

<b>Institution:</b> St Mary's University, Twickenham		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27 English Language and Literature		
<b>Title of case study:</b> <i>The Language of Kindness</i> : Placing the distinctive contribution of nursing at the heart of public debate about the nature and future of healthcare		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2016-2018		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Christie Watson	<b>Role(s):</b> Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 2016-18
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2018-present.		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Christie Watson's memoir <i>The Language of Kindness</i> (2018) is a first-hand account of twenty years at the frontline of nursing, which has had impact on the public discourse regarding the distinctive contribution of nurses in our society and how the nursing profession shapes the nature of our healthcare systems in significant ways, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Attitudes, awareness and understanding of the vocation and profession of nursing in the media and in public and professional discourse.</li> <li>b. Support for nurses and developments in practitioner attitudes and behaviours within the nursing profession itself.</li> <li>c. Public recognition of the specialist role and identity of nursing as a profession.</li> <li>d. Affected individual readers, especially those whose lives have been touched by nursing provision.</li> </ul>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words) <p><i>The Language of Kindness</i> (3.1) was written by Christie Watson, who was a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at St Mary's University, Twickenham between July 2016 and October 2018. First published in 2018, <i>The Language of Kindness</i>, saw Watson build on themes apparent in her earlier works: a memoir, <i>With Tiny Sunbirds Far Away</i> (2011) (3.2), (winner of the Costa First Book award), and <i>Where Women are Kings</i> (2013) (3.3). In these works Watson examined complex family relationships and experiences of family hardship, along with issues such as identity and belonging.</p> <p>These themes were continued in <i>The Language of Kindness</i>, a memoir providing an insider's perspective on life as a nurse. Watson drew on her nursing career between 1993 and 2013, and her work at the hospitals of Great Ormond Street, St Mary's Paddington, and Guy's and St Thomas. Drawing on first-hand experiences of treating patients, working alongside doctors, and interacting with relatives, all recalled from memory, and delicately presented to protect individual identities, Watson paints a vivid, and uniquely contemporary, picture of what it means and what it takes to be a nurse. In researching the genre prior to writing the book, Watson notes that, despite the countless medical memoirs written by doctors, the only other existing account of working as a nurse was written by Florence Nightingale in the nineteenth century. At the very heart of her account, and this is perhaps that which most shapes its impact on readers, is a series of profound insights into the nature of contemporary nursing, the complex array of expertise and skills, the careful balance of</p>		

conviction and compassion, the emotional intelligence, which has not been articulated so clearly for public appreciation previously.

Watson's portrayal is undoubtedly affecting on an individual level and has resonated with many who have interacted with frontline health services, but its greatest impact has been at the level of public discourse about the profession of nursing. By illustrating the distinctive role of nurses in the delivery of 'healthcare with humanity', that is, the provision of essential care and support to patients and relatives above and beyond their fundamental medical needs, necessary because of their very nature as human beings, Watson's work raises important questions about the identity and efficacy of healthcare systems as the demands placed on them continue to rise and resources are stretched. By implication, it raises questions about the nature of our societies and whether we have room in those societies for 'kindness'. Nursing, as a profession of care provision, is placed at the heart of that debate. *The Language of Kindness* has, to date, been translated into over twenty languages, including Chinese, Spanish, and Russian, reflecting the universality of its appeal and its message.

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

1. Christie Watson, *The Language of Kindness: A Nurse's Story* (Chatto & Windus, 1st ed., 2018). ISBN 978-1784741983.
2. Christie Watson, *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away* (Quercus, 1st ed., 2011). ISBN 978-1849163743.
3. Christie Watson, *Where Women Are Kings* (Quercus, 1st ed., 2013). ISBN 978-1849163804.

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

#### Impact on attitudes, awareness and understanding of the vocation and profession of nursing in the media and in public and professional discourse.

The publication of *The Language of Kindness* and the resulting reviews, print, radio, and television interviews, readings, and other outreach activities that Watson has conducted, have resulted in a wide-reaching enhancement of public and professional discourse regarding the nature of nursing and its value to healthcare systems. Watson's contribution is unique in that it stands apart as a nursing-specific memoir, and especially compelling as a narrative based on twenty years of frontline nursing. In a review for *The Observer* (29th April 2018), Molly Case – herself a nurse – acknowledges: "*The Language of Kindness* is part of the swell of medical memoirs. But this one is different – it is from the perspective of a nurse" (5.1a). The book was 'Book of the Week' on BBC Radio 4 from 7th-12th May 2018, and Watson herself appeared at least four times on national radio between May 2018 and February 2019 to discuss issues raised by her work and the reaction to it. On 10th May 2018, Watson appeared on Steve Wright in the Afternoon on BBC Radio 2 – a show with a reported audience of over 8 million weekly listeners (5.1f). Watson has been interviewed on television, notably on the BBC News Channel (3rd May 2018), London Live TV (3rd May 2018), ITV News London (7th May 2018) and 'Lorraine' on ITV (15th August 2018) (5.1f).

