

Institution: University of Reading
Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Enhancing the availability of poetry
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Through his practice-led research and active promotion of community-based poetry initiatives, the University of Reading's Peter Robinson has increased the availability of poetry at local, national and international levels. As a result of his work, poetry has been more prominently staged, explained and argued for in public forums, enhancing the cultural lives and wellbeing of individuals and communities. Economic impact has been achieved through Robinson's intervention in helping to secure the financial viability and boost the profile of a small publishing firm specialising in poetry, which in turn has improved the cultural life and self-esteem for the local community.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Long-term engagement and principles</p> <p>Peter Robinson, Professor of English and leader of the Poetry and Poetics Research Group at the University of Reading, bases his research on a life-long commitment to poetry, how it is written and how it is experienced by and involves the reader. These ideas inform his work as a producer of practice-based and other research, including the composition and translation of poetry, such as the 26-year project that led to his co-translation of <i>The Selected Poetry and Prose of Vittorio Sereni</i> (Chicago, 2006).</p> <p>On appointment to the University of Reading in 2007, Robinson introduced the publication of an annual creative arts anthology (drawing contributions from students, staff, local residents and visiting writers), produced the subsequent research outputs and engaged in the following research activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Composition of poetry and translation: Robinson composed original individual poems and books of poetry, such as <i>The Returning Sky</i> (2012), and translations of poetry from other languages, including collections of works by individual poets (such as <i>The Greener Meadow: Selected Poems of Luciano Erba</i>, 2007) and contributions to significant anthologies (such as <i>The FSG Book of Twentieth-Century Italian Poetry</i>, 2012). • Editing anthologies and other poets' collections: Such work included Robinson's <i>Complete Poetry, Translations & Selected Prose of Bernard Spencer</i> (2011), <i>Reading Poetry: An Anthology</i> (2011) and <i>A Mutual Friend: Poems for Charles Dickens</i> (2012). In addition, he edited books of poetry by Susan Utting, Lesley Saunders, Kate Behrens, Tom Phillips, A. F. Harrold, Claire Dyer and Jean Watkins (2012-13), four of which were first collections. Robinson also oversaw the publication of six student-edited and -designed <i>University of Reading Creative Arts Anthologies</i> (2008-13), including work by writers outside the university. • Scholarly poetry criticism: Robinson's outputs in this area included <i>Poetry & Translation: The Art of the Impossible</i> (2010), three edited collections of poetry criticism, and numerous articles on the relationships between readers, writers and poems and their impact on individuals, communities, poets and poetry writers. Examples include Robinson's multi-authored <i>Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry</i> (2013).

In addition to the above activities, Robinson organised readings, seminars, workshops, launches, conferences, exhibitions and the first Reading Poetry Festival, and established the English Association's national Poetry Network.

3. References to the research

- Peter Robinson, *The Returning Sky* (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2012). This was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation (Spring 2012), highly commended and anthologised by the Forward Prize judges 2013, and reviewed in *Agenda*, *Blackbox Manifold*, *London Magazine*, *Poetry London* and *Poetry Review* (which described Robinson as 'a major English poet').
- Peter Robinson (trans.), *The Greener Meadow: Selected Poems of Luciano Erba* (Princeton University Press, 2007). This was the winner of the John Florio Prize in 2008, reviewed in *Eyewear*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *PN Review*, *Stride*, *Testo a fronte*, and discussed in Matthew Reynolds, *The Poetry of Translation* (Oxford University Press, 2011), producing a commission to translate *Poems by Antonia Pozzi* (London: Oneworld Classics, 2011).
- Peter Robinson, *Poetry & Translation: The Art of the Impossible* (Liverpool University Press, 2010). This was reviewed in *TLS*, *Literature and Translation*, *Poetry London*, *Agenda*, leading to invitations for Robinson to lecture at the University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway (2012) and lead seminars at the Universities of East Anglia (2012) and York (2013).
- Bernard Spencer, *The Complete Poems, Translations & Selected Prose*, ed. Peter Robinson (Tasset: Bloodaxe Books, 2011). This was reviewed in the *Guardian*, *London Review of Books*, *TLS*, *PN Review*, *Poetry London*, *Stand* and *Use of English*, leading to an invitation for Robinson to speak at 'Bernard Spencer: Mystery Poet' hosted by the Stephen Spender Society at the Senate House, London (October 2012).
- Peter Robinson (ed.), *Reading Poetry: an Anthology* (Reading: Two Rivers Press, 2011). This contains poetry written by contemporary poets with close links to Reading. It was featured in *Berkshire Life* and at the Henley Literature Festival, was made a chosen text by a local reading group, and resulted in Robinson's work with HM Prison Reading (see Impact section below).
- Peter Robinson (ed.), *A Mutual Friend: Poems for Charles Dickens* (Reading: Two Rivers Press and the English Association, 2012). This contains poems by poets from the UK, and others from the USA and New Zealand. It was featured in a series of events during the 2012 Dickens Bicentennial in Reading, Manchester, Cambridge, Swindon and Hampstead, and at the Foundling Museum in central London.

4. Details of the impact

Robinson's 'availability of poetry' activities have articulated and underlined the value of poetry and encouraged the reading and writing of it at a variety of cultural levels and by a range of different age groups. This has helped to improve creative, emotional and moral wellbeing through close attention to the integration of accurate perception and truthful representation in appropriately structured language, qualities that help bring into mutual acknowledgement individual reading or writing minds, bodies, and the surrounding material and cultural world.

