

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

<p><b>Institution:</b> Queen's University Belfast</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 29 - English Language and Literature</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Poetry from the Seamus Heaney Centre</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)          The Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry promotes the cultural economies of Ireland through its impact on education and tourism; it encourages the understanding and practice of creative writing both nationally and internationally; its research has been utilised by other artists, in exhibition and performance, and in acknowledged stylistic and aesthetic influence; it provides a cultural benefit to an extensive readership and to audiences worldwide, and, specifically, in the enhancement of cultural understanding both in and concerning Northern Ireland.</p> <p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>2.1. The impact derives from poetry of internationally recognised excellence disseminated not only in book form but also by public readings, broadcasting, adaptation, translation, web recordings, podcasts, vodcasts and online resources. The research has been undertaken by four leading poets, Ciaran Carson, Medbh McGuckian, Sinead Morrissey and Leontia Flynn, over the period since the founding of the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry in 2003.</p> <p>2.2. Key researchers:          Professor Ciaran Carson, Director of the Seamus Heaney Centre: 2003-present          Ms Medbh McGuckian, lecturer in Creative Writing: 2003-present.          Dr Sinead Morrissey: Writer-in-Residence (2004-7); Reader in Creative Writing: 2007-present          Dr Leontia Flynn: Seamus Heaney Centre Research Fellow: 2005 - present</p> <p>2.3. The Centre's director, <b>Ciaran Carson</b>, is the author of ground-breaking collections such as <i>Belfast Confetti</i> and <i>Breaking News</i>, books which write an urban experience into Irish poetry, and which subject the landscape of Belfast during the Troubles and subsequent peace process to a scrutiny in ways which set the terms for critical debate through the 1990s and 2000s, and continue to do so. Now widely acknowledged to be as important for Belfast as Joyce is for Dublin, Carson's work blends local rootedness and the specificity of experience in the city with a global openness and experimentalism that ally him with precursors such as Baudelaire and with the fin-de-siecle, as well as with an American modernist tradition. An accomplished translator of Baudelaire, Dante, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud (eg, <i>In the Light Of</i>, 2012), and of Irish language poetry (Carson's first language is Irish, although he writes in English), his work is in continual dialogue with other languages, other cultures – and indeed other art forms. A poet who plays and writes about traditional music, and who brings an interest in music and the visual arts to bear on the forms of his poems, Carson's <i>oeuvre</i> is resistant to the idea of the lyric poem as hermetically sealed or elitist; rather, his poems may be read as deeply implicated in musicality, story-telling, and oral history.</p> <p>2.4. <b>Medbh McGuckian</b>, like Carson, is one of what is commonly termed the 'second generation' of Northern Irish poets (following on from Heaney, Longley, and Mahon). Stylistically one of the most innovative and challenging poets of the last four decades, whose work has increasingly forced a redefinition of 'traditional' modes of interpreting the lyric, McGuckian also opens up the Northern Irish lyric to encompass female experience, as in <i>The Book of the Angel</i> (2004), in a way which has been profoundly influential on theorisations of literature and gender in Ireland, and on those women writers who have come after her.</p> <p>2.5. They include <b>Sinead Morrissey</b> and <b>Leontia Flynn</b>, both of whom depart from McGuckian's modes yet in doing so acknowledge her importance in reshaping the landscape of the 'Irish poem'. Flynn and Morrissey are two of the leading figures in what is increasingly seen as a 'new wave' of Irish poetry – a generation whose publications coincide with seismic shifts in the political landscape of Northern Ireland through the 1990s, and whose renown looks set to match that of their predecessors. Flynn's work, from her first collection, <i>These Days</i> (2004) onwards is characterised by a lively, accessible and seemingly informal tone, one which deliberately flirts with the 'unpoetic',</p>

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allied with an often disguised formal tautness: her iconoclasm and humour are a way of addressing serious issues – identity politics in Ireland; the problem of tradition; poetry and value, global recession. Morrissey's capacious and expansive imagination, ranging from Belfast to Japan to the US (in *Between Here and There*, 2002), and home, is mirrored in her long and fluid line, and in the rush of images which affirm what MacNeice called the 'incurably plural'. Her researches into other lives and histories, particularly in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, underpin powerful dramatic sequences, as in *The State of the Prisons* (2005) which prompt re-evaluation of the relation of the present to the past, thereby affecting perception of the future.

