

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Aberdeen
Unit of Assessment: English Language and Literature
Title of case study: <i>The Penguin Book of Irish Poetry</i>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study describes the reception and impact of Patrick Crotty's <i>Penguin Book of Irish Poetry</i> (2010), an unprecedentedly capacious anthology drawn from many languages and seventeen centuries of poetic composition in Ireland. The anthology presents poems in modern English and Scots alongside verse translations from Middle English, Old French, Old, Middle, Classical and Modern Irish, Latin and Old Norse. Many of the book's specially commissioned translations are by internationally renowned poets. The study considers responses to the anthology terms of its high sales, wide range of reviews, coverage by news media, and engendering of public events.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p><i>The Penguin Book of Irish Poetry</i>, as Nick Laird observed in the <i>Guardian</i>, represents 'the gleanings of a lifetime's reading'. Some of the research underlying the book led to such outputs as Crotty's 27,000-word chapter on 'Poetry 1890-1940' in <i>The Cambridge History of Irish Literature</i> (2006), and his essay on connections between eighteenth-century Irish Gaelic verse and Scottish poetry in Sergeant and Stafford's <i>Burns and Other Poets</i> (2012). Among the poems which the anthology reproduces are forgotten or neglected pieces in English. The book presents a broader range of Gaelic and Hiberno-Latin verse than any previous anthology. It is based on first-hand linguistic scholarship, and includes many works never before subject to literary translation. Unfamiliar poems from the four distinct phases of Irish are made available in new translations. The anthology's key contribution to the mediation of Gaelic literature can be found in its attention to the Classical ('bardic') poetry that dominated literary production in Gaelic Ireland and Scotland from the early thirteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries. The volume demonstrates for the first time that Latin poetry flourished in Ireland up to the end of the eighteenth century.</p> <p>The editor worked to deepen his knowledge through discussion and correspondence with such scholars as Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha of the National University of Ireland Galway (for the Gaelic materials) and Professors Peter Davidson and Jane Stevenson of Aberdeen (for the Latin texts). The new translations were to some degree collaborative, Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley and Maurice Riordan commenting on and improving the editor's contributions, and the editor working with those poets to achieve agreed versions of theirs. Crotty also worked with Kathleen Jamie, Bernard O'Donoghue, Kit Fryatt, Tiffany Atkinson, David Wheatley and the Harvard Celticist Professor Patrick K Ford on their translations.</p> <p>A major aspect of the scholarship emanating from Aberdeen's Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies over the past decade has been to question the utility of received national paradigms of Irish and Scottish cultural and historical experience. The anthology reflects that ethos in its treatment of Classical Irish poetry and its portrayal of verse in Scots, not just from Ulster but from eighteenth-century Munster. ('Poem Addressed to the Blessed Virgin', by the founder of the 'bardic' mode, Muireadhach Albanach Ó Dálaigh, may have been written in Scotland rather than Ireland, and appears in a specially commissioned and appropriately magisterial translation by a leading contemporary Scottish poet, Kathleen Jamie.) While the anthology tells a 'national tale' by arranging the texts in a way that facilitates an unfolding panorama of Irish history, its openness to a polyphony (and even a discord) of voices undermines simplistic nationalist and unionist constructions of Irish identity.</p> <p>The lengthy introduction, as Seamus Heaney noted in his speech at the launch in the Royal Irish Academy, is 'really a history of Irish poetry', the only such history to accommodate all the cultural and linguistic identities of the island from the coming of literacy in the fifth century AD to the recent past.</p>

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3. References to the research

The last four of the five items cited below drew to varying degrees on research initially undertaken for *The Penguin Book of Irish Poetry*. Author/editor is Patrick Crotty in each case.

- *The Penguin Book of Irish Poetry* (London: Penguin, 2010).
- 'Merry Ha'e We Been: The Midnight Visions of Brian Merriman and Robert Burns', in David Sergeant and Fiona Stafford, eds., *Burns and Other Poets* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 107-26.
- 'Swordsmen: W.B. Yeats and Hugh MacDiarmid', in Peter Mackay, Edna Longley and Fran Brearton, eds., *Modern Irish and Scottish Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 20-38.
- 'The Contexts of Heaney's Reception', in Bernard O'Donoghue, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 37-55.
- 'The Irish Renaissance, 1890-1940: Poetry in English', in Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary, eds., *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2: 50-113.

4. Details of the impact

The Penguin Book of Irish Poetry sold over 12,000 copies in its first three months (30 September to 31 December 2010), a considerably greater number than the publishers expected of such a large (1120 pp.) and expensive (£40) hardback. (Penguin initially envisaged a print-run of 5000.) The anthology featured in the Irish Top Ten Non-Fiction best-selling lists in October 2010. Sales of the hardback then slowed before the release of a paperback edition in March 2012, which has sold a further 1600 copies.

