

Institution: Edge Hill University
Unit of Assessment: 29 - English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Linguistically Innovative Poetry: critical and practice-led research makes an important contribution to communities of practice and appreciation.
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The term 'linguistically innovative poetry' (LIP) encompasses a range of practices and approaches that has emerged in British poetry since the 1980s. Critical and practice-led research undertaken by Sheppard has made an important contribution to the development and vitality of communities of practice and appreciation in British alternative poetries. His work has helped readers and critics to identify, appreciate and engage with British poetry and particularly LIP. This case study is based on the critical and practice-led research projects into the potentialities of literary experiment carried out by Sheppard, work that is generally constellated around the widely-used term 'linguistically innovative poetry', a term he has helped to disseminate in the critical domain and in the field of literary production.</p> <p>The impact and benefit is registered through a change in literary critical perspectives regarding LIP, including the use of the term, in several cultural environments, and in a heightened sense of the potentialities for literary experiment in the field of literary production itself.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The critical and practice-led research underpinning this case study was undertaken by Sheppard between 2006 and 2013. Sheppard joined Edge Hill University in 1996 and has been employed continuously since then (currently as Professor of Poetry and Poetics in the Department of English & History). The central themes in both creative and critical work involve investigations of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Formal strategies for advancing non-metrical verse (Outputs 1, 2, 3, 5, 6) and poet's prose (1, 2, 4, 6) including isoverbalism (word count) and other measures and formal constraints, often devised for particular works, such as innovative sonnet forms (100 word sonnet and other sonnet-deviant structures in 1,2,5) and hybrid prose-poetry forms such as lineated prose (1,2) and collage prose (4). 2. Organisational possibilities regarding the poetic sequencing of the postmodern long poem particularly in the arrangements of the 'strands' and 'indexes' of the 75 parts of the 407 page epic <i>Twentieth Century Blues</i> (2, 3) and in his studies of the principles of organisation of other long poems, works of Harwood and Roy Fisher and Allen Fisher, for example (7, 8). 3. Formal devices of creative linkage adequate to a revitalised representation of both subjectivity and history (1-6) in accelerated collage modes of writing, and in developments of 'reading through' and 'new sentence' work in the autobiographies (4) and in the use of multiple fictional translators and editors in output 6 which complex the notion of the 'author-function'. 4. Extensions of literary production into the fields of performance and art collaboration (texts from 2, 5, 6) with dancers and print-makers in particular, as featured in exhibitions with Pete Clarke in the UK and abroad, and in critical work on performance writing, (7, 8) as in the sound and visual poetry of Bob Cobbing. 5. Modes of creativity that permit LIP as a speculative, writerly discourse to inhere in writerly practice itself and adjacent to it (2, 4, 5, 6): Sheppard is an advocate of poetics as a speculative writerly discourse and he incorporates this into his practice (particularly in the meta-poems and poem-essays of 5) as well as studying the forms of poetics, notably in the studies of hybrid poetry-poetics pieces by Maggie O'Sullivan and Ken Edwards in 8. (7,8) 6. Critical re-valuations of post-war British poetry in the light of LIP which involves a critique of mainstream poetry and evaluations of the poetry and poetics of the linguistically innovative modes, such as item 7's representation of the poetry of saying as a technical, social and ethical eternity of saying, via a poetics of discontinuity and indeterminacy. (7,8)
<p>3. References to the research</p> <p>All outputs available on request, outputs 2, 3, 6 and 8 submitted in REF 2.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Authored Book: Sheppard, R. (2006) <i>Hymns to the God in which my Typewriter Believes</i>, Exeter: Stride. 2. Authored Book: Sheppard, R. (2008) <i>Complete Twentieth Century Blues</i>. Cambridge: Salt. 3. Authored Book: Sheppard, R. (2009) <i>Warrant Error</i>. Exeter: Shearsman Books. 4. Other: Sheppard, R. (2010) <i>The Given</i>, Newton-le-Willows: Knives, Forks and Spoons. 5. Authored Book: Sheppard, R. (2011) <i>Berlin Bursts</i>. Exeter: Shearsman Books.

