

Institution: Queen's University Belfast
Unit of Assessment: 29 - English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Apprehending Modern Poetry
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The work of poetry critic, Professor Fran Brearton, has impacted upon the media (particularly BBC) representation of, and understanding of, modern poetry, in Ireland and Britain. Through shaping radio broadcasts, the research also impacts on educational resources at all levels (School and HEIs) as well as providing a general cultural benefit, to poetry readers specifically, and to a general audience, thereby bringing current trends in research out to a wider public. The research has also led to broadsheet newspaper writing on contemporary poetry which is then utilised by publishers and literary event organisers (as a PR/marketing resource and external authoritative critical validation of their product) to promote and enhance the work of living writers. It has enabled and facilitated literary events that have themselves had impact beyond the academic sphere, through collaborative initiatives with external organisations as well as with individual artists.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>2.1. The impact derives from critical work on modern poetry published by Fran Brearton over the last 12 years. At a time when cross-border, or cross-community remembrance, in Ireland and Northern Ireland respectively, was still a highly controversial issue, or indeed non-existent, her research demonstrated the importance of the First World War to Irish literature. She established a new frame of reference for reading WWI literature in Ireland, recognising that the experiential soldier-poet paradigm that dominates English literary criticism is not applicable, and proposing instead a different model for understanding Ireland's literary relation to the Great War, one that affirms subsequent generations of poets through the century as, in a different way, poets of the First World War too. Her groundbreaking study <i>The Great War in Irish Poetry</i> (OUP 2000, 2nd edition 2003), includes chapters on W.B. Yeats, Robert Graves, Louis MacNeice, Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley and Derek Mahon, and on the politics of remembrance in Ireland. The chapter on Graves constitutes the first sustained critical consideration of Graves and his war experience in an Irish as well as British context; that on MacNeice, following on from Edna Longley's pioneering work in the 1980s in affirming the relevance of MacNeice's Irishness to his critical reception, analyses his response to world war, its effect on his reception, and redefines his relation to British poetry of the 1930s in the process. Its analysis of the Great War's continuing impact on contemporary poetry in Northern Ireland uncovers previously unnoticed or sidelined preoccupations at work in Heaney and others, and demonstrates the relevance (running counter to a political narrative) of the First World War to the aesthetic development of poets from both sides of a community 'divide'.</p> <p>2.2. Brearton's research has, more broadly, affirmed Graves's importance to the history of 20th century Anglophone poetry (see the 2004 British Academy Chatterton lecture on English Poetry, 'Robert Graves and <i>The White Goddess</i>', published in <i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>, Vol. 131, pp. 273-301 (December 2005)), and elucidated the reasons for his comparative critical neglect, despite his reputation and popularity. She has also provided the only sustained critical account in print of the nature and importance of the friendship between Graves and Sassoon during the Great War as well as giving the fullest literary-critical explanation to date for its demise (<i>The Oxford Companion to Modern British and Irish War Poetry</i> (OUP, 2007)).</p> <p>2.3. Several years of research, including archival research, on the poetry of Michael Longley have uncovered the relation of his work to political developments in Ireland from the 1960s to the present day, notably the relation between poetry and politics during the 'Troubles', and on the significance of the peace process to his aesthetic - and vice versa. The research established Brearton as the foremost authority on Longley's work. It also established a critical understanding of</p>

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Longley's influence on a subsequent generation, explored in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry* (2012).

2.4. Key researcher:

Professor Fran Brearton

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)3.1. Key Outputs:

- (1). Brearton, Fran, *The Great War in Irish Poetry* (Oxford: OUP 2000). ISBN: 0-19-818672-X (2nd edition pbk 2003, ISBN 0-19-926138-5).
- (2). ---. 'Robert Graves and *The White Goddess*', Chatterton Lecture on Poetry 2004. *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. 131, 2004 Lectures, pp. 273-301 (December 2005). ISBN: 13: 978-0-19-726351-8.
- (3). ---. *Reading Michael Longley* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books, 2006), ISBN: 1-85224-682-0; pbk 1-85224-683-9.
- (4). ---. 'A War of Friendship: Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon', *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*, ed. Tim Kendall (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp.208-226. ISBN: 978-0-19-928266-1
- (5). Brearton, Fran, and Alan Gillis, eds., *the Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry* (OUP, 2012)
- (6) Brearton, Fran, and Edna Longley (eds.), *Incorrigibly Plural: Louis MacNeice and his Legacy*, (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2012) ISBN: 978-1-84777-113-1.

