**What kind of evidence are poetry sound archives?**

**The BBC's Poetry Broadcasts: Institutional Politics and Performance Practices.**

The last decades have seen a huge increase in the number of poetry sound archives available, across multiple languages and poetry cultures. From the early trailblazing work of PennSound and UBUWeb, through to more recent initiatives including *Archives Sonores de la Poésie* itself, some of which have been supported by large institutions, some collectively compiled, and some the work of an individual's dedication, scholars can now draw on an extensive and easily accessible corpus of recordings. It is safe to say that poetry scholarship has not yet caught up with this new development. The following is a preliminary attempt to think through the way that these archives could shape poetry scholarship. While this pertains most directly to work on contemporary poetry cultures, and of those poets whose work is archived, it raises broader questions for the theorisation of poetic sound.

To this end, I will ask a single question: what can poetry sound archives tell us? In other words, what kind of *evidence* do they constitute? To do this, I will take as my case study one particular archival site: that of the BBC. Some of its archive is written (available at the BBC Written Archives Centre), some digitised (the BBC's Genome project [genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/] contains all entries to the *Radio Times*, the BBC's radio and TV listings magazine, from 1922 to 2009), and some auditory (including the public-facing website hosted by the Poetry Archive: *The BBC 100 Collection*: https://poetryarchive.org/keystones/bbc-100/).

Poetry Archive's BBC 100 Collection contains BBC poetry broadcasts from a century of poetry broadcasting: it is a curated cross-section of the BBC's sound archive, and as such focusing on breadth rather than depth [full disclosure: I was one of the researchers-curators]. Like most poetry sound archives, and in keeping with the Poetry Archive's own policy, the collection prioritises poems read in the poet's own voice. This is not always possible: in its first few decades the BBC did not routinely archive recordings due to the constraints of cost, technological capacity, and space for archiving; the Poetry Archive site gets round this by including some recordings from actors, or other poets, reciting poems from early broadcasts. Yet this immediately raises two problems, one specific to the BBC, and one methodological for the kind of evidence that poetry sound archives can constitute.

Regarding the BBC itself: while what is archived is predominantly the readings of contemporary poets, it is important to note that a substantial amount of the BBC's poetry output was made up of readings from the history of poetry; and these are also the most successful in terms of audience engagement. The poetry magazine 'Time For Verse' ran from October 1945 to April 1978, and this was replaced by 'Poetry Please!' in 1979, which is reputed to be the longest-running poetry programme in the world, and was last broadcast in February 2023. Another programme, 'Words and Music', has run since 2007 on Radio 3, interspersing readings of poems with music related (sometimes obliquely) to the poems themselves. The initial programmes were linked to a specific author or poem, but some they become arranged thematically: topics include 'Birdsong' (21 Dec 2008), 'Epiphany' (8 Jan 2012), and, more surprisingly, 'in Hirsute of the Truth' ('A sequence of poetry, prose and music on the theme of that object of commerce and symbol of virility - hair', 17 Feb 2013).[[1]](#footnote-1) A marker of the success of 'Words and Music' is that for its 2011/2012 season it was moved from a late-night slot to the prime-time Sunday early evening slot, and re-runs of earlier episodes have also had prime-time slots. So while several BBC producers over the last century have worked tirelessly to nurture new poetries, bring them to new audiences, and have sought to experiment with broadcast media, a story which focuses on poetry broadcasting of contemporary poems alone--and in the poets' own voices--misses out a key aspect of the BBC's poetry broadcasting policy.