Impact on individuals

Impact case study (REF3b)

Particular impact has been felt by poets and poetry readers, students and enthusiasts, both locally and further afield, who have enjoyed and benefited from the increased focus on poetry that Robinson's activities have brought about.

Impact on the local economy

Robinson's activities have had a major positive impact on the fortunes of a small Reading publishing firm, Two Rivers Press, which was struggling after losing funding from Reading Borough Council and Arts Council England. Robinson's research-based commitment to the availability and efficacy of poetry led to him providing pro bono work as poetry editor, management committee member and poetry event organiser for the company. In the two financial years before he became involved (April 2008 to March 2010), revenue figures for Two Rivers Press were £11.5k and £10.2k respectively. In 2010-11, they rose to £14,296 and in 2011-12 to £28,589. Revenues for 2012-13 were £25,068. Revenues for Apr - Jul 2013 are: £9,715 (from the draft accounts) [1].

Total sales of poetry books have risen as follows: The books published in 2009 (4 titles) netted £1,700; 2010 (2 titles) = £2,711; 2011 (4 titles) = £5,950; 2012 (5 titles) = £5,058, 2013 (3 titles) to date = £2,772. (these numbers are calculated from the unit sales of books published in each year using a standard 60% net receipt).

Impact in the local community

- Robinson further boosted the profile of local poetry publication with the anthology *A Mutual Friend: Poems for Charles Dickens* ed. Peter Robinson (Two Rivers Press and the English Association, 2012), including a series of well-attended readings [2].
- Robinson initiated and led the organisation of the first Reading Poetry Festival (2013) - five days of events including a children's poetry day, a centenary symposium on Vittorio Sereni, two days of conversations with poets on themes derived from the Poetry and Poetics Group's research, as well as readings by local, national and international poets. In feedback, the festival was described as 'a great opportunity to broaden horizons, meet a wider range of poets and to discuss poetry' [3]. Such was its success that the event will become an annual one, with a broadened international reach.
- Robinson's work has benefited marginalised groups such as prisoners. He collaborated with The Reader Organisation in HM Prison Reading, where he took part in a reading and writing workshop with prisoners aged 18-21. The Reader in Residence at HM Prison Reading, wrote that she had witnessed the reading of Robinson's 'Reading Gaol' alongside Oscar Wilde's 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' 'connecting people across the ages, and within the group. More vitally, I saw it having some sort of use for these individuals, living out their lives in the here and now of prison life' [4].
- Further plans to increase the reach of poetry-related activity in the local area include a poet in residence to enhance links between the University's Special Collections archives and the community, as well as a Reading poet laureate.

Testimonials/Feedback

Robinson's authority as a poetry editor is based on his own continuing impact as a highly respected poet and literary scholar [5]. One poet, who had ceased writing for over 20 years, remarks of Robinson's advocacy for the art: 'It is more than probable that neither of [my] books

Impact case study (REF3b)

would have appeared were it not for Peter's support and encouragement' [6]. Another poet writes that Robinson's 'willingness to trust in the raw material of a complete unknown seems a rare quality in a publisher nowadays and an absolutely essential one' [7].

Books of poetry and anthologies edited by Robinson have received positive reviews, some of them made available on the Two Rivers Press website [8]. Launch events and readings organised by Robinson are documented on a number of Facebook pages and Twitter accounts [9].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[1] Figures obtained from the managing director of Two Rivers Press, in an email to Peter Robinson, 10 October 2013 – available on request.

[2] Unsolicited feedback on events for *A Mutual Friend: Poems for Charles Dickens*, available on request.

[3] From feedback, available on request, provided at the first Reading Poetry Festival, 5-9 June 2013, with full details of programme and participants here: <http://readingpoetryfestival.com>

[4] Comments made by prisoners in HM Prison Reading, after reading 'Reading Gaol' from *Reading Poetry: an Anthology*, 13 September 2012. Confidential videos of the *Read and Relax* session on 10 October in the prison with Robinson – available on request.

[5] Comments, 244 in the space of seven days, on 'Otterspool Prom', from *The Returning Sky*, which was Carol Rumens' *Guardian Poem of the Week* for 18-24 February 2013:

http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2013/feb/18/poem-week-peter-robinson-otterspool-prom?CMP=tw_t_qu&fb=ative See also YouTube hits for the video of Robinson's 14 June 2011 reading at the Notre Dame Center, London, over 700 views on 31 July 2013:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNw8ZbnUI0U>

[6] Personal testimony regarding the personal benefit of being encouraged to start composing and publishing poetry again after a gap of some 20 years, 22 February 2013 – available on request.

[7] From an email statement, available on request, regarding the psychological benefit of experiencing Robinson's editorial work on *The Beholder* (Two Rivers Press, 2012), 21 February 2013

[8] See, for example, reviews of Susan Utting, *Fair's Fair*, Tom Phillips' *Recreation Ground* and of *Reading Poetry: An Anthology* ed. Peter Robinson on the Two Rivers Press website at:

<http://tworiverspress.com>

<http://tworiverspress.com/wp/review-susan-uttings-fairs-fair-in-the-north-49/>

<http://tworiverspress.com/wp/review-phillips-recreation-ground-reviewed-in-the-london-magazine/>

<http://toddsswift.blogspot.co.uk/2011/06/review-reading-poetry.html>

[9] See, for example, the Facebook pages for Two Rivers Press, Peter Robinson, and Claire Dyer: [https://www.facebook.com/tworiverspress]; [https://www.facebook.com/peterrobinso];

[https://www.facebook.com/claire.dyer]