, the annual *Mousson d'été*. Staff received institutional support for their translation work in the form of research time buy-outs, and **public media training** for their radio and TV work from the University's Communications Office.

(3) Cultural Intervention: The Unit has used its research to intervene in public debates about 'Why Languages Matter' (conference with politicians at **Cumberland Lodge**), the Arab Spring (conference and exhibition on *Realism in Rawiya* at the University's **Art Exchange** Gallery), and human rights. Chaudhuri raised £2,000 for Amnesty International by organising a high profile screening event at the **Tricycle Cinema** in London (300 attendees), which included celebrities and filmmakers. She has since developed partnerships with **refugee care-workers and clinical practitioners**, and is now a Research Associate of the London-based Centre for Psychotherapy and Human Rights, which treats survivors of political violence. Bahun and Fumagalli combined their research on trauma and civil war to curate an exhibition at **firstsite Arts Centre, Colchester (a Partner of the University and of Plus Tate)** on *Karmadavis: Art, Justice, Transition* (11,124 visitors) to draw attention to arbitrary detention and genocide in Guatemala. The exhibition was accompanied by talks with the artist, film screenings, and an international symposium on how art can intervene in troubled political contexts, and was supported by the **Director of the Essex Collection of Art from Latin America** and the **Faculty Impact Officer**, who helped develop feedback questionnaires and analyse the responses.

(4) Digital Archiving: Essex has recognised expertise in digital humanities: it hosts a number of data archives and led the successful AHRC bid 'Going Digital' on behalf of seven Consortium partners. In consequence we have been able to work with our external partners with the support of a highly efficient in-house information technology team, including a dedicated **Faculty Web and Promotions Officer**, to develop digital archives of essays, poetry, historical information, visual media, and other cultural material, both for specialists and the general public. This approach to impact is seen most prominently in the *Memory Maps* collaboration with the **Victoria and Albert Museum** and the collaboration with **Sally Potter's Adventure Picture Company** to create SP-ark. This multimedia archive of production material relating to Potter's adaptation of *Orlando* is now widely regarded as a prototype for online participatory learning. It was one of the University's first Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP) in the humanities (£9,500) and was supported by the University's **KTP Manager** and the **Research and Enterprise Office**. In addition to University support, the **Department's Research Committee** has provided practical and financial support: it advises on maximising impact, monitors annual research forms which include a section on plans for knowledge exchange, and reviews applications for grants from the departmental **Research Promotion Fund** for public-facing activities.

c. Strategy and plans

Our goals are threefold: (1) to enhance our existing and develop further partnerships with the creative industries; (2) to extend the scope of collaboration with the University's Centre for Human Rights and The Essex Transitional Justice Network in order to develop externally-funded research projects; (3) to integrate our critically acclaimed BBC documentary filmmaker Nic Blower and our Oscar-winning scriptwriter and producer Sheryl Crown more fully into our research activities on documentary film.

We are working on two pathways to impact, which are at different stages of development: (1) We will continue to grow the *Memory Maps* project. We intend to spread focus from Eastern regions of England to other regions of the UK. Our aim is to foster among the public a *sense of belonging* and *ecological stewardship*, and to commission and inspire new writings on re-imagining both these responsibilities. (2) We have already set into motion two interlinked projects on 'Changing Perceptions of Human Rights Atrocities': (a) We aim to build on our existing relations with **clinical practitioners, pressure groups and art institutions** to promote art as therapy and as reparation tool for victims of atrocity. Bahun applied for a HERA consortium grant on *Ars Transienti: The Function and Role of the Arts in Countries in Transition*, which although unsuccessful after getting through to the second round, she is now reworking. The UoA also participated in the AHRC-funded skills initiative 'Humanities in Human Rights', a workshop specifically addressed to PG students and early career researchers. (b) The other pathway to impact involves **policy makers and legislators**. The conference 'Shaping the Future of Transitional Justice', which included academics and representatives from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, constituted a first step towards working with outside agencies, interested in new ways of documenting and disseminating victim/witness accounts. The project is based on the premise that art-based practices leave an affective imprint that is unavailable to both governmental policy-makers and non-governmental organisations working in the field of human rights.

d. Relationship to case studies

Our three case studies exemplify the UoA's four approaches to benefiting both cultural institutions and their audiences.

Our digital archiving work has included the *Memory Maps* project, in which Terry and Warner collaborated with the Victoria and Albert Museum to create an online collection of over 200 paintings and artefacts, with commissioned pieces by 19 contemporary writers, including essays, poems, and songs. The materials were chosen for their potential to inspire psychogeographical writing, an emerging literary genre that *Memory Maps* both studied and helped to encourage among professional and amateur writers. Within the REF period the archive has received over 103,000 views, inspiring in 2013 a *Memory Maps* page at the University of Essex website, which has received a further 1,500 views. Through this project the UoA has increased cultural capital in the region and beyond, actively promoting psychogeographical writing.

Warner has used her research on the Arabian Nights for her acclaimed book *Stranger Magic* in the public domain to draw attention to the shared cultural histories between the Western and Arabic traditions. Within this REF period she has given over 18 public talks and lectures worldwide, and appeared on a host of TV and radio programmes, reaching over 3.8 million members of the public both in the UK and internationally. Her work has also included an example of the consultation approach we take to influence the practice of cultural organisations. Her expertise in Arabic literature and its influence in the West led to her appointment to the International Advisory Board of the Library of Arabic Literature, New York, to whom she gives guidance on their selection of Arabic classics to be translated into English.

Kuti's case study includes the collaboration she has established with the Bury St Edmunds Theatre Royal, thus complementing Warner's cultural consultation work. The Theatre Royal has benefitted both from the advice and guidance Kuti has provided, informing their artistic policy, and from her own creative production, writing work for performance at the Theatre. The effect of this has been to use both her research and her own creative writing to restore neglected Georgian drama for a contemporary audience, simultaneously contributing cultural capital, informing the theatre-going public of forgotten work, and influencing the practice of a major regional cultural institution.