

Institution: Manchester Metropolitan University		
Unit of Assessment: D27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Engaging New Audiences with Public Poetry through Broadcast, Performance and Commemoration		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dame Carol Ann Duffy	Professor of Contemporary Poetry	1996-present
Michael Symmons Roberts	Professor of Poetry	2006-present
Jean Sprackland	Professor of Creative Writing	2009-present
Andrew McMillan	Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing	2017-present
Helen Mort	Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing	2017-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>Inspired by Dame Professor Carol Ann Duffy's Laureateship, poets in the Manchester Writing School (MWS) have led the revival of poetry in the UK as a public medium informed by a mission for equality, social justice and cultural enfranchisement. MWS poets have extended the reach and significance of contemporary poetry by engaging new audiences that include broadcast audience figures alone of over 52,000,000 since 2014, plus multiple engagements via print, online and live events. They have introduced a literary form often seen as marginal into prominent cultural spaces hitherto dominated by prose, including theatre, radio, television, concert halls and community projects. MWS poets have catalysed debates and altered perceptions of pressing social, environmental and political concerns. They have successfully re-presented canonical texts to address contemporary issues, and have influenced perceptions of the role of poetry in public discourse.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>Since the establishment of the Manchester Writing School at the university in 1998, the Poetry Research Group has built an international reputation for actively engaged, powerful contemporary public poetry in a wide range of cultural forms and domains. Through its work, contemporary poetry has been remobilised as a medium that inspires people and prompts them into reflection and action. The current Writing School, including poets such as Carol Ann Duffy, Michael Symmons Roberts, Jean Sprackland, Adam O'Riordan, Andrew McMillan, Helen Mort and Karen Solie, builds on the legacy of former colleagues, including Simon Armitage, Jeffrey Wainwright and Michael Schmidt.</p> <p>Though formally and thematically diverse in their practice, these writers are united by their shared communal ethos and orientation, and their passionate commitment to a tradition of public and often collaborative work in English poetry that manifests itself in elegies, commissioned commemorations and political poems. The poets' work in this tradition is recognised by their public prominence, and their publications on major trade poetry lists: Roberts, Sprackland and McMillan with Cape, Duffy and Solie with Picador, and Mort and O'Riordan with Chatto & Windus— all publishing houses committed to disseminating poetry among wide audiences. The capacity for contemporary poetry to function as a transformative public art is further evidenced by the ways in which these poets have responded to high-profile commissions. For example, Duffy's employment of British demotic speech in verse forms on the page has led to work such as her ground-breaking contemporary political reimagining of <i>Everyman</i> for the National Theatre [1]. Roberts' employment of half-rhymed couplets to carry contemporary dialogue and narrative has been developed through more than two decades of work on libretti and broadcast plays,</p>		

culminating in his acclaimed verse drama for BBC Radio and Television about homelessness, *Men Who Sleep in Cars* [2]. Duffy's work as Britain's first female Poet Laureate and most prominent writer of commissioned public poetry—such as her acclaimed elegy *The Last Post*, marking the deaths of the last two British soldiers to fight in the First World War—exemplifies MWS poets' commitment to poetry as a public art form that can challenge and change perspectives on a wide range of social and political issues [3]. This radical commitment to taking poetry 'beyond the page' includes McMillan's powerful writing on homosexuality and the male body [4], Mort's recasting of mountaineering as a feminist act [5] and Sprackland's passionate evocation of the ecological crisis in her poetry collections and creative nonfiction [6]. All these poets have reached new audiences through broadcast, stage performance and collaboration.

3. References to the research

1. Carol Ann **Duffy**, *Everyman* (London, Faber & Faber, 2015), ISBN: 978-0571326884, stage play by Carol Ann Duffy, commissioned by the National Theatre.
2. Michael **Symmons Roberts**, *Men Who Sleep in Cars* (2015 & 2017), BBC radio and television drama, broadcast on BBC Radio 4 and adapted by the author for BBC4 TV.
3. Carol Ann **Duffy**, *Ritual Lightning: Laureate Poems* (London, Picador 2014) ISBN: 978-1447274506.
4. Andrew **McMillan**, *Playtime* (London, Jonathan Cape, 2018), ISBN: 978-1911214373.
5. Helen **Mort**, *No Map Could Show Them* (London, Chatto & Windus, 2016) ISBN: 978-1784740641.
6. Jean **Sprackland**, *Strands: A Year of Discoveries on the Beach* (London, Jonathan Cape, 2012) ISBN: 978-0224087452.

Indicators of Research Quality:

Men Who Sleep in Cars was shortlisted for Best Drama at the BBC Audio Drama Awards, and for the Society of Authors' Tinniswood Awards for Best Drama Script. The film version was shortlisted for Best Drama at the Royal Television Society Awards and Best Original Programme at the Broadcast Awards. It was also nominated as 'Best Original Programme' for the 2019 Broadcast Awards.