3.2. Items 1-4 were included in RAE 2001 & 2008; items 5 & 6 are in REF 2. *The Great War in Irish Poetry*, was described in *Notes & Queries* as 'welcome, timely, and necessary' in its 'provocative arguments about the relationship between Irish memory and the First World War, and its penetrating readings of individual authors'. In a TLS review, the book was praised as 'Detailed and authoritative... [offering] convincing and subtly argued proof of its key propositions about the War's imaginative potency ... Brearton's eloquent, agile, and intellectually daring book transforms 'the debate' about Irish poetry in a decisive way.' *Reading Michael Longley* is recommended reading for students of modern Irish poetry, and has been drawn upon & cited in all subsequent published work on the poet. It is also cited as a teaching resource (eg www.resources.teachnet.ie) for Republic of Ireland Leaving Certificate students.

3.3. Completion of *Reading Michael Longley* was facilitated by the AHRC-funded research leave scheme.

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

4.1. Brearton's media work generates new ways of understanding poetry. She has made three appearances on Radio 4's *In Our Time*, discussing Siegfried Sassoon (7/6/2007), W.B. Yeats and Irish Politics (17/4/2008), and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Modernity (26/02/2009) respectively. The invitations to academics to participate in this programme are made on the basis of profile and expertise in the field, as well as the ability to distil their research findings effectively for a wide audience. The programme is premised on use of current developments in research, and the shape of each 45-minute broadcast, chaired by Melvyn Bragg, is largely determined and driven by the research interests and research findings of its three participants, through a series of research phone calls in the weeks preceding the live broadcast. The contribution for all three programmes drew directly on research in *The Great War in Irish Poetry* and, in the case of Sassoon, also on research for *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry* and for the British Academy Chatterton lecture. The audience figures, confirmed by its producer Tom Morris, for the live 9am broadcast and 9.30pm repeat of the programmes are 2.25 million and have been at this level for at least 5 years. All three programmes are available in perpetuity as podcasts from the BBC's *In Our Time* website or from iTunes; they are downloaded at the rate of several

thousand each month and their impact is ongoing; 50% of the *In Our Time* online audience is from outside the UK.

The broadcasts serve as an educational resource, downloaded by students and teachers; they inform, and often form perceptions of the writers and ideas under discussion; they affirm the broader relevance and appeal of humanities research beyond the academy and in an international context, as evidenced in the sustained audience and download figures themselves, in the online comments and discussion following each programme, and in emails and letters received by the researcher from members of the general public. An email received in October 2010 from a TV producer and campaigner for traffic system reform states: 'I just listened again to the above edition and wanted to check it is you who appeared in it, as I want to recommend some of your quotes for a student's essay'; another from a musician in 2008 that 'You have inspired me to re-read some Sassoon poetry and *The Wasteland*'. Or an email sent by a marketing managing director in 2009 advises: 'I feel infinitely less inadequate now as regards my own pronounced inability to perceive a wholly cogent and accessible narrative in *The Waste Land*. I also hadn't realised that Ezra Pound had revised/edited/savaged quite so copiously.' Brearton's contribution to discussion of Eliot's *The Waste Land* was featured again in Radio 4's 'Pick of the Week', triggering a consideration in that programme of the limerick. The broadcasts provide a recognised cultural benefit to a large audience outside academia and shape cultural understanding of the subjects under discussion.

4.2. Her research has also shaped, and been utilised in, documentaries and broadcasts about contemporary Irish poetry. The study *Reading Michael Longley* led to her acting in an advisory capacity to the BBC, 'to make sure', as the programme producer states, that in the making of a documentary about Michael Longley, presented by Fergal Keane (*Keane on Longley*, BBCNI, 2008), the personal portrait Keane presented was also allied to key critical themes and issues in relation to Longley's work. She gave an advisory interview to Nicholas Wroe for his 2004 *Guardian* profile of Longley, which, available online, continues to affect knowledge about, and understanding of, Longley's career and writing. In 2009, she was the main contributor to an hour long (pre-recorded) RTE Radio documentary on Michael Longley (*The Arts Show*), also determining the poems and themes discussed therein.

4.3. To commemorate Armistice Day in 2008, she participated in a broadcast on English and Irish war poetry (RTE Radio 1, *Today with Pat Kenny*), and that such a broadcast occurred in Ireland is also testament to the impact of her research in uncovering the Great War's importance to modern Irish poetry. In November 2009, Brearton was one of three writers/critics (with Jon Stallworthy and Owen Sheers) in a commemorative event at the imperial War Museum, London: 'Poetry of the Second World War', where poems discussed were read by actors Imogen Stubbs and Art Malik. Brearton's research into Irish war poetry enabled to the reading & recording at the event of the poetry of a hitherto unknown Irish woman poet of World War II, Eileen Shanahan, whose poetry had never before been publicly read, and whose family were present to hear her work discussed for the first time. The event was recorded and archived by the IWM.

