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| Institution: Manchester Metropolitan University |
| Unit of Assessment: D29 English Language and Literature |
| Title of case study: Poetry Beyond The Page: Widening Access To Contemporary Poetry |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>From within the Manchester Writing School poets Sprackland, Roberts, O’Riordan and CA Duffy are widening access to contemporary poetry by building on the achievements (flagged as exceptional in RAEs 2001 and 2008) of a specialist poetry cluster at MMU that formerly included Michael Schmidt (1998-2005), Simon Armitage (1999-2010), Jeffrey Wainwright (1973-2008) and Sophie Hannah (1998-2005). This poetry research group has generated significant impact on: 1) <i>new writers</i> – via Manchester Poetry Prize, Ted Hughes Award, mentoring and readings 2) <i>the teaching of poetry in schools</i> – via initiatives like the Manchester Children’s Book Festival, Poetry Archive, Poetry By Heart, contribution to GCSE syllabus 3) <i>new readers and audiences</i>, through broadcasting, collaboration and public events.</p> |
| <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The poetry research group at MMU has deep roots, growing out of the work of a pioneering group of former colleagues (Schmidt, Wainwright, Armitage, Hannah) Between them, these colleagues laid the foundations for research and impact generation, rooted in the lyric ‘mainstream’ of English poetry. This work was founded on highly influential books published during their time at MMU, including <i>Killing Time</i> (1999), the one-thousand-line poem written by Armitage in his role as the Millennium Poet and screened on BBC television; Wainwright’s collection <i>Out of the Air</i> (1999) and his critical work <i>Poetry: The Basics</i> (2004); and Schmidt’s <i>The Lives of the Poets</i> (1998) and <i>The Harvill Book of 20th Century Poetry in English</i> (2000), as well as his work as an influential poetry editor (PN Review) and publisher (Carcanet). The common factor in all these works and outputs is a desire to describe, define and (as poets) contribute to a central ‘mainstream’ tradition in English poetry with twin roots in the early 20C modernists (notably Eliot, Pound, Moore, Jones) and the lyric tradition exemplified by Hardy, Edward Thomas, Yeats and others. This is a poetry and poetics which draws on those lyric roots for its musicality, its interest in (and renegotiation with) traditional forms of rhyme and metre and its desire to be at the same time a private art, (concerned with the intimacy of the lyric ‘I’) and a public one (through elegies, love poems, etc.) art. From its other roots, in the early 20C modernists, this ‘mainstream’ tradition takes an interest in the vernacular, in poems employing multiple ‘voices’, in free verse as a form in itself and an interest in the longer structures of poetic sequences. The MMU poets’ work in this lyric mainstream is recognised by their public prominence and their publication on major trade poetry lists, (Roberts and Sprackland with Cape [2, 3, 4, 5], Duffy with Picador [1], O’Riordan with Chatto [6]) all committed to publishing and promoting poetry to as wide an audience as possible. The potential for lyric poetry still to function as a public form is regularly tested and explored by the MMU poets as they respond to commissions from broadcasters and newspapers to respond to public occasions with elegies (e.g. Roberts’ ‘Last Words’ [3] for Radio 4 to mark the anniversary of 9/11) epithalamia (e.g. Sprackland, Roberts, Duffy [1] in the Guardian to mark the Royal Wedding) and public liturgies for performance and broadcast (e.g. Roberts’ BBC Radio commissioned liturgies for Ascension Day, Hiroshima Day and Good Friday. In response to these commissions, the MMU poets have sought to adapt their poetic technique to suit the demands of broadcast and public events (including the need to communicate clearly at a single hearing) without losing the richness and musicality of the poem on the page. They seek to achieve accessibility without diminishing the quality of the poetic line, and their continued commissions suggest that they regularly succeed in achieving this balance.</p> |
| <p>3. References to the research</p> <p>Carol Ann Duffy [1] <i>The Bees</i> (96 pages, published by Picador 2011, ISBN 978-0330442442) winner of 2011 Costa Poetry Award and PEN Pinter Prize, shortlisted for TS Eliot Prize. A review in the Financial Times</p> |

Impact case study (REF3b)

said: *“By turns mythic and elegiac, there’s a lyrical intimacy to many of these poems, which embrace both a love of nature and a personal family devotion. Playful and witty, Duffy’s accessible style is more often passionate than cerebral... Beneath the pastoral is a sharper edge that scythes through complacency”.*

Michael Symmons Roberts

[2] *Corpus* (80 pages, published by Cape 2004, ISBN 978-0224-073424) winner of Whitbread Poetry Award, shortlisted for TS Eliot Prize, Griffin International Prize, Forward Poetry Prize. “He reflects on the world in a way that is informed by a sense of grace, of transcendence, but the pieces are grounded in detail, beautifully expressed, subtly luminous.” (The Guardian)

[3] *The Half Healed* (80 pages, published by Cape 2008, ISBN 978-0224-085670) winner of an Arts Council Writer’s Award, contains ‘Last Words’, commissioned by Radio 4 to mark the anniversary of 9/11.