However, it is the second, methodological question, that will concern me here. What happens when we privilege the voice of poets over other voices in our archives?[[2]](#footnote-2) Alessandro Mistrorigo provides a powerful rationale for using the voice of poets for his own archive *Phonodia* (which brings together the voices of contemporary Hispanophone poets whom he has recorded over the last decade).[[3]](#footnote-3) In this, he contrasts Reuven Tsur's analyses of the performances of actors reciting poems to Charles Bernstein's account of the poet's voice as 'the poem's entry into the world'.[[4]](#footnote-4) While Tsur's interest is on the cognitive processes involved in the *interpretation* of a poetic text, using recitation to read back into the poems the cognitive demands they make on reading, Mistrorigo argues that recordings of poets provide two key forms of evidence. The first, following Bernstein, is that voice is not simply the *destination* of a textual poem, but also its *starting point*. The second, more pragmatic argument, is that poets are, 'in regard to whatever text, not only linguistically, but also poetically competent readers' (95). They provide better insights into how the poems work than actors, simply because they understand better how poems work (as well as having particular insights into how their own poems work).[[5]](#footnote-5)

Yet it is difficult to support Bernstein's claim that the voice is quite simply the point of entry of poem into world, for several reasons. Most glaringly, in positing the voice as an origin for a written poem, it falls into precisely the kind of metaphysical projection of a self-present subjectivity that Derrida diagnoses in the 'phonologism' of *Le voix et le phenomène*.[[6]](#footnote-6) More practically, it presumes a specific mode of composition that not all poets will share. Finally, this onus on the poem's 'entry into the world' would disregard the fact that when poets read their own work, they too are interpreting the poem: one of the great advantages of sound archives with multiple readings of the same poem is to demonstrate how the contingencies of the recitation (broadcast, public performance, personal recording, etc.) shape the recitation itself, just as a poet's perception of their own poem will change over time, as they see things in it that hadn't occurred to them at the time of composition. And, given that they have both linguistic and poetic competence, poets can also be excellent readers of *others'* poems.

Finally, I would add that there is a danger in archiving poets' voices that one replicates that unthinking cult of the author always latent in so-called 'archive fever': the excitement of deciphering an author's handwriting, of touching the manuscripts, or now, of listening to their voice (an auditory rather than manual 'signature'): auratic objects that reflect the author's own aura. Such archiving brings together two developments in recent humanities scholarship. The first, arising in part from the dominance of an historicist empiricism which aligns objectivity with objects, and a political economy of academia where funding bodies direct the kinds of research that take place, places the archive as the privileged site of truth about literary texts. And the second, linked to identitarian modes of thought prevalent outside as well as inside the academy, identifies the person of the author with the subject positions they are assigned and thus necessarily read the author's work through their personhood thus defined: the archive now a privileged site of truth as it provides tangible evidence of that person. The current cult of the author no doubt has a certain nostalgia to it, given the dismantling of codes of authorship through new modes of writing (such as fan fiction or narrative universes) which prioritise the community of readers/writers, and the 'IP', over individual author, as well as the development of generative AI. But its metaphysical and political commitments should give us pause.

My fundamental concern is that the focus on the author's voice leaves the poem itself ill-served, as one underappreciates the plasticity of the poem's own 'voice'. Where for some poets--notably performance poets, or those working in slam or spoken word genres--there isn't a 'text' independent from authorial performance, and any alternative performance of the poem would be akin to a 'cover version', text-based poems live only on condition of escaping their authors' voice and being released into its future voicings. The poem's 'voice', one might say, exists neither 'in' the text *nor* 'in' a single vocalization, but rather in a virtual space between the two: each text gestures towards an inexhaustible range of potential voicings (or perhaps 'soundings', in the sense of 'sounding out' as well as 'bringing into sound'). This includes both the poem's affordances for, and its constraints on, any single voicing: not just in the sense that to make one interpretive choice necessarily discounts others, but also in the sense that any voicing/sounding comes up against the finitude of an individual human body, negotiating the demands made on breath, intonation, prosody, as well as interpretation. Any single voicing is just one provisional articulation of the affordances of the poem.[[7]](#footnote-7) A poetry sound archive restricted to authors' voices risks constraining the poem by closing it off to the plurality of its voicings/soundings.