Playtime was the winner of the 2019 Polari Prize celebrating work that explores the LGBT experience.

Strands: A Year of Discoveries on the Beach was the winner of the 2012 Portico Prize for Non-Fiction.

4. Details of the impact

Generating new audiences for canonical poetic texts addressing contemporary issues

Building on their work addressing social and political issues, the poets in the Manchester Writing School are regularly commissioned to adapt and dramatize canonical poetic texts to resonate with contemporary cultural and political questions. Duffy's re-telling of the fifteenth-

century English morality play *Everyman* for the National Theatre (2015) placed the drama firmly in the context of our contemporary eco-crisis, recasting Everyman's sin as indifference to the earth's future. The play reached 6,266,762 people, including live theatre audiences, cinema-streamed audiences, radio listeners and YouTube viewers. *Everyman* also attracted younger and more diverse audiences, with increased representation from BAME communities and people with disabilities. It was acclaimed for its contemporary relevance: Michael Billington argued in *The Guardian* that its 'big achievement' was 'to keep the framework of the original while suiting the content to a secular society' (30.04.15) [A]. Roberts' 2018 dramatisation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* for BBC Radio 4, starring Sir Ian McKellen, was released as a commercial audiobook by Penguin. This verse drama introduced new listeners to Milton's world torn apart by the civil war, drawing poignant contemporary parallels with divided Britain during the Brexit process. *The Spectator* declared that it felt 'very much in tune with our own obsessive fears' (31.03.18), and a review in the *New Statesman* announced that 'never was a poem so needed' (22.03.18). Roberts is committed to this 'opening up' of classic poetic texts: his projects also included a re-telling of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's radical feminist verse novel *Aurora Leigh* (BBC R4, 04.02.17), and a re-mapping of T. S. Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' onto the Trafford Centre, Greater Manchester's iconic shopping mall (BBC R4, 30.12.17). These programmes have increased the cultural capital of new audiences, informing them of not just what these texts engage with, but also why they continue to be relevant. The contemporary adaptation becomes a means for making these texts work to express or explore these audiences' own pressing issues and concerns. Again, in the hands of the Manchester Writing School poets, poetry manifests itself as a powerful tool for democratic self-enfranchisement and emancipation [B].

Challenging and changing perceptions of social and political issues

The Manchester Writing School's work reaches beyond poetry book readerships, and utilises wider public contexts including broadcast media, theatre, music and commemoration. As a result, they have been able to reach, inspire and mobilise new audiences, whose identities and voices have become a more established presence within these domains of public discourse. This process has afforded the poets an influential voice in debates on a range of social, political and environmental issues. Roberts' Radio 4 and BBC4 TV verse drama *Men Who Sleep in Cars* (05.02.15), starring Maxine Peake, was widely critically acclaimed: *The Observer* declared it 'a work of genius' (01.10.17), and it was nominated for the UK Broadcast Awards and RTS Awards in 2018. The broadcasts achieved over 1 million engagements, raising awareness of this under-reported kind of 'hidden homelessness', prevalent in young and middle-aged men. Wide media (and social media) responses to the issues raised in the drama included a live national broadcast debate on BBC 5-Live's *Afternoon Edition* addressing the relationship between homelessness and shame, and a feature in the *Manchester Evening News* (30.09.17), in which Maxine Peake used her role in the film to issue a call to action on the city's 'homelessness explosion': 'we have to show a bit of compassion and interest [...] we're only a pay packet away' [C]. Mort's retelling of the Medusa myth for Proper Job Theatre's touring play reached 77,000 people. Again, the play attracted new and younger audiences from the northwest, increased awareness of sexual abuse, and gave voice to victims. It also made a positive impact on the production company and touring venues, diversifying and broadening audiences, and increasing media coverage. McMillan's assertive invocations of sexuality and masculinity in his published poetry have informed his work with LGBT communities. Poem-lyrics for LGBT choir The Sunday Boys were created through focus-group discussions, and performed at Manchester's Stoller Hall (29.7.18), reaching audiences of 3,383. His work affords new, young, male and northwest audiences' access to contemporary poetry as a means of intervening in public discourse. McMillan fostered a local sense of community, bridged

intergenerational divides, increased the pride and confidence of choir members, and bolstered the choir's aspiration and ambition [D].