6. Authored Book: Sheppard, R. (2013) *A Translated Man*. Bristol: Shearsman Books.
7. Authored Book: Sheppard, R. (2005) *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents 1950-2000*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
8. Authored Book: Sheppard, R. (2011) *When bad times made for good poetry*. Exeter: Shearsman Books.

Complete Twentieth Century Blues

Ian Davidson in *Poetry Wales* 44/3, Winter 08/09: 'a major poem of serious intent...'

Keith Jebb in *Poetry Salzburg Review* 16: Autumn 2009: 'We have a book, a very exciting and important book, a book written over the last decade of the last century, which ranges across ... the whole century. And it does so with a political and (anti)moral commitment, an anger and sense of injustice, combined with control, wit and sheer bloody inventiveness that have been rarely directed by one poet to one long poem or serial poem.'

The Poetry of Saying

Mandy Bloomfield in *The Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*: 'Written by a prominent practitioner and critic of linguistically innovative poetry, it is all at once one of the most wide-ranging, detailed, theoretically-astute and eloquent monographs in its field.'

Warrant Error

John Muckle in *Eyewear*: 'its worked torsions, devilishly sour humour and relentless verbal ingenuity which drag you, nodding and shaking your head in unequal measure, through this brilliant, disquieting book.' <http://toddsswift.blogspot.co.uk/2010/08/guest-review-muckle-on-rowe-and.html>

4. Details of the impact

A number of impacts arose within the communities of practice and appreciation of British alternative poetics as they have developed since the 1980s. These poetics, which are constellated around the term 'linguistically innovative poetry', have been shaped by changes in the environment in which British poets have developed, produced and performed, and are marked by an increased willingness of poets to operate theoretically. Within these communities the work of **Sheppard** has had significant impact between January 2008 and July 2013.

Impact 1: Sheppard's poetic practice and poetics have contributed to the formal development of linguistically innovative poetry, via publishing and solo presentations and in collaboration with practitioners of other art forms and performance. **Sheppard** publishes (in magazines as well as in volumes listed in Section 3) and reads/performs work widely, including Bluecoat, Chapter and Verse Festivals (2008 and 2011), Liverpool, Tate Gallery, Liverpool, London literary venues, such as The Blue Bus, Crossing the Line and The Flat Time Gallery, as well as launches of his books for Shearsman; in Manchester at The Other Room and at several Knives, Forks and Spoons readings in the North West. He is well-known for his forceful spoken delivery. Recent performances have included revivals of work written with the concrete poetry pioneer Bob Cobbing (1920-2002). The revival of Cobbing's work generally owes much to Sheppard's championing of him, most notably through the special edition of *The Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry* (vol 4, no 2, Sept. 2012). Collaborative work (with the painter Pete Clarke) has been exhibited at Dundee Arts Centre, Scottish Royal Academy, the Scottish Poetry Library, as part of the 'Text Beyond Poetry' project, Kunstraum Dreizwanzig, Kölnand, and as part of the 'Re:Location' project in Novi Sad, Serbia, between 2011-13. One print was runner-up for the 2013 Adrian Henri Prize. He has collaborated on texts with Zoe Skoulding and Jeff Hilson, both performed at 'Camerades' events at the Cornerhouse, Manchester (2013) and Rich Mix, London (2012).

Of Sheppard's performance of his work, *Warrant Error*, in *Litter*, (Other Source 1) Alan Baker writes 'Introducing Sheppard at a reading in London, Tony Frazer said something to the effect that his work shows that political poetry can still be written in our times. I'd certainly agree; there's something liberating about reading poetry like this, in which the clichés and lies we're daily subjected to are appropriated, satirized and exposed, and yet which still finds space for the small human lives caught in these processes. It's political poetry of the first order'. The same critic writes of *The Given*, 'This is an impressive piece of work, but it's only one small piece of the output of this prolific and inventive writer, who is always looking for new ways to extend poetic expression, and whom most contemporary poets could learn something from'. (Other Source 2).