Paradoxically perhaps, this is especially the case when we turn to prosody--the very area where a sound archive might otherwise have the most transformative potential. Because the prosodic dimension of a single voicing is inextricably embedded within a broader interpretive approach: our phrasing, or emphasis, does not so much reflect a hermeneutic 'sense' but rather participates in an act of 'sense-making'--we make sense of the poem by bringing it into sense. A sound archive that would grasp poetic prosody would need a corpus that contains a plurality of readings before it could start with the synoptic work of identifying and extracting prosodic features from sound files. Of course, such an archive would be of incredible value for poetic prosody to start mining the possibilities offered by computational models. But to conflate that archive with the current work towards archiving poets' voices would be a category error.

There is, however, another kind of evidence which archives of poets' voices are better served to provide: that is, evidence of the poetry cultures out of which they emerge. Who is recorded, when, in what context: archives tell us about performance practices, broadcasting policies, networks and coteries, and institutions of patronage--including, of course, the universities themselves which host readings, endow fellowships, set up creative writing courses, and then direct resources towards the production and maintenance of the poetry sound archives from which we derive our analyses. Indeed, the focus on the poet's voice for poetry sound archives can hardly be extricated from the role that archives play within these networks and institutions of patronage; nor from the professionalization of the poet since the mid-twentieth century.

In the below, I will make some provisional observations based on the archives of BBC poetry broadcasts, between the Written Archives Centre, the Genome Project, and the various available recordings, some of which are publicly accessible via the Poetry Archive, some of which are only available at listening posts within the British Library's sound booths.[[8]](#footnote-8) To this end, I will discuss two different kinds of broadcast from the 1960s. The first is a series, 'The Living Poet'; the second is a single recording of a very different programme: 'Sono-Montage', a collaboration between the poet Rosemary Tonks, the producer George MacBeth, and the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop.[[9]](#footnote-9) What kinds of evidence do these provide?

Poetry on the BBC: New Poetry for the New Audience

From its early years, the BBC sought to nurture new poetry: not simply in the sense of providing a broadcast platform for recently published poems, but by developing a new kind of poetry, composed specifically for broadcast rather than treating broadcast as secondary to print. This desire was voiced as early as 1930 by John Masefield, newly appointed Poet Laureate, in a letter to *The Listener*, the BBC's magazine dedicated to culture and ideas. His letter began with an image of an Ancient bard performing their poems to a rapt audience: an oral origin from which the history of Western poetry was one of decline. This decline was characterized by the dominance print; while the greatest poetry in the era of writing is 'often exquisite with literary artifice', this comes at the expense of 'indifference to vital form'. Modern poetry ceases to be a means of binding together a community and becomes a 'less moving thing', and ultimately a 'hateful school task'. But radio broadcasting, Masefield suggested, was bringing about a new orality, enlivening millions to the power of the human voice. For now, the poems being recited on the radio had been written for silent reflection rather than recitation; but Masefield suggested that the new broadcast technologies might ‘give to poets (especially to young poets), the chance to work at forms and constructions of verse fitter for speaking’. Masefield closes: ‘Will not the broadcasting authorities call in the poets to create what they alone can create, the new poetry for the new audience?’[[10]](#footnote-10)

Masefield had been in communication with BBC producers from as early as 1927, and his commitment to the 'speaking' of poetry long preceded this. He had set up Oxford Recitations, a competition for poetry recitals, in 1923, and being a founder member of the Scottish Association for the Speaking of Verse in 1924. In 1937, the conversation was still in progress, but no closer to being resolved satisfactorily: one internal memo, by G.R. Barnes, the BBC's Director of 'Talks', from 22 November of that year, shares Masefield's enthusiasm for 'The broadcasting of unpublished poems by contemporaries, provided they are written to be heard and not simply to be read'; but it worried that the audience for these broadcasts 'would have to be won before we could experiment in this way.'[[11]](#footnote-11)

The attempts to 'win' such an audience, however, were unsuccessful. The late 1930s and early 1940s saw experiments with programmes such as 'Poets' Pub' (poets in the pub) and 'Poetry for Everyman'; these did not satisfy poetry aficionados, but nor did they bring in healthy audiences.[[12]](#footnote-12) Another internal memo, from 20 September 1941, argued that these attempts at making poetry accessible were self-defeating:

… we have for some time been misconceiving our proper poetry policy, which might be taken to show some lack of faith on our own part in the merits of poetry as an art. If we believe that English poetry is one of the greatest achievements of the English genius (do you prefer 'British'?) why should we not have the courage of our convictions and survey it without excuse in all its quality at chosen intervals?[[13]](#footnote-13)

Thus a key faultline opens up, between broadcasts that seek to incorporate poems into appealing radio format, and broadcasts that let the poems speak for themselves. In the coming years, the BBC would broadcast a small number of programmes dedicated to a single poet reading a selection of new work, or even a single long poem; yet by and large the preferred formats remained those of the personal anthology (a publicly recognisable individual reads poems important to them), the 'mosaic' (mixtures of words and music), a magazine (short features, discussion as well as readings, almost like a highbrow chat-show).

'The Living Poet' is striking because it is the first time that the BBC find a title and format for the 'poems-speak-for-themselves' model, and then stick to it: it ran from January 1960, on a monthly(ish) basis, until 1991. The programme comprised of nothing more than a poet introducing and then reading a small number of poems, or having them read by a different reader (an actor, or in some cases another poet).

What kind of *evidence* does 'The Living Poet' give us? Firstly, we might ask why, after so many false starts, the title/format now actually sticks. One part of this answer is institutional: there was now a critical mass of producers at the BBC committed to broadcasting new poetry, and retaining the format; moreover, with the expansion of BBC channels and the development of commercial radio, minority-interest broadcasts (such as poetry broadcasts) had less pressure around listening figures.[[14]](#footnote-14)

But it is also evidence of changes in the poetry culture itself, and in particular the increased significance of the public poetry reading. Producers could indicate an audience for this kind of format. And it is evidence of how gradual a process this was. Even though the public reading was becoming a far more prevalent event, 'The Living Poet' shows us how gradual a process this was. Today we take the poet reading their own work as a default mode of transmission, well into the 1970s The Living Poet would have the poets introduce their work, but then use specialist readers (normally actors, but sometimes a different poet) to read the poems.[[15]](#footnote-15) The Living Poet allowed the poem to live through another's voice; but the presence of the poet during the reading was indispensable. Nevertheless, looking at the format of 'The Living Poet' can map the clear trend towards the poet reading their own work. In 1963 George Mackay Brown was accompanied by an actor; when he returned to the programme in the late 1970s, he read alone. 'The Living Poet' documents the shift in the UK's poetry culture towards identifying the person of the poet with the poem's voice. By contrast, all five broadcasts of The Living Poet dedicated to US poets (Richard Wilbur, Theodor Roethke, Robert Lowell, Randall Jarrell, Stanley Kunitz) were taken from public readings given by the poets themselves.

The public poetry reading was becoming integral not only to poets' social lives but to their livelihoods: spaces for networking, for reaching new audiences and patrons, and so the BBC became a key institution of patronage.[[16]](#footnote-16) The Living Poet began as 20-minute segments, normally the final transmission of a Sunday evening; by the 1970s their duration was 40 minutes: substantial exposure for one poet. But this also meant that the selection of the poets determined who reached audiences, and who slipped into obscurity. Here, a clear pattern emerges, that shows how imbricated the BBC producers were with a larger poetry establishment, and particular affiliations.

So what does its editorial policy tell us? In its first three years, twenty UK-based poets were featured on 'The Living Poet'. Of these, two were BBC employees: Anthony Thwaite and George MacBeth. Thwaite was also a member of 'The Movement', a coterie that had come to dominate British poetry in the late 1950s, notably thanks to members of that coterie obtaining positions as editors of key literary supplements, cultural magazines, and publishers; Thwaite's role at the BBC thus contributed to a wider march through the institutions.[[17]](#footnote-17) MacBeth, who was also on the BBC's own Poetry Committee, was a member of a different, but linked, coterie: 'The Group', a network of like-minded poets who met regularly to workshop each other's work. As you can imagine from their rather laconic names, the two coteries shared aesthetic and ideological commitments,[[18]](#footnote-18) as well as institutional affiliations: The Movement was founded by like-minded undergraduates at Oxford in the 1940s, while The Group's first incarnation was among Cambridge undergraduates in the early 50s.[[19]](#footnote-19) In this regard, the BBC (whose main roles were populated by Oxbridge graduates) aggregated and magnified the positions of influence at work within the literary scene, and so strengthened the hegemonic positions of these two coteries.