*The Language of Kindness* received national and international acclaim upon its publication, for both its style and substance, becoming a number one *Sunday Times* bestseller (27th January 2019) and appearing in 'Books of the Year' selections for *The Daily Telegraph*, *New Statesman*, *The Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Sunday Times*. Watson has appeared in major interview and feature articles for *The Daily Telegraph* (30th April 2018), *The Bookseller* (26th February 2018) and *The Sunday Times Magazine* (15th April 2018) amongst many others (5.1f). In November 2018, Watson was awarded a *Marie Claire* 'Future Shapers' award as one of eleven women "innovating the way we live and work" (5.2). *The Language of Kindness* has been praised for bringing to the world's attention the vital, yet otherwise unvoiced, work of a profession that is often overlooked and undervalued. Adam Kay (a doctor and writer) reflects in his review for *The Guardian*: "It struck me again

and again how little we hear from nurses, how quiet their voice is, how poorly represented they are on our bookshelves. All this despite the crucial role they inevitably play in our lives and those of our families. It also struck me how poorly we understand what this role truly involves – even if, like me, you have worked alongside them” (5.1b). Of great significance is how the book shapes public discourse regarding the value of nursing to the sustainability of our healthcare systems. In her review for *The Times* (22nd April 2018), Jackie Annesley states: “anyone curious as to how the NHS staggers on would do well to read [*The Language of Kindness*]. The answer lies in the compassion of people like Watson” (5.1c), and Alison Pearson writing in *The Telegraph* (24th June 2018) is frank in her assessment of the book’s underlying message: “This is not an overtly political work, although its description of nurses under intolerable pressure powerfully makes the case for giving a chunk of the extra £20 billion for the NHS, promised this week by the Prime Minister, to those underpaid, overworked and mainly female staff on the frontline” (5.1d).

The immediate set and cast of Watson’s book, namely UK-based hospitals, and staff, naturally lean our attention towards the value of nursing to the NHS. Health policy is, however, a global issue, often at the forefront of public debate, and healthcare systems worldwide rely to the same extent on nurses. Of the 43.5 million health workers in the world, the World Health Organisation estimates that 20.7 million are nurses and midwives. Hence, the international significance of the work is noteworthy. The appeal and relevance of the work and its impact on readers crosses societies and cultures, as evidenced by international reviews. Writing in her review in *The New York Times* (27th June 2018), Roxana Robinson writes: “*The Language of Kindness* could not be more compelling or more welcome: It’s about how we survive, and about the people who help us do so” (5.1e).

#### **Impact on support for nurses and developments in practitioner attitudes and behaviours within the nursing profession.**

In July 2018, Watson became patron of The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Foundation, which provides support, grants, and training for nurses. Her appointment coincided with a ‘Language of Kindness’ fundraising walk, which Watson spearheaded, that raised £5,300 – more than triple the target (5.3). Robert Sowney, chair of the RCN Foundation, said on Watson’s appointment: “[Watson] is a true champion of nursing ... We are looking forward to working even more closely with [Watson] in the future to support and strengthen nursing and improve patient care” (5.4).

The book itself has directly impacted those training as nurses. Duke Hervey, a trainee nurse, writes in a review: “This book was just what I needed to be reminded of during my final year as a student nurse. Being kind is of fundamental importance particularly in nursing, and [Watson] really highlights this in her inspirational book. A stunning read” (5.5). Another trainee nurse, Rachel Martin, wrote on Twitter on 19th February 2019: “Just finished *The Language of Kindness* by [Watson]. My eyes are stinging. As I approach the finish line of my nursing training, I feel many of my worries & questions remain. After reading this book my anxiety has eased and I just can’t wait to start my own nursing journey” (5.6). Professor Jane Cummings, Chief Nursing Officer for England (from 2012 to 2019) and Chair of the Board of Trustees for the RCN Foundation emphasises the importance of the work to nurses, as she writes: “A poignant and powerful account of what it’s like to be a nurse. It’s a profession that touches all our lives delivering expert and compassionate care from the cradle to the grave. A must-read for nurses and those interested in understanding the true art and science of nursing” (5.7).