Impact case study (REF3b)

Writing in *The Wolf*, Christopher Madden (Other Source 3) remarks: '*He read with startling velocity, manifesting all the assurance of technique and voice of a poet who can add a substantial body of critical work to the armoury of his practice as a poet. None of the energy of his performance is lost when reading the poems yourself on the printed page; Sheppard is an astute technician of the performed and written voice, his poems crafted meticulously as if they were musical scores. But when the reader glances over these pages, it is not intimidation at the challenge of reading them that is keenly felt; rather, it is the openness of the lines, gesturing beyond their materiality to the world of the reader in ways not always evident in contemporary poetry*'.

Impact 2: Sheppard's work as critic and reviewer has contributed to greater awareness of the tenets of LIP. **Sheppard**, in addition to texts listed above, reviews poetry books and co-edits the *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, which has a readership within poetry communities, and (by title and contents) fosters understanding of literary innovation. He has spoken at academic conferences with a cross-over into the poetry world, such as The Small Press Conference at Salford University in 2012, but also at the Hay Poetry Jamboree in 2011, an independent gathering.

A fellow poet-critic Scott Thurston confirms Sheppard's influence and contribution, stating (Other Source 4) that '*Robert Sheppard ... is a key figure in the development of Innovative Poetry in the UK through his work as a poet, critic, editor, reviewer, publisher and lecturer. His critical study The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents 1950-2000 (2005) offers the most theoretically sophisticated account of the history of Innovative Poetry, including detailed examinations of the work of Roy Fisher, Bob Cobbing, Lee Harwood, Tom Raworth, Allen Fisher, Adrian Clarke, Ulli Freer and Maggie O'Sullivan.... Aside from his critical work, Sheppard has also been influential in the use of the term poetics in literary-critical work....Sheppard's major achievement as a poet is his long work Twentieth Century Blues*'.

Alongside influencing the work of fellow poets, Sheppard's poetry has shaped the work of artists including one who works collaboratively with Sheppard on a regular basis. This artist was invited to take part in a project looking at the relationship between how we read poetry. Artists and writers were commissioned to work together and this show 'Poetry beyond Text' went out in Dundee and then in Edinburgh in 2011. The artist confirmed he got this work as a result of previous work with Sheppard. (Statement 1)

Impact 3. Sheppard's work as poet-critic and poetry organiser has fostered the careers of a number of established and emerging poets, small press publishers and events organisers, all working on or with *linguistically innovative poetry*. The Poetry and Poetics Research Group (PPRG) at Edge Hill, which **Sheppard** initiated, has engendered, nurtured and facilitated the development of poets well-known and active in the poetry community. Publications and organising by members include Joanne Ashcroft winning the Purple Moose Prize 2012, the prize being that her chapbook *Love Songs for Mina Loy* was published by Seren, a follow up to her 2011 KFS book *From Parts Becoming Whole*; Matt Fallaize's *Delete* (KFS, 2011); Andrew Taylor's myriad of pamphlets collected in *Radio Mast Horizon* (Shearsman, 2013); Tom Jenks' *Items* (if p then q, 2013); and Lindsey Holland's *Particle Soup* (KFS, 2012). Much of this work has been discussed in terms of practice and poetics at PPRG meetings. Taylor co-edits Erbacce Press and magazine (and occasional readings). Michael Egan runs Holdfire Press (and occasional readings). Jenks co-runs The Other Room reading series. Holland runs North West Poets, an umbrella group for poets in the region and co-edited its loco-specific anthology *Sculpted* (North West Poets, 2013). The PPRG organised the April 2013 one day conference on Literary Collaboration which drew in poets and artistic collaborators from the region and enabled them to further the poetics of their collaborative work. The PPRG works in tandem with the reading series **Sheppard** has been running at the Rose Theatre since 1997.