The Movement is far better known today than The Group, though one could make an argument that The Group has had a more lasting impact on British poetry. Philip Hobsbaum, its 'chairman',[[20]](#footnote-20) organized their meetings by having poets circulate and read a small number of poems, which were then submitted to critical discussion by their peers: what is now utterly recognizable as a creative writing workshop. After he left London to take up a lectureship at Queen's University, Belfast, Hobsbaum founded the 'Belfast Group', whose poets included Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon (both BBC employees), Michael Longley... the most prominent Northern Irish poets of that generation, and perhaps the most prominent generation Northern Irish poetry has ever known.

The earliest incarnation of The Group was as 'A small gathering of undergraduates [who] met intermittently to practise the speaking of verse and, by natural gradation, the speaking of verse which was their own.'[[21]](#footnote-21) It is fitting therefore that they should have taken so quickly to radio (they make up an even higher proportion of the guests on 'The Poet's Voice'). But it also means that The Living Poet departs from the aesthetics of those US poets, such as Ezra Pound, Langston Hughes, Anne Sexton, Allen Ginsberg, who had provided the poetry reading with such impetus. These poets embraced the oratorical, the vatic, the confessional, the performative; by contrast, the British poets featured on The Living Poet's come across as rather sober, and the primary mode they inhabit is the dramatic monologue ('poetry is regarded as a function of speech', Lucie-Smith explains).[[22]](#footnote-22) None of the British poets who read alongside Allen Ginsberg et al The International Poetry Incarnation at the Royal Albert Hall on 1 June 1965, a cultural watershed in the history of poetry readings in the UK, had previously been featured on The Living Poet.[[23]](#footnote-23)

It is also significant that 'The Living Poet' was a recitation of text-based poems; it respected the primacy of print. If the initial hopes of poets such as Masefield, and BBC commissioners, had been that radio might create new poetries, then 'The Living Poet' seems to be a disappointment. However, the success of the Albert Hall reading did lead to a shift in BBC editorial policy. Peter Redgrove and George MacBeth, both members of The Group, were also key figures in one of the most significant radio-poetry experiments the BBC broadcast during the 1960s.

'Sono-Montage', a selection of nine poems, was arranged by the poet Rosemary Tonks with the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop (it was produced by MacBeth and featured poems and readings from Redgrove). The Radiophonic Workshop was founded to provide sound effects for radio and TV shows - it is perhaps best known for the Doctor Who theme tune - but from the first it collaborated with poets. The surrealist poet David Gascoyne provided the text for 'Night Thoughts'; music was composed by Humphrey Searle. It was first aired in December 1955, repeated in July 1956, but, despite its success, the tape was destroyed. So in 1966 it was re-recorded, with much the same cast. 'Night Thoughts' was structured as a drama in verse with musical accompaniment and radiophonic effects; 'Sono-Montage', by contrast, was arranged as a poetry reading. Individual poems are read and then submitted to sound effects such as feedback and echo, speeding up and slowing down, and thus become a platform for the technical virtuosity of the Radiophonic Workshop.

