

Institution: University of Gloucestershire
Unit of Assessment: UoA 29 English Literature and Language
Title of case study: Poetry: Poesis, Process and Pedagogy
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The impact of Professor Nigel McLoughlin's work has two main, interrelated facets. The first is the public dissemination of his poetry through a variety of media, including mass media. His work takes the Irish troubles as a main context, and addresses themes of violence, invasion, identity, belonging, and tradition. He has published widely and has been invited to perform his work to public audiences at numerous literary festivals. The second is his academic research into pedagogy and poetics. Here his academic work examines the creative process and principles of making poems and his research reflects how one can explore and teach the various textual, musical, rhythmic, formal and thematic considerations of poetry. His own poetry bears out this reflective relation to expressivity through its perpetual experiments with formal and musical considerations, imagery and the relationship of the poetic whole to multi-sensory images and embodied thought.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>McLoughlin's practice-led research into poetry began initially in 1993. By 2005, when he joined the University of Gloucestershire to take up the post of Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing, he was already an established poet with a significant profile which demonstrated cultural impact through invited public readings interviews and favourable reviews. Shortly after joining the university his third collection, <i>Blood</i>, was published. The collection was thematically centred on historical and mythological explorations of invasion, and his fourth collection, <i>Dissonances</i>, returned to reinvestigate tradition, musical and rhythmic devices and to experiment with formal constraints. His most recent collection, <i>Chora: New & Selected Poems</i>, was a significant, thematically consistent, body of work, which integrated a representative sample of previous work, many of which were significantly revised, with a selection of new work. His practice-led research in poetry since taking up his post in Gloucestershire has continued to generate cultural impact as evidenced below.</p> <p>His published output of poems in literary journals since 1993 runs to over two hundred publication credits. Since taking up his current post, his work has appeared in many of the major literary journals in the UK and Ireland, many of which have international reputations and circulations, such as <i>Poetry Review</i>, <i>London Magazine</i>, <i>Agenda</i>, <i>Acumen</i>, <i>Poetry Ireland</i>, <i>Cyphers</i>, <i>The Shop</i> and <i>Resurgence</i>. His work has also appeared in international journals such as <i>Free Verse (USA)</i>; and <i>American, British & Canadian Studies (Romania)</i>, and has been broadcast on <i>Weekend Edition (National Public Radio, USA)</i>.</p> <p>In addition to his creative work, McLoughlin has given many conference papers and published scholarly articles on the pedagogy of creative writing and on the nature of creativity and its relation to poetics, as well as on poetics more generally. Since joining the university, he has given over twenty invited conference papers, including conferences with international reach and significance such as <i>The Line of Contemporary Poetry</i>, Oxford University (2006); National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) (2006-9); Associated Writing Programmes (AWP) conferences in Chicago (2009), Washington (2011) and Boston (2013), The Poetics And Linguistics Association (PALA) Annual International Conference in the University of Heidelberg (2013); and Great Writing (2006-2012), including a joint keynote address to Great Writing, Imperial College (2012).</p> <p>A significant proportion of the audiences at NAWE, Great Writing and AWP include arts practitioners who work outside the academy, and a number of those who teach creative writing in the community, in schools, or in other non-university settings. He has published papers on pedagogy in <i>Word Play</i>, the magazine of the English Subject Centre; <i>Writing in Education</i>, the journal of the National Association of Writers in Education, and in <i>New Writing: The international journal for the practice and theory of creative writing</i>.</p>

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During this time **McLoughlin** has also published articles on poetics and stylistics in *New Writing: The international journal for the practice and theory of creative writing*. He has published on the creative process in *Axon: Creative Explorations*, as well as several book chapters on writing as a creative process. In 2012, he was invited to co-edit a special edition of the Australian Journal *TEXT: The journal of writing and writing courses* which focused on Creativity: Cognitive, Social and Cultural Perspectives. In 2013, he was invited to edit a special edition of the journal *American, British and Canadian Studies* entitled *Creative Writing: New Signals, New Departures*. These invitations evidence of the reach of his academic and creative work within the wider international community and evidence the esteem in which it is held.

3. References to the research

McLoughlin, N. (2005). *Blood*, Bristol: Bluechrome Press.

McLoughlin, N. (2007). *Dissonances*, (Bristol: Bluechrome.

McLoughlin, N. (2009). *Chora: New & Selected Poems*, Matlock: Templar Poetry.

McLoughlin, N. (2012). 'The Workshop as a Creative, Critical and Intellectual Space'. in P. Perry (ed.) *Beyond the Workshop*, London: Kingston University Press

McLoughlin, N. (2010). 'Stress Weight: Unwilled Order, Clothes Lines and Crowned Teeth' in *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, Vol. 7, No.3, Colchester: Taylor & Francis. ISSN 1479-0726

McLoughlin, N. (2013). 'Writing Poetry' in G. Harper (ed.) *The Blackwell Companion to Creative Writing*, London: Wiley Blackwell.