2.6. All four poets, whose poetry is formed and reformed by external forces – civil unrest, the peace process, a rapidly changing and increasingly multicultural Ireland, encounters with what is 'other' – simultaneously write back into society, shaping it, as much as shaped by it.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

#### 3.1. Key Outputs:

Ciaran Carson, *Collected Poems\** (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2008); *The Star Factory* (Granta, 1997); *In the Light of* (Gallery, 2012)

Leontia Flynn, *Profit & Loss\** (Jonathan Cape, 2011); *Drives* (Jonathan Cape, 2008); *These Days* (Jonathan Cape, 2004)

Medbh McGuckian, *My love Has Fared Inland\** (Gallery 2008), *The Currach Requires No Harbours* (Gallery, 2006), *The Book of the Angel* (Gallery, 2004)

Sinead Morrissey, *Through the Square Window\** (Carcanet, 2009); *Land of Giants* (2012); *The State of the Prisons* (2005) (Carcanet), *Between Here and There* (Carcanet, 2002).

[\* = in REF 2.]

3.2. The research from the centre has garnered major awards and recommendations and received international critical acclaim. Prizes and awards include: **Carson** (Forward Prize, T.S.Eliot prize, Cholmondeley Award, Costa Poetry award shortlist); **Flynn** (Rooney Prize, Forward prize best first collection; T.S.Eliot Prize shortlist; PBS Choice, O'Shaughnessy award); **McGuckian** (Rooney Prize, Forward prize for best single poem; Cheltenham Prize, British National Poetry Competition, Alice Hunt Bartlett prize, American Ireland Fund Literary Award; Cholmondeley Lifetime Award); **Morrissey** (National Poetry Competition, T.S.Eliot prize shortlist (twice); Irish Times/Poetry Now award; PBS Choice; Forward prize shortlist); Morrissey has been the recipient of a Lannan Literary fellowship (awarded to writers of 'distinctive literary merit') in recognition of her work, as well as an Arts Council of Northern Ireland Major Individual Artist award. Carson and McGuckian are members of Aosdána. Carson has been awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature by University College Dublin, McGuckian a D.Litt from the University of Aberdeen.

3.3. The research has enabled the formation of significant partnerships. The Fulbright Commission supports two distinguished fellowships in the Seamus Heaney Centre per year, in poetry and Irish writing. The BBC sponsors a writer-in-residence post. Foras na Gaeilge sponsored a singer-in-residence. The ACNI supports promising new writers as affiliates of the Centre. Glucksman Ireland House sponsors a poetry prize. The British Council has sponsored or part-sponsored overseas visits by creative writing staff to disseminate their research and expertise.

3.4. Key outputs are themselves the subject of important research internationally The AHRC funded project based in the Centre on modern poetry, as part of the phase 2 funding awarded to Aberdeen's Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies (graded 'outstanding' in 2011), included significant new critical work on Carson and McGuckian. Their poetry has been the subject of full-length academic monographs and essay collections (see most recently Neal Alexander, *Ciaran Carson, Space, Place, Writing*, Liverpool UP, 2010; and Alcobia-Muphy & Kirkland, eds, *The Poetry of Medbh McGuckian: The Interior of Words*, Cork UP, 2010). Flynn and Morrissey's work has been the subject of numerous high-quality book chapters and journal articles worldwide, and they now receive critical attention in key publications, Morrissey for example in *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*, and both writers in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry* (2012).