The book was reviewed in the *Daily Mail*, *Dublin Review of Books*, *Essays in Criticism*, *Financial Times*, *Independent*, *Irish Catholic*, *Irish Examiner*, *Irish Times*, *PN Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, the *Tablet* and *Times Literary Supplement*. It was the subject of two articles in the *Irish Times* and one in the *Guardian*. The volume was a Book of the Year in the *Independent*, *Scotland on Sunday*, the *Tablet* and the *Times Literary Supplement*.

The anthology was launched by Seamus Heaney (Nobel laureate) and Michael Longley (winner of the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry) at an event attended by 300 people at the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin. Highlights of the launch were broadcast on RTE Radio's *Morning Ireland*, main daily news and current affairs programme in the Irish Republic. Crotty was interviewed on Radio 3's *Night Waves*, RTE's *Arena* and BBC Radio Ulster's *Arts Extra*, pre-eminent radio arts programmes respectively in Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. He also gave interviews on one national and two local independent radio stations in Dublin. Publication of the paperback was marked by a half-hour discussion between critic Niall MacMonagle and host Pat Kenny on the 9 April 2012 (Easter Monday) edition of RTE Radio 1's *Today with Pat Kenny*.

The publicity surrounding the launch excited public debate about cultural identities, as when the SDLP MLA Conall McDevitt tweeted his surprise at the book's high estimate of the Ulster Scots poetry of James Orr (1770-1816). Such inclusivity towards multilingualism and Presbyterian heritage contributed to ongoing processes of memorialisation and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and to the intermittent controversy about the authenticity of Ulster Scots language and culture.

Roy Foster in the *Financial Times* described the book as 'much more than an anthology . . . an alternative history of Ireland'. Clair Wills in the *Irish Times* declared the editorial selection 'impossible not to admire', while Patricia Craig in the *Independent* wrote that 'this . . . magnificent anthology . . . achieves what might seem nearly impossible, a balanced view of Irish poetry from

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the earliest times to the present'. Timothy Webb in *Prairie Schooner* praised the 'compulsive. . . exuberance and energy' of the book's editorial vision.

Reviews drew attention to the Introduction, described as 'sterling' by Craig and as 'incisive and thoughtful' by Edward Larrissy (in *Essays in Criticism*), and said by Foster to mark Crotty's emergence 'as a formidably accomplished . . . critic'. Michael Glover in the *Tablet* called it 'tremendously informative . . . the best and fullest account I have ever read of the complicated history of poetry in Ireland: of its languages, the battle between Gaelic and English, the flight of the Bards – all . . . summarised masterfully and engrossingly'.

The structure of the book was another focus of attention. Craig said the volume was 'superbly organised', while Barra Ó Seaghdha in the *Dublin Review of Books* praised the 'scale' and 'architecture' of 'a fully realised, multi-storey edifice'. The editor's translations, too, elicited approbation, being described as 'wonderful' by Wills, and the work of a 'formidably accomplished translator as well as critic' by Foster. Gerard Mangan in the *Times Literary Supplement* observed that Crotty 'has risen to a very complex challenge in the sheer variety of voices he has recreated convincingly.'

A celebration of the book, featuring readings by the poet-translators Ciaran Carson, Bernard O'Donoghue and Kit Fryatt, was held on 23 May 2011 as part of Aberdeen's annual WORD festival. 'Conversations with an Irish Penguin', a public seminar on the recreation of early medieval Irish literature in the first section, was conducted by David Dumville, the University of Aberdeen's Professor of History, Paleography and Celtic, at the National University of Ireland Galway on 14 April 2012 and at Harvard University on 22 September 2012.

John Wyse Jackson claimed in the *Irish Catholic* that it would take a lifetime to absorb the riches of the anthology. The main impact of the work, a matter of a wide general readership's enhanced understanding of the literary, cultural and historical past of Ireland, will similarly be a long term affair.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact**Interviews**

1. Patrick Crotty interviewed by Philip Dodd, *Night Waves*, Radio 3, 22 September 2010.
2. Patrick Crotty interviewed by Rosita Boland, *Irish Times*, 4 October 2010.

Public Events

3. Launch at Royal Irish Academy, Dawson Street, Dublin, 30 September 2010.
4. 'Irish Poetry Event', with Patrick Crotty, Ciaran Carson, Bernard O'Donoghue and Kit Fryatt, *Word*, King's College Conference Centre, Aberdeen, 23 May 2011.

Features

5. 'Author, Author', article by Nick Laird, *Guardian*, 23 October 2010

Non-academic Reviews

6. Patricia Craig, *Independent*, 8 October 2010.
7. Clair Wills, *Irish Times*, 9 October 2010.
8. Roy Foster, *Financial Times*, 22 October 2010.
9. Gerald Mangan, *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 May 2011.
10. Timothy Webb, *Prairie Schooner*, Volume 85, Number 4, Winter 2011 (abstract of this review available from HEI on request)