The first two of these were part of a successful RAE submission in 2008; three of the others are part of the unit's submission to REF 2014. The positive reviews and comments on the quality of poetry detailed below refer to *Dissonances* and *Chora*. *Chora* was selected to feature in the *Poetry Book Society Bulletin* on publication. *Blood* also received very favourable critical notice on publication. His 2010 article on 'Stress Weight' was selected to represent the quality and breadth of work published in *New Writing* for its tenth anniversary celebrations.

4. Details of the impact

McLoughlin's various works have been disseminated through books, anthologies, articles, radio broadcasts, conference papers and public performances, leading to an enhanced public awareness of the thematic issues that his work addresses, through the public dissemination of the work, but also through written and verbal interviews about his work, and through informal discussions with audience members at performances. These all promote a wider cultural awareness of the formal and thematic concerns being explored in contemporary Northern Irish poetry more generally.

The distinctively aural appeal of **McLoughlin's** work is evidenced through invitations to perform his work at both prestigious and lesser-known literary festivals and venues. The smaller occasions nonetheless attract a strong public presence and offer special benefits and opportunities for audience engagement with new and challenging poetry. He has been regularly invited to read to audiences at some of the largest and most important poetry festivals in the UK and Ireland. In the assessed period he has read at Cheltenham Festival of Literature and Bristol Poetry Festival among several others. Audience sizes for his readings at smaller events are usually about fifty, but at larger festivals his readings can attract audiences in excess of one hundred. **McLoughlin's** work impacts on its audience in an immediate and visceral way, which may be exemplified by the following quotations from the *Crafty Green Poet* blog (source 1): 'I discovered Nigel McLoughlin's poetry at a recent event, where he was reading. I was impressed by the cadences of his language and the obvious inspiration he finds in the natural world. He also has a very engaging reading style'. Another reader replied: 'Thank you for this tip-off. I thought McLoughlin's vocabulary was 'crisp' and most evocative'. Because of the thematic issues dealt with in his work, he has been invited to discuss the Northern Irish troubles and their effect on the poetry of the 1960s and 1970s generation of new poets and to read his work. His 2008 *Weekend Edition* interview on United

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States National Public Radio followed that of Senator George Mitchell and had an audience estimated at 26 million (see audience figures quoted in source 2).

McLoughlin has discussed the importance of musical qualities of poetry to its reception and composition in interviews and conference papers as well as in published articles and book chapters. The performances exemplify this, and he was invited by Sir Andrew Motion and Richard Carrington, directors of the Poetry Archive, to record an hour-long reading. The invitation is extended to 'significant poets who write in English' (invitation letter from Poetry Archive available for inspection). The Poetry Archive website currently receives 200,000 hits per month. The recording session was completed in December 2012 and the recording is due to be made publicly available late in 2013. McLoughlin's work has elicited favourable public reaction both in performance: 'at the Derwent Poetry Festival...there was an audience of eighty-five for the main Saturday evening reading, and [McLoughlin's] evocative live reading was exceptionally well received' (private communication, can be corroborated by Derwent Poetry Festival Director); and with regard to his printed work, as exemplified by the following quotations from public comments found on the poetry blog *When the Dogs Bite* (source 3) which featured a review of *Dissonances*: 'I've read the book and it really is wonderful. But if you ever get to listen to him read his work....it's a real treat' and 'It's the best modern poetry I've read'; and from a public comment on *Peony Moon* (source 4) which featured a selection of his poems: 'I especially like Chorus. 'The open-throated song of morning' is gorgeous'. In Issue 6 of *The Shit Creek Review* (source 5) his poem 'Snapshot', was praised by one of the editors for 'its triumph over the villanelle form...I've never read anything like it before. I liked it before I realized it was a villanelle. When does that ever happen?'

The critical reception of **McLoughlin's** poetry has been extremely positive. Since his first collection appeared in 2001, each of his books has received very favourable critical notice. A review of *Dissonances* in *Eyewear* (source 6), commended his work for its 'power and dynamism', while in *The Chimera* (source 7), Dr Maggie Butt said of the same collection: 'this book caught me off-guard and quickly became one of my favourite collections of the year' and 'these poems have a real music built into their bones, and are fleshed with sharp imagery, the sort that makes you say "yes, that's how it is"...they form a tangible, sensory connection between the poet and the world – a physicality which he appears to transmit effortlessly to the reader'. Dr Jan Fortune-Wood, writing in *Envoi* Issue 151 (page 91) said his was 'work not only of bravery and complexity, but also deep humanity. It is not always easy listening, but it is a tremendous song' (source 8). Critics of *Chora: New and Selected Poems* have been similarly positive: in *Ink, Sweat and Tears* (source 9), Ken Head states that 'throughout the more than one hundred poems in the collection and across a wider range of subjects than I've been able to find space for...it is the directness of the poet's gaze that is so noteworthy'. In *The Chimera* (source 10), Barbara Smith commented that the collection demonstrates the 'expansion of a muscular aural and oral talent'. *Chora* was also one of the collections selected to be featured by the Poetry Book Society in their Bulletin in 2009.