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**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

4.1. The research of the Seamus Heaney Centre benefits the cultural economy of Northern Ireland through its impact on tourism strategy and by enhancing the worldwide recognition of Northern Ireland's literature as an exceptional cultural achievement. Literary tourism contributes up to £2.6 billion a year to the British economy, and Northern Ireland's Literary Tourism Plan recognises 'Belfast's literary heritage as 'an important dimension in marketing Belfast as an international destination'. On the basis that the 'global literary renown' to which outputs in the period have significantly contributed is an 'imaginative export', Morrissey, Flynn and Carson's research is extensively utilised in a range of literary tourism products – in a Literary Belfast iPhone App (to which they contribute video guides), as well as an associated website and exhibitions, developed in collaboration with Belfast City Council Tourist Development Office, Filmtrip, the BBC, Queen's University and Culture NI. The App is one of several initiatives funded by Belfast City Council, part-financed by the European Regional Development Fund and administered by the NI Tourist Board. As part of this development, Flynn and Morrissey are featured on downloadable audio files, 'Celebrate Literary Belfast' at <http://www.literarybelfast.org/>

4.2. The Centre runs a regular programme of readings and talks open to the public, organised and introduced by the key researchers, thereby delivering cultural policy outcomes in matching the government's aim to improve quality of life through experiencing, participating in and accessing the excellence of Northern Ireland's cultural assets. It provides an online archive of readings by key researchers and by visiting writers available to the public. The SHC website at <http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SeamusHeaneyCentreforPoetry/> receives c.2000 external hits per month. It holds a week-long poetry summer school each year, with both local and international participation, for new writers. The summer school is consistently over-subscribed, testament to the reputations and impact of its staff, the four key researchers; and the attendees affirm the influence of the outputs by the poets in developing their own aesthetic, as well as to the benefit of creative writing tuition. Researchers run the long-standing Belfast Writers' Group, first established in the early 1960s under the auspices of Philip Hobsbaum and continued by Seamus Heaney, many of whose participants have gone on to become successful authors in their own right. An anthology of work by the writer's group, *Incertus* was published in 2008, with a public reading recorded live for the BBC. A documentary for BBC Radio 4, 'The New Group', examining the resurgence of writing from Belfast, and particularly from Queen's, in the last decade, was broadcast on 28 July 2012, affirming the continuing impact of a poetic 'renaissance' in Northern Ireland, to which the key researchers are central, on current literary practice and production.

4.3. The key researchers promote the understanding and practice of creative writing outside the academy; they provide a cultural benefit to the wider public, and the dissemination of the work through non-print media contributes to a wider understanding of Northern Irish history, culture and society. Public readings of their work are given to audiences of 500-1000 (for example the T.S. Eliot poetry prize readings (audience 1000+); Edinburgh Festival readings (500), the Literary Belfast reading (750) etc); poetry outputs have been broadcast on radio (including *Women's Hour*, *The Verb*, *The Today Programme*, *The Arts Show* and *Arts Extra*). The publication and wide dissemination of significant outputs in creative writing by the Centre's authors has also led to involvement in promoting new writing through competitions, in judging the UK National Poetry Competition, and in the Centre's awarding of its own poetry prize annually to the best first poetry collection published in the UK/Ireland. The prize is sponsored by Glucksman Ireland House at NYU, which offers the winner a platform for initiating or augmenting a transatlantic audience. The research has led to significant internship and work experience opportunities. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland funds affiliates who are mentored by the Centre's staff, and give public readings. The critical and cultural interest in, and involvement with, the underpinning research on the part of the editor of *Irish Pages* has led to the establishment of internships on *Irish Pages* for creative writing students, who obtain valuable publishing and editing experience. The Centre also publishes a journal of poetry, criticism and reviews, *The Yellow Nib*, edited first by Carson and currently by Flynn, which provides a platform for new as well as established writers, and whose editors' profiles and experience have facilitated acquiring Arts Council funding. The journal also offers an internship and assistant editorial position to a graduate student biennially.