On 15th May 2018, Watson was invited to address the RCN annual congress in Belfast as keynote speaker. In her speech, Watson praised the work of her fellow nurses and called for greater support for the nursing profession. Responses to her speech, taken from nurses who were present, made clear the impact of her work and her message. Chair of congress, Stuart McKenzie, stated: “I’d like to thank [Watson] for articulating to us without boundaries and reminding us of what we are and just what we do.” Mike Travis, a delegate, said: “I’ve been coming to congress for 36 years and for a description of what nurses do and what we

are, that was the best. Your book will have an impact on nurses. Your book will have an impact on the wider public and help them understand just what we do for them. I'll certainly be using your book to help my colleagues through a very difficult time" (5.8).

### **Impact on public recognition of the specialist role and identity of nursing as a profession.**

To date *The Language of Kindness* has sold over 250,000 copies in the UK and Commonwealth territories, with 23 foreign editions. As well as the interviews on national media previously mentioned, Watson has taken part in webchats (Mumsnet 17th May 2018) and podcast interviews (Vintage Podcast 3rd May 2018, Audible Sessions Podcast 3rd May 2018, Penguin Podcast 9th May 2018), spoken at 14 festivals including Hay Festival (3rd June 2018), Latitude (15th July 2018) and Edinburgh International Book Festival (16th August 2018) and delivered readings at various bookshop and library events (5.1f). The combined audience that has listened to Watson talk about her work, either directly in person or indirectly through various media, is certainly in the millions (considering viewing and listening numbers for the television and radio shows she has appeared on alone).

On 12th November 2019, Christie Watson delivered a book reading and Q&A session at the St Mary's University, Twickenham, University Women's Club. To assess the audience response to her work, 'before and after' surveys were completed by the attendees and subsequently analysed by Professor Pauline Foster. There was a marked shift in results from before the event to after; after the event, all attendees either mostly or totally agreed that they 'knew a lot about nurses' working lives', the exact opposite of the responses to the same question asked prior to Watson's speech. Attendees were also invited to offer words to describe the nursing profession before and after the event. Pauline Foster summarises the results: "the effect of the event was a discernible shift in attendees' perceptions of nurses as overworked, underpaid angels towards a different perception of them as overworked, underpaid professionals. The perception of nurses as doing rewarding, but insufficiently rewarded work remained, but a recognition is detectable that the vocational bedrock of nursing needs to get more credit" (5.9). In assessing the impact of Watson's work on how we think about nursing and its contribution to society, Caroline Sanderson – in her profile feature for *The Bookseller* – writes: "It packs the same unswerving frankness about the demands of the medical profession as Adam Kay's *This is Going to Hurt*. But it is also a transcendent book that takes the temperature of our society, in the process asking searching questions about the human qualities we should prize most" (5.10). Watson herself has noted that "while the book started off being about the life of a nurse, it became something much broader about humanity"; a conclusion that neatly encapsulates the profound significance of the work to us all.

### **Impact on individuals affected by frontline healthcare provision.**

*The Language of Kindness* has had extensive impact on individual readers, especially those who have relied upon or been impacted by nursing provision. Miss C Brown, the parent of a child with complex medical needs, writes in her book review (8th February 2019): "Thank you for writing this book. I suspect people who have not been exposed to the world of hospitals may be in for a bit of a shock and it would be great if more people could read it." (5.5). C S George writes (12th June 2018): "This is an incredible book that everyone should read. Thank goodness for our NHS and thank goodness for nurses." (5.5). William Marler writes (5th February 2019): "My life has been dependent on the NHS and I've spent more time with nurses so far than many people will in a lifetime. They are the heart and soul of our nation. It makes me proud that my mother has been a nurse for over 37 years. *The Language of Kindness* is a celebration of nursing and its vital role in the recovery and wellbeing of the sick." (5.5).

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

1. Reviews of work: a. Molly Case - *The Guardian*; b. Adam Kay – *The Guardian*; c. Jackie Annesley *The Times*; d. Alisson Pearson – *The Telegraph*; e. Roxanna Robinson – *The New York Times*; f. Listing of newspaper and magazine coverage (UK), podcast, festival, and bookshop appearances, and radio and television appearances (UK).
2. Marie Claire 'Future Shapers' awards 2018:  
(<https://www.marieclaire.co.uk/life/work/future-shapers-616954>)
3. JustGiving page: (<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/language-of-kindness-walk-for-nurses>).
4. [Nursing charity appoints nurse turned author as new patron | Nursing Times](#)
5. Collection of reviews and responses from individual readers, principally taken from Amazon.co.uk.
6. Collection of public responses taken from Twitter.
7. Professor Jane Cummings – Review of 'The Language of Kindness' – Waterstones.
8. Collection of responses to Watson's keynote speech at the RCN congress 2018 in Belfast.
9. Professor Pauline Foster's analysis of the audience surveys collected at Watson's reading and Q&A session at the University Women's Club, 12<sup>th</sup> November 2019 (plus questionnaire responses).
10. Caroline Sanderson - Christie Watson 'I just wanted it to be real'