McLoughlin's academic work has also had significant impact, as evidenced by the fact that his article 'Stress Weight: Unwilled Order, Clothes Lines and Crowned Teeth' was one of seventeen articles chosen to represent the quality and breadth of the research published as part of the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Taylor and Francis journal *New Writing: The international journal for the practice and theory of creative writing*. This journal has a significant readership in territories where creative writing has not yet entered the academy, and among practising writers outside the academy internationally. The assessors noted that: they felt it was 'innovative' in '[i]ts combination of critical investigation and practice-led intention' and that 'the author's focus on poetry research from the point of view of a practice-led philosophy was considered notable' (the quotations are taken from an email from the editor of *New Writing* which is available for inspection). Colleagues nationally and internationally have found **McLoughlin's** work on creative writing pedagogy, and the practice and poetics of creativity to be very influential in thinking about how the discipline is taught and how courses are designed (contact details of two colleagues who can corroborate this are supplied).

McLoughlin's practice-led research in poetry has also had impact in an area into which it is more non-traditional for contemporary poetry to cross: Hungry Bentley, a band from the north of England, used **McLoughlin's** poem 'Book of Invasions' as lyrics to a song of the same name on

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their album, *Closing Credits*, which was released in 2008. A review of the album on *Inner Ear Media* (source 11) said of 'Book of Invasions': 'The words are magnificent'. The band have also used **McLoughlin's** version of the Gaelic 'Song of Amergin' as lyrics to a song of the same name on their most recent album, *Novel Grade Events*, released at the end of 2012. Both these poems are from **McLoughlin's** collection *Blood*. This has brought **McLoughlin's** work to the attention of a wider audience, through performances by the band at around thirty venues in the UK and elsewhere, with average audiences of around fifty people, many of whom are not habitual readers of poetry, the songs also received airplay on independent music stations in the US and Ireland, again broadening the reach of the poems to music fans, many of whom would not otherwise engage with poetry. The songs containing **McLoughlin's** lyrics are available on iTunes and Spotify; to date there have been over 500 album sales and downloads for *Novel Grade Events* (data can be corroborated by Hungry Bentley).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. *Crafty Green Poet Blog* (April 2009):
<http://craftygreenpoet.blogspot.co.uk/2009/04/poetry-of-nigel-mcloughlin>.
2. *NPR data on weekly audience* (approx. 26 million):
<http://www.npr.org/about/aboutnpr/audience.html>
3. *When the Dogs Bite* review of *Dissonances* and discussion (September 2008)
<http://whentheogsbite.blogspot.co.uk/2008/09/nigel-mcloughlins-dissonances.html>
4. *Comments on featured poems at Peony Moon* (Sept 2010):
<http://peonymoon.wordpress.com/2010/09/10/nigel-mcloughlins-chora/>
5. *Praise in Editorial of Issue 6 of Shit Creek Review* (February 2008):
<http://www.shitcreekreview.com/issue6/editorial.htm>
<http://shitcreek.auszine.com/> (for issue release date)
6. *Michael Begnal's Review of Dissonances in Eyewear* (February 2008):
<http://toddsSwift.blogspot.co.uk/2008/02/guest-review-begnal-on-mcloughlin.html>
7. *Maggie Butt's Review of Dissonances in The Chimera* (May 2008):
<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:Bj3tfADLUpUJ:the-chimera.com/May2008/Reviews/Butt.html+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk>
8. *Fortune-Wood, J.* (2008). 'Paying Attention to Things'. *Envoi* 151: 89-94.
9. Ken Head's Review of *Chora: New & Selected Poems* in *Ink, Sweat and Tears* (03/11/10):
<http://www.inksweatandtears.co.uk/pages/?p=871>
10. *Barbara Smith's Review of Chora: New & Selected Poems* in *The Chimera* (March 2010):
<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:PJ44oQz0L-YJ:www.the-chimera.com/March2010/Reviews/Smith.html+&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk>
11. *Inner Ear Media's Review of adaptation of poem for lyrics on Music CDs* (23/10/08):
http://www.lastfm.fr/user/innerearmedia/journal/2008/10/23/28jm4q_review%3A_hungry_bentley_-_closing_credits?setlang=fr

A portfolio of written communication referred to in the impact case study, and PDF versions of the material referenced in the links above are available for inspection. Details of corroborating contacts are also provided.