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4.4. The research has also proved inspirational for other artists – through translation, through generating new projects in different media/genres (for example, visual art inspired by the work of all four key researchers was a project undertaken by the Belfast Print Workshop gallery owner and artists) and through acknowledged influence on form, style, and content in other anglophone poetries. Research outputs have been translated into and published in Chinese, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Norwegian, Japanese, Portuguese and Russian, thereby impacting on cultural production internationally. Morrissey is one of 15 poets whose work was displayed alongside paintings in the National Gallery as a showcasing of the arts in London 2012 timed to coincide with the Olympics. Poetry and prose by Morrissey was used in the *Land of Giants* spectacular, part of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad, the largest outdoor event ever seen in Northern Ireland, involving a cast and crew of over 500 people, performed to an audience of c.18,000 on Belfast's *Titanic* slipway, and now online at [www.landofgiants.info/](http://www.landofgiants.info/). Ciaran Carson's *The Star Factory* was realised as a musical performance involving sound technicians, traditional musicians and the poet, entitled *Owenvarragh, a Belfast Circus on 'The Star Factory'*, in March 2012, using John Cage's score "...Circus On..." to mark the composer's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday (audience 150; repeat performances include the Belfast Festival; York Festival of Ideas, and now on YouTube). His Rimbaud translations, *In the Light Of*, inspired, and featured in, a visuals, graphics and sound exhibition by a team of designers and artists for the opening of a new Illuminations Gallery at NUI Maynooth in September 2012.

4.5. Poems published by researchers in the period have been used as an educational resource by the British Council (in sub-saharan African countries). Outputs by Carson are set texts for study in schools & colleges nationally and internationally, and the subject of online study guide resources & discussion, as in, for example, the BBC's 'GCSE "Bitesize"' website. Key researchers (Carson and Morrissey) are featured in the 'Poets' Chair' of *Poetry Ireland*, an invaluable, and free educational resource for secondary level students studying for the Leaving Certificate examinations in the Republic of Ireland. The research of the Centre is also an educational resource for the BBCNI 'Get Writing' programme. Since writing from the Centre offers a unique test case of the relationship between literature and politics in a society preoccupied by questions of identity that the literature probes and complicates, its reach beyond the educational sector into a broader contribution to Northern Ireland's social and economic wellbeing is also evident. Participation by the Centre's writers in EU funded 'Peace III' programmes evidences the significance of their work to peace and reconciliation initiatives; Flynn has recorded for Radio 3 on the subject of Belfast, the peace process, and poetry; and in Morrissey's appointment as Belfast's laureate the Lord Mayor affirmed the need for the arts to 'speak for the future of Belfast'.

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

(1) **Literary Tourism:** iPhone App at

<http://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/literarybelfast/id438409199?mt=8> 'Writers' and 'Audio and Visual' sections of 'Literary Belfast' at <http://www.literarybelfast.org/>

(2) **Cultural & artistic production:** SHC Poetry Summer School feedback questionnaires. Belfast Print Workshop at <http://bpw.org.uk/previous-exhibitions/>; Illuminations gallery:

<http://illuminationsgallery.wordpress.com/in-the-light-of/>

(3) **Education:** Web stats for SHC website available at <https://webstats.qub.ac.uk> (search Seamus Heaney Centre).

British Council teaching resources [www.teachingenglish.org.uk](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk) (search 'Sinead Morrissey').

BBCNI 'Get Writing' programme at [www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/learning/getwritingni](http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/learning/getwritingni).

'GCSE "Bitesize"' website at [www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/)

Poetry Ireland at [www.poetryireland.ie](http://www.poetryireland.ie) - follow 'Education' and 'Poets' Chair'

(4) **Northern Ireland social/cultural benefit:** <http://www.community-relations.org.uk/eu-news/peace-iii/> BBC news reports July 2013 (online at [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk)).

#### Individuals:

(5) Editor of *Irish Pages*

(6) Head of Corporate Affairs, BBCNI