Jean Sprackland

[4] *Hard Water* (64 pages, published by Cape 2003, ISBN 978-0224069595) Sprackland’s first poetry collection with Cape containing many of her poems used in schools.

[5] *Tilt* (64 pages, published by Cape 2007, ISBN 978-0224080866) winner of the Costa Poetry Award. *“An assured and convincing book of poems from a poet of incisive wit and subtle intelligence... the thematic scope of the collection often dazzles in its range and ambition.”* (Tower Poetry)

Adam O’Riordan

[6] *In the Flesh* (64 pages, published by Chatto & Windus 2010, ISBN 978-0701185053) winner of Arts Council Writers Award and Somerset Maugham Award. *“In the Flesh is an auspicious debut, full of unforgettable lines and hard-won insights. Adam O’Riordan is the real thing.”* (Hugo Williams)

4. Details of the impact

The MMU poets have always sought to widen access to their poetry beyond the pages of their published works. The expressive power and aesthetic allure of their poetry in print has attracted the attention of broadcasters, literary editors, composers/choral directors, opera commissioners and educators/examiners who have then, on the basis of the strength of the poetry, offered them opportunities to adapt their poetic outputs to reach and influence ever wider and new audiences. This move to poetry ‘beyond the page’ is enabled further by the poets’ broadcasting expertise and skilful promotion of their work through public readings, introducing to many an art form often regarded as ‘too difficult’ to engage with. Awards and critical acclaim for their work on and off the page have generated opportunities for the poets to pursue their public engagement agenda by widening access to poetry at festivals and events both at home and abroad, serving on judging panels for awards, and broadcasting extensively about contemporary poetry. The impact-generating public engagement activities of the poetry cluster at MMU fall into three broad areas:

1) Impact on new writers:

Through the power and accessibility of their poetry on and beyond the page, the MMU poets have become trusted mentors and teachers. Between them, they have personally mentored more than 300 new writers since RAE 2008 through teaching Arvon creative writing courses, Poetry School courses Arts Council and Complete Works mentoring schemes. [This is a conservative estimate, in that Sprackland’s count alone is 8 Arvon courses x 16 participants = 128, plus 4 Poetry School courses, again with an average of 16 = 64, plus longer-term Arts Council/NAWE mentoring schemes for 3 new writers. So Sprackland alone has ‘mentored’ at least 195 writers since 2008.] Many of these writers have gone on to become published poets themselves, including Andrew Philip (Salt), Carole Coates (Smith Doorstop) and Alan Buckley (Tall Lighthouse) and Karen McCarthy (OUP/Carcanet – forthcoming). Sprackland has contributed to the sustainability of this impact by pioneering (with Greta Stoddart, through the Poetry School and Arvon Foundation) a course teaching experienced writers how to teach new writers. This course took place in 2009, with

Impact case study (REF3b)

10 participants. Roberts serves as a trustee of the Arvon Foundation [1], the largest and best-established creative writing teaching organisation in the UK. Through establishing new poetry prizes [The Ted Hughes Award (C Duffy), Rosamond Prize [2] (Roberts) and the Manchester Poetry Prize (all)] and judging existing prizes like the Arvon International Poetry Competition (Roberts and Sprackland) and Poetry London Prize (Roberts) the MMU poets have helped to discover and publicise the work of new poetic voices such as Kate Tempest (Ted Hughes Award 2013 [3]) Jack Underwood (Manchester Poetry Prize shortlist 2010) and Anthony Rowland (Manchester Poetry Prize winner 2012). C Duffy's readings series at Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre [4] provide a platform for new poets to give their first public performances alongside established figures. Internationally, the MMU poets have travelled widely (often via the British Council) giving public readings and workshops in (for e.g.) Germany, Greece, USA, Switzerland, Austria, Italy.