These are still not works composed specifically for radio, but rather works initial composed for print and subsequently set to radio. The radiophonic performance is more like a transmediation or a setting-to-music than like a recitation: words and phrases are extracted and repeated, the flow of verse is interrupted to fit the sound effects rather than the prosody or the sense. In this, the radio programme sets up tensions between the prosody implied by the verse, and the rhythms of the sound effects themselves. In addition, the recording proceeds by extracting particular words or phrases and submitting them to different effects: the recording thus stages a disjunction between the poetry reading, and the radiophonic experiments, as though the programme is groping towards an integrated whole.[[24]](#footnote-24)

And just as we saw a series of paradoxes in the idea of a 'Living Poet', so Sono-Montage engages paradoxes around its exploration of voice. For the recording's explorations of Tonks's reading voice proceed through prosthetic distortions of this voice, so it simultaneously draws its listener's focus to the individual, embodied speaking voice, and to the techniques of manipulating the voice, making it strangely inhuman as well as humanly vulnerable. The 'Living Poet', we saw, lives as the poet inhabits different speakers than themselves, and yet their personal presence remains crucial; here, the human voice is made present, unattached from persona or character, transformed into 'pure voice', but only as a machinic double of itself. Here too, radio does not return poetry to the human voice, but rather becomes a different prosthesis for the voice of poetry, both human and un-human.

In this, 'Sono-Montage' provides an extra kind of evidence: of the technological capabilities available at the time, and the ways that sonic experiment had (or had not) been incorporated into poetic practice: a medium for adaptation or transmediation rather than a compositional resource. And while 'The Living Poet' as a format would endure until the early 1990s, 'Sono-Montage' was a one-off. In this too it serves as a kind of evidence: of the difficulty of conceptualizing of poetry composed for radio as auditory medium -- that 'new poetry for the new audience' -- instead of remaining within a text-based model of poems.

And here too, the sound archive offers evidence on the strain placed on the notion of poem as 'text'. On the one hand, such archives invite us to posit a before-text in the poet's voice; on the other, they impress upon us the virtuality of the voice of any text-based poem. They both unsettle the dominance of print, and show the tenacity of print both within poets' practices and our own conceptualization of the poem. In this way, the archives not only document specific poetry cultures--whether networks and coteries, or approaches to performance and broadcast--but also enliven us to the aesthetic and ideological values in play in that culture, and even the metaphysical assumptions about what a poem is or can be: in the BBC's corpus one can see the cultural primacy of poem's text reassert itself just where the possibilities of freeing poetic voice from the text become most apparent. These assumptions are most evident, moreover, not through conscious performance choices or policy decisions, but in the contradictions that the archives continually put on display: once we see them not simply as evidence of objects and people, but also as prompts for theoretical reflection.