Helping wide audiences to mark major commemorations and celebrations

The poets' own broadcast poetry, and their adaptations of classic poetic texts, have achieved a minimum of 52,141,311 audience engagements since 2014. Their work has increased the share of male listeners aged 15-24 by 57%; male listeners aged 35-44 by 31%; and total listeners aged 35-44 by 36%, compared to regular poetry audiences on the radio [E]. This track record has led to many new commissions designed to mark public anniversaries and events. Duffy's 'The Wound in Time', commissioned by director Danny Boyle and 14-18 Now, was recited on beaches across the UK as a nationwide act of remembrance for the Armistice Centenary (11.11.18), and was broadcast on BBC Radio 4, reaching an estimated 3.5 million audience engagements. It generated new audiences for poetry, increasing reach with young people, males and lower socio-economic groups. 'The Wound in Time' united people in a national act of remembrance at a fractious time in our recent history during the Brexit process, connecting people with their past and with each other [F]. Roberts' collaborative and multi-media Somme commemoration in Manchester Cathedral ('Manchester Hill Remembered') reached a live audience of 1,069 people, with an increased reach in northwest and younger audiences. The performance increased awareness of this important event in Mancunian history: 63% of the audience had not heard of Manchester Hill prior to the event [G]. McMillan's 'Conversations on a Bench' for BBC Radio 4 deployed verbatim interview material interwoven with poetry to create an elegy for the victims of the Manchester Arena bombing (29.08.17). As the social media reaction indicated, the programme enabled people to articulate their grief [H]. Roberts was also commissioned by Manchester International Festival and the BBC Philharmonic to produce a choral oratorio with composer Emily Howard (*The Anvil*) to commemorate the Peterloo Massacre on its bicentenary in 2019. *The Anvil* shed new light on this seminal historical-political anniversary. Premiered to a live audience of 1,300 at Bridgewater Hall (7.7.19), it was the centrepiece of a range of Peterloo-themed events based on Roberts' texts for *The Anvil*, performed by (among others) the Irish immersive theatre group Anu in sites around Manchester, reaching a total live audience for the day of 4,200. The concert was also broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on the anniversary of Peterloo (16.8.19) [I].

Re-energising poetry's role in society

Through its work 'beyond the page', Manchester Writing School has been at the forefront of challenging perceptions of poetry as a marginal and arcane literary form. Through a strategy of free access and a programme of public outreach, Sprackland's work as Chair of the online Poetry Archive since 2016 has developed new global audiences for poets reading their own poems. In 2018-19, there were 1,262,510 engagements with the Poetry Archive from across the world. A sample of 530,000 users broken down by age showed 145,000 in the 18-24 group, signalling significant reach with younger people. User feedback emphasised that the archive allows 'Easy access to magnificent recordings to use in my classroom with the educational resources', and it 'enables my students to connect the written word, the spoken word, and the history and context in which the words were created'. There are over 200,000 engagements with the Poetry Archive every month [J]. Roberts' essays for BBC Radio 4's strand *Something Understood* explored ideas ranging from cultural understanding of death to the power of pervasive bodily metaphors (breath, heart, vision) in our culture. Roberts has used this platform to introduce audiences to poems by a wide range of contemporary poets. Building on its tradition of 'widening access' to poetry, our university has invested in a specialist Poetry Library, which is the first one to be built in England since 1968, and the first public poetry library ever to be established in a UK university. The library will provide a focus for events, engagement and residencies for the city of Manchester, the north-west and its

diverse poetic communities, plus readers and performers from the UK and abroad. The Library will function as a natural, but hugely significant, development of the MWS poets' commitment to generate new audiences through public poetry.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Evaluation data and testimonial corroborating the impact for *Everyman* (Sally Fort's independent evaluation Oct 2019); Review in the Guardian corroborating critical response: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/apr/30/everyman-review-chiwetel-ejirofor-national-theatre-carol-ann-duffy-morality-play>
- B. Reviews and critical response to Michael Symmons-Roberts' adaptation of *Paradise Lost* <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/of-innocence-and-experience> ; <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/tv-radio/2018/03/devastatingly-milton-ian-mckellen-s-thrilling-trippy-retelling-paradise>
- C. Evaluation data corroborating the impact of *Men Who Sleep in Cars* (Sally Fort's independent evaluation Oct 2019) and evidence of the critical response: <https://www.eightengines.com/men-who-sleep-in-cars> ; <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/showbiz-news/men-who-sleep-in-cars-13678015>
- D. Evaluation data and testimonial corroborating the impact of McMillan's work with The Sunday Boys (Sally Fort's independent evaluation Oct 2019)
- E. Independent evaluation by Sally Fort (Oct 2019) corroborating audience engagement and reach of Manchester Writing School poets.
- F. Evaluation data corroborating impact of *The Wound in Time* (Sally Fort's independent evaluation Oct 2019)
- G. Evaluation data corroborating the reach and significance of *Manchester Hill Remembered* (Sally Fort's independent evaluation Oct 2019)
- H. Evaluation data for *Conversations on a Bench* (Sally Fort's independent evaluation Oct 2019)
- I. Evaluation data corroborating the reach and significance of *The Anvil* (Sally Fort's independent evaluation Oct 2019); Testimonial from John McGrath, Artistic Director and Chief Executive, Manchester International Festival
- J. Poetry Archive Evaluation (Julie Blake, *Poetry by Heart 2015-2016* evaluation report, April 2016); Testimonial from Robert Seatter, Chair of Poetry Archive