4.4. As a recognised authority on modern poetry, Brearton is regularly invited to review new poetry (by Irish poets and by women poets) for the *Guardian*, drawing on that research to reach a wide public. Those reviews in turn are cited by poetry publishers in the UK and the US to promote the work of their writers, and thereby impact upon poetry book sales and public profiles (the reviews are used in blurbs, on publisher websites, on the Poetry Book Society site, and for online entries on poets - Wikipedia, the Poetry Foundation, Poetry Daily). They are also utilised in educational online resources (as in for instance the entry for Flynn on www.poetrybooks.org.uk), and in PR materials for events promotion and for the marketing of poetry - in, for instance, advertising readings by Durcan at the Kilkenny Arts Festival or Linenhall Arts Centre, by Fainlight (Kinsale Arts Festival) or in the US to promote readings by Tess Gallagher.

4.5. Brearton's work on MacNeice follows on from, and evaluates, Edna Longley's pioneering 'reclaiming' of MacNeice in an Irish context. Longley and Brearton organised the 2007 Louis MacNeice Centenary Conference and Celebration, an event which brought MacNeice's status as an Irish poet into the orbit of Belfast City Council & the Irish-British Secretariat who supported and

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collaborated with the event. These centenary celebrations prompted a BBC travelling exhibition from 2007-8 on MacNeice's life and work, resulting in the publication (ed. Sansom) *Castles in the Air*, and an exhibition by Carrickfergus Museum timed to coincide with the conference. Running alongside the academic events were three poetry readings, opened to the public, funded by the ACNI and run by Brearton & Longley in 2007 and 2008, which attracted capacity audiences of 250. The poets reading were those with particular aesthetic/cultural affinities to MacNeice and invited on that basis. They included Don Paterson, Paul Muldoon, Derek Mahon, Simon Armitage, Nick Laird, Medbh McGuckian, Michael Longley. Contributions to the conference by poets Muldoon, Mahon, Laird, McCarthy, and Flynn, were subsequently collected in *Incorrigibly Plural* (2012); and the promotion of centenary events also secured investment for the establishment of an annual Louis MacNeice Memorial lecture, funded by the BBC, given to large public audiences from 2008 onwards.

4.6. Brearton's research on Robert Graves in the context of 20th century Irish poetry, the only research focussed in that area, underpinned her organisation of the Robert Graves Society symposium on Graves and Ireland in 2011, in association with the Seamus Heaney Centre. The event also included the making of an hour-long archived recording of the eighty-year-old poet John Montague's reminiscences and reflections on Graves's visit to Ireland in 1975, available online, thereby providing a long-term cultural benefit and a unique resource for readers and enthusiasts of both Montague's and Graves's work. In 2006 Brearton was elected vice-President of the Robert Graves Society, and in 2010 President, an election consequent upon her research-standing in the field of Graves studies, and with an remit to promote the work of Graves both within the academy and to a general public through public events and biennial conferences that open up the impact potential of Gravesian scholarship. The short-term consequence has been, for the first time, the involvement of Irish studies PhD scholars in Gravesian events, and their career enhancement (one of those PhD students has now been asked by Graves's executors to adapt his only stage play for radio).

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

- (1) Email from the producer of *In Our Time* & selected emails retained from *In Our Time* listeners.
- (2) In Our Time podcasts archive (culture) at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/iotc>
- (3) Email request from BBC Producer for *Keane on Longley*, 2007
- (4) Selected *Guardian* reviews: O'Driscoll (29 June 2012); Durcan (30 Mar 2012), Flynn (2 Sept. 2011), Fainlight (26 Feb 2011), McDonald (2 April 2011), Gallagher (16 June 2007)
- (5) PR for literary events/publications:
http://www.poetrybooks.co.uk/poetry_portal/poetry_review_round_up_summer_2012
<http://www.carcanet.co.uk/cgi-bin/scribe?showdoc=957;doctype=review>
<http://www.castlebar.ie/linenhall/Paul-Durcan-at-the-Linenhall.shtml>
<http://kinsaleartsfestival.com/events-2012/ruth-fainlight/>
<http://www.peninsuladailynews.com/> (Tess Gallagher)
- (6) <http://www.robertgraves.org/society/>
- (7) MacNeice Centenary Conference & Celebration and John Montague recordings:
<http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SeamusHeaneyCentreforPoetry/LMN/> and
<http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SeamusHeaneyCentreforPoetry/RobertGravesandIrelandSymposium/>

Individuals

- (8) Head of Corporate and Community Affairs, BBCNI
- (9) War Poets' Association & Robert Graves Society committee member.