2) Impact on poetry in schools:

The accessibility of the MMU poets' work on the page, and their ability to communicate with young poetry readers on regular school visits, has enabled them to impact on how poetry is taught in schools. The Manchester Children's Book Festival [5], created and hosted by MMU's Writing School, has provided a vehicle for the MMU poets to generate impact from the dissemination, discussion and presentation of their work. This impact includes the direct encouragement and nurturing of writing *by* as well as *for* children, including *Mother Tongue Other Tongue* [6], which is a multilingual poetry competition, run as a pilot in 2012 in partnership with the COLT (Routes into Languages NW) project [<https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/northwest>]. The competition celebrates cultural diversity and the many languages currently spoken in secondary schools across the North West of England. Trained student ambassadors delivered workshops in schools across Greater Manchester and helped judge the competition, which attracted 550 entries in 41 languages from 30 secondary schools across the North West. Through the reach and accessibility of her poetry, and her work with the Poetry Society on education and outreach projects, Sprackland was a founding figure (with Sir Andrew Motion) in the development of the Poetry Archive [7], which allows for the first time free access to hundreds of recordings of poets reading their own work. This is a project with global reach, used by an average of 150,000 visitors per month. It is used extensively in teaching and learning across UK schools. It has helped to set the agenda and influence public policy on poetry and education, developing a renewed sense of importance of voice and recitation in the understanding of poetry. In 2012, Sprackland and Motion collaborated again, this time on Poetry by Heart [8], a new national project for young people aged 14-18, which won £500,000 funding support from the Department for Education and has generated a broad public debate on the merits of memorising poems in schools, e.g.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/howard-jacobson/howard-jacobson-simon-armitage-is-wrong-learning-a-poem-by-heart-is-a-joy-for-life-not-class-warfare-7855056.html>

Inclusion in the most widely used English GCSE and A-Level syllabus (AQA) (C Duffy, Sprackland) and C Duffy's regular performances at GCSE 'Poetry Live' events (attended by 75,000 pupils per year in 50 venues across the UK) have ensured sustainable impact generation in introducing and communicating contemporary poetry to pupils aged 14-18.

3) Impact on new audiences:

The MMU poets have worked to open access to contemporary poetry through strategies to build new audiences beyond the existing poetry-book-buying public. These strategies have included O'Riordan's reviews and articles about contemporary poetry in the Guardian, Telegraph, and Independent. Financial Times, C Duffy's regular poetry columns and pages in the Guardian and Daily Mirror and Roberts and Sprackland's extensive broadcasting on BBC Radios 2, 3, 4, 5-Live and World Service. E.g. [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01rv3m1> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b02v25nw> <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jul/25/war-poetry-carol-ann-duffy>] These events and broadcasts have reached audiences new to poetry, many of whom have gone on to become poetry readers and some of whom have signed up to poetry courses to make a start as writers themselves. Sales for poetry books are modest (even a well-established poet might not sell more than 5,000 copies of a single collection) but the reach for

Impact case study (REF3b)

a broadcast such as 'Book of the Week' [9] is over 3 million. This strategy to develop new audiences has extended into collaborative ventures, in which audiences for opera, choral music, theatre, painting and photography are introduced to contemporary poetry through collaborative work with such organisations as Welsh National Opera, Royal Exchange Theatre, Opera North, Scottish Opera [10] (Roberts, C Duffy), Tate Gallery, National Gallery, Manchester City Art Gallery (Sprackland, Roberts).

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

[1] Arvon Foundation (to corroborate extent of teaching / mentoring):

<http://www.arvonfoundation.org/footer>

[2] Rosamond Prize (to corroborate a collaborative venture):

<http://www2.hlss.mmu.ac.uk/english/the-manchester-writing-school/the-rosamond-prize/>

[3] Ted Hughes Award (to corroborate a newly created national award):

<http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk/content/competitions/tedhughes/>

[4] Royal Exchange Theatre 'Carol Ann Duffy & Friends' (to corroborate public readings):

<http://www.royalexchange.co.uk/event.aspx?id=620>

[5] Manchester Children's Book Festival (to corroborate newly created festival):

www.mcbf.org.uk

[6] Routes into Languages 'Mother Tongue Other Tongue' (to corroborate work with schools):

www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/northwest/news/2636

[7] Poetry Archive (to corroborate involvement in major online poetry resource):

<http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/teachersHome.do>

[8] Poetry by Heart (to corroborate involvement in major educational initiative):

http://www.poetrybyheart.org.uk/?page_id=3164

[9] BBC Radio 4 'Book of the Week' (an example of extensive broadcast work):

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00zdbj1>

[10] Scottish Opera (an example of extensive work with music and theatre):

<http://www.scottishopera.org.uk/12-13/clemency>