

## MEDIA RELEASE

**Taoiseach Enda Kenny, accompanied by Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Jimmy Deenihan, officiates at donation of the literary papers of Irish Nobel laureate Dr Seamus Heaney to the National Library of Ireland**

**21 December, 2011:** The Taoiseach, Mr Enda Kenny TD, **accompanied by Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Mr Jimmy Deenihan TD**, attended a reception this morning to mark the hand-over of the literary papers of Irish Nobel laureate Dr Seamus Heaney to the National Library of Ireland. Speaking in the National Library's reading room, the Taoiseach singled out the Archive's **"mixture of the familiar and the unknown"**, describing it as **"an invaluable resource which offers an extraordinary insight into how poetry is imagined and elaborated before it appears in print"**.

Minister Deenihan called the donation **"a thread of continuity between writers and the National Library, where Dr Heaney himself, like many great Irish writers before him, has researched, worked and written."**

The reception, which took place in the National Library of Ireland Reading Room, was attended by Dr Heaney, his wife Marie and members of their family.

At the heart of the Archive are the manuscripts of Seamus Heaney's poetry – a comprehensive and vast collection of loose-leaf, typescript and manuscript worksheets and bound notebooks that span Heaney's literary career from the publication of his first major collection *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), onto volumes such as *Wintering Out* (1972) and *North* (1975), right through to *Station Island* (1984), *Seeing Things* (1991) and his most recent publications *District and Circle* (2006) and *Human Chain* (2010).

The Archive also illuminates Dr Heaney's extensive career as a teacher, academic, broadcaster, literary critic and man of letters. Included are typescript and manuscript drafts of his prose works including *The Government of the Tongue* (1988) and the early drafts of lectures, delivered as Oxford Professor of Poetry, which were subsequently collected and published in *The Redress of Poetry* (1995).

Similarly represented in the Archive is Dr Heaney's work as a translator – notably his collaborations with Stanislaw Baranczak on an English language translation of the poems of Polish poet Jan Kochanowski, published in 1995, and his translations from the poetry of Brian Merriman published in 2000. His re-workings of the work of Sophocles also feature in drafts of his first play *The Cure at Troy* which was produced by the Field Day Theatre Company in 1990, of which

Heaney has served as a Director, and his second dramatic work *The Burial at Thebes* which was commissioned by the Abbey Theatre for its centenary year.

This fascinating literary archive, the working papers of one of Ireland's greatest living writer, is an extraordinary addition to the National Library's treasures. It complements collections which include the literary papers of several internationally acclaimed contemporary Irish writers, including Marina Carr, Roddy Doyle, Paul Durcan, Brian Friel, Hugo Hamilton, John Montague, Edna O'Brien and Colm Tóibín. It also holds the papers of Maria Edgeworth, George Moore, Kate O'Brien, Patrick Kavanagh, Brendan Behan, Benedict Kiely, Christy Brown, James Plunkett and James Joyce. Welcoming the donation, the Director of the National Library of Ireland, Fiona Ross said that Dr Heaney's extraordinary gift as a poet enriches us all and is a source of great honour and pride to Ireland.

"The archive is an extraordinary record of a lifetime's work by one of the leading Irish writers of his generation, the best-known poet in the English-speaking world. It is unique in its comprehensiveness, its range and multiplicity. Given the move to electronic records, it may be one of the last paper archives of a major writer to become available. It is likely to attract many researchers, cultural tourists and other visitors to Dublin for many years to come. The Library is proud to become a centre for Heaney scholarship and we look forward to making this collection available to scholars and researchers from all over the world", Ms Ross concluded.

### Ends

**For further information please call Katherine McSharry, Head of Services, National Library of Ireland on 087 994 8144.**

### NOTE TO EDITORS

#### **Biographical Note: Dr Seamus Heaney**

Seamus Heaney was born in 1939 in Co Derry, educated in Northern Ireland, and has lived since 1972 in the Republic of Ireland. He is the author of 11 major collections of poetry including *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and *District and Circle* (2006); two plays (adapted from Greek tragedies), and several collections of prose writings. He has held academic posts at Queen's University Belfast; the University of California, Berkeley; Harvard University (where he was Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory), and Oxford University (where he was elected Professor of Poetry). He has been the recipient of many international prizes, including the Whitbread Book of the Year (1996, 1999); the TS Eliot Prize for Poetry (2006); the David Cohen Prize for Literature (2009), and the Nobel Prize for Literature (1995). He is a Saoi of Aosdána, a member of the Royal Irish Academy, and has been awarded honorary degrees by many universities around the world.

**[Additional information on the literary archive donated to the National Library of Ireland](#)**

Among the enormous collection of manuscripts of poetry are extensive files of drafts and worksheets relating to Seamus Heaney's books *Wintering Out* (1972); *North* (1975), *Seeing Things* (1991) and *Electric Light* (2001). From these files it is possible to trace the imaginative development of individual poems from first manuscript versions through multiple typescript drafts to correct proofs and final text. A remarkable feature of the archive is the number of unpublished poems in manuscript: early poems from his students days; an entire volume offered to another publisher before *Death of a Naturalist* was accepted by Faber; discarded drafts of poems, some of which were later re-worked in other forms; poems which were not considered successful enough to be included in book collections. All of this material will be of great value to scholars in exploring the honing of Seamus Heaney's poetic skills, the range of his experimentation, and the exacting standards he sets himself for his work.

As well as individual files of loose leaf material associated with individual books of poems, the archive contains a very large series of bound notebooks, some from the very beginning of his writing career. The notebooks contain manuscripts of poems juxtaposed with personal notes, drafts of lectures and other materials. They provide a fascinating insight into his working methods and the way in which certain themes, preoccupations and ideas came together at a particular point in time.

Materials related to his other creative work include his first play *The Cure of Troy* (1990); *The Burial at Thebes*, which was commissioned by the Abbey Theatre in 2004, and an adaptation of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (produced by the Field Day Theatre Company, of which Seamus Heaney was a Director). This will complement the National Library of Ireland's already extensive Field Day archive which documents one of the most significant theatrical and cultural enterprises of the 1980s. Field Day sought to provide new images of Irish identity, north and south, at a time of serious political conflict on the island of Ireland.

Also included are scripts of RTE and BBC radio and television programmes in which Seamus Heaney was involved, as well as drafts of the lectures he delivered at Oxford, Harvard and other major universities.

**ENDS**