A number of people interviewed to inform this case study confirmed the contributions that **Sheppard** and his work have made to the vitality of the field and the work of those active within it. An editor of an independent press in Bristol notes: '*Since relocating to the north-west, a lot of people have gravitated towards Rob and the region and he has provided validation for people who might have struggled in this genre otherwise [...] Unlike other poets Robert doesn't seek to promote clones of himself. Work that has come out of his students has been startlingly good and original and has moved the agenda commercially and artistically - see people like Scott Thurston for example. Rob has given these people an example of where they would like to go with their*

Impact case study (REF3b)

careers. Rob provides an example for young poets such as these [...] Rob influences the industry through various events and conferences, including those held at The Bluecoat and various readings in Wales that often attract 40 to 50 people'. (Statement 2).

A fellow poet-critic reported of **Sheppard**: 'I would not have pursued my career had it not been for Rob, it is no overstatement to say I would not have become the writer I am [...] Rob taught me how to approach publishers, he taught me what I need to do to be a commercial writer - he is very good at bridging the gap between academia and commercial activities [...] The events held at the Rose Theatre within the Ormskirk campus of Edge Hill have been very influential on the industry. Anybody who is anybody within the genre has been to these readings - I include Alec Newman of Knives Forks and Spoons Press in that. Rob, in terms of stimulating public debate, is highly influential.' (Statement 3)

A poet-editor remarked that **Sheppard** has, 'Certainly had an impact on my life as a poet. Rob has been highly influential by introducing me to writers and other individuals who are interested in innovative poetry (note: within REF impact time frames) that have shaped my career [...] It is not an overstatement to say that I have the career I have as a result of my relationship with Rob.' (Statement 4).

A survey of members of the Poetry and Poetics Research Group, past and present 1999-2013 (11 respondents of 14 group members)

Members of the Poetry and Poetics Research Group, past and present (from 1999-2013) were surveyed. Nine agreed that being in the Group had made them more aware of the tenets of linguistically innovative poetry and that they had a better understanding of British poetry.

The writings of Robert **Sheppard** were well known to the participants both creative and critical. 'From the creative texts I learned about contemporary linguistically innovative poetry in relation to one writer's practice and output. The critical texts increased my knowledge of the history (literary, social and cultural) and practices in what has come to be called linguistically innovative poetry.' Another wrote: 'Robert Sheppard is at the forefront of British poetry. His cataloguing of important poets is much needed and will be vital for future generations.' Another wrote: 'They (the outputs) have significantly widened my awareness and appreciation of innovative British poetry and have had an important influence on my own work as a poet.'

Asked about the significance of the term linguistically innovative poetry, at least four members defined themselves as linguistically innovative poets, one noting 'integral to my practice', another, 'shaped my own practice'. 'It's given me more possibilities,' reflected another. All members agreed that attendance at the PPRG had affected or changed their writing practice; 'a forum to explore and experiment to develop my practice as a writer (poetry and poetics)' as one put it. 'I have presented work at a developmental stage at the PPRG that has since been published in book form', and another: 'Robert Sheppard has been influential in the way I write poetry.' (Other source 5)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Factual Statements

1. Painter, print-maker, Interview November 2013 – impact on own work, career.
2. Editor, Shearsman Books, Interview November 2013 – contribution to vitality of the field and to the work of those active within it.
3. Poet-Critic, Interview November 2013 – as above.
4. Poet-Editor, Erbacce Press, Interview November 2013 – impact on own career as a poet.

Other Sources

1. Review of *Warrant Error*. <http://www.leafepress.com/litter2/litterbug02/litterbug-sheppard.html>;
2. Review of *The Given*, Litter: <http://www.leafepress.com/litter5/sheppardBaker/bakerSheppard.html>
3. Christopher Madden in *The Wolf* 26, spring 2012
4. Scott Thurston in 'Innovative Poetry in Britain Today': 'Innovative poetry in Britain today' *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* (60) pp. 15-30. <http://usir.salford.ac.uk/10251/>
5. Survey results available on request