1. For this particular programme, see the Genome record: https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/b01qqfhr. Last accessed 29 May 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For the purposes of this essay, I will focus on this question for text-based poems: that is, poems whose textual existence is distinct from any singular performance, and where scholarly criticism predominantly takes the form of textual analysis. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The archive is available at https://pric.unive.it/progetti/phonodia/home. Last accessed 29 May 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Alessandro Mistrorigo, 'Phonodia: La voce dei poeti e l'uso delle registrazioni', in Lorenzo Cardilli and stefano Lombardi Vallauri (eds.), *L'arte orale: Poesia, musica, performance* (Turin: Accademia University Press, 2020), 91-106, 94-5. See Bernstein, *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (New York: OUP, 1988), 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For the sake of argument, we'll leave aside here the observation that some poets are famously terrible readers of their own work: writing and performing are distinct skillsets. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Given the rigorous anti-authorial-intention statements central to Language poetry (and its descendant, Conceptual Writing), it is a constant surprise how many of its claims and artistic gestures fall back on the person and action of the poet-figure. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. On this, see my *On Voice in Poetry* (Palgrave, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This dispersal of the BBC's broadcasting archive can also be understood as 'evidence': of the different institutional and cost pressures on hosting a publicly accessible digital archive: costs of digitisation of recordings, but also the negotiation of rights, which at the BBC would involve not just the poets' own intellectual property but the IP of producers, editors, and the Corporation itself. Then there are the incentives towards scarcity, for an organization which needs to continue to attract visits to the programmes it hosts on BBC Sounds and iPlayer, or re-uses in edited form for new programming. And of course, while the BBC has held a significant position within the UK's poetry culture of the last century, the reverse can hardly be said: poetry has made up a fraction of BBC programming, even within its cultural programming, so the complications of making its poetry sound archive freely accessible are hardly worth the pay-off. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Broadcast on BBC Network Three at 22:15 on 21 June 1966. 45 minute broadcast. Full Radio Times entry: https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/75bda0da96a5422aa942052da065452d. Last accessed 29 May 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. John Masefield, 'Broadcasting and Poetry', in *The Listener* vol. 4 Issue 102, p. 1056. Wednesday 24 Dec., 1930. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. BBC Written Archives Centre, R19/933/1. This memo might agree, by and large, with Masefield's analysis, it is less than forgiving of Masefield's own broadcasting efforts: 'The Poet Laureate is not a good broadcast reader, even of his own work.' So much for his enthusiasm for the correct speaking of verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Poetry for Everyman had an initial audience share of 5.4% (15 May 1942), but by its third episode that share had dropped to 3%. BBC Written Archives Centre, R51/394/1**.** [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. V. Salmon to G.R. Barnes. Such exceptionalist claims about the English poetic tradition are not unrepresentative of how BBC producers (and indeed presenters) have discussed the need to provide high-quality poetry broadcasts, but the patriotism on display here surely in part issues from this being wartime, where the BBC's cultural programming was playing a role towards national self-confidence. BBC Written Archives Centre, R51/394/1**.** [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The Third Programme, the BBC's dedicated Arts/Culture station, first went on air on 29 September 1946. It immediately attempted some ambitious poetry broadcasts: a series called *The Poet and the Critic* (first broadcast 26 October 1946) included critics assessing the work of a poet, before the poet had right of reply, while the producer Douglas Cleverdon adapted David Jones's long poem, *In Parenthesis*, as a radio drama, which was broadcast on 19 November 1946. See Humphrey Carpenter with Jennifer Doctor, *The Envy of the World: Fifty Years of the BBC Third Programme and Radio 3, 1946-1996* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1996), 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Another poetry programme of this same moment focused exclusively on poets reading their own (unpublished) work, in a social, magazine format; it ran irregularly from 1956 to 1965 (a total of 32 episodes), shifting its title between 'The Poet's Voice', 'New Poetry', and on one occasion 'Poetry Now'. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. In addition to providing a platform through broadcast, the BBC had been an employer of poets for a long time: from Louis Macneice to Una Marson, Peter Porter to Seamus Heaney. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. In Ian Hamilton's phrase, 'it was a take-over bid and it brilliantly succeeded.' 'The Making of the Movement', in Michael Schmidt and Grevel Lindop eds., *British Poetry Since 1960: A Critical Survey* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1972), 70-73; 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. A caveat to this is that the Group was much more linked by *process* than by aesthetics. Roger Garfitt has argued that '[t]he Group never had the stylistic cohesion of the Movement, and never wanted it,' and as we will see below, Group members would support very different kinds of poetic experiment. 'The Group', in Schmidt and Lindop eds., *British Poetry Since 1960*, 13-69; 13-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. In his account of The Group's development, Edward Lucie-Smith is at pains to clarify that it quickly outgrew its Cambridge origins (he himself studied at Oxford): 'Some of the most important of the members had not been to either Oxford or Cambridge, and a few had no university education at all,' in *The Group: An Exhibition of Poetry* (University of Reading Press, 1974), 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. This was the term given him by another prominent member, Edward Lucie-Smith, 'Foreword', in *A Group Anthology* eds. Hobsbaum and Lucie-Smith (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), v. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Philip Hobsbaum, in *The Group: An Exhibition of Poetry*, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Lucie-Smith, 'Foreword', viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. A half-hour programme of recordings from the Poetry Incarnation was broadcast on BBC on 19 August 1965, and at 19:30, instead of the habitual late-night slot. Radio Times record: https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/d8c1d97d7a9447bf92d71d657d8c79db. Last accessed 29 May 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. An excerpt from Sono-Montage is available at the Poetry Archive BBC 100 Collection. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)