

Institution: University of Liverpool
Unit of Assessment: 28 – Modern Languages and Linguistics
Title of case study: Contemporary Spanish Poetry: Politics and Poetics.
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Diana Cullell's study of contemporary Spanish poetry (published 2010) has illuminated the relationship between the power of the State and new writing in democratising Spain, and has provided new ways of understanding poetic traditions. Her direct engagement with public events and poets since 2010 has enhanced that impact and is ongoing. Spanish readers, as well as audiences beyond Spain, have acquired new understanding of poetic practice and of tradition and the politics of culture. The poets themselves have found new readers while Cullell's critical anatomy of poetics has provided them with tools for reflecting on their own practices. Spanish cultural institutions have benefited as mediators for the dissemination of Cullell's insights.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The impact activities described below developed out of Cullell's research for her monograph <i>La poesía de la experiencia española de finales del siglo XX al XXI</i> (2010). This research was initiated when Cullell was a postgraduate at the University of Manchester between 2005 and 2008. However, the book was written, revised and disseminated while she was in post at the University of Liverpool. Cullell was appointed to Liverpool as a University Teacher in October 2008, and then to a lectureship in October 2011.</p> <p>Cullell's book offers an analysis of the history of a particular poetic tradition in Spain. It is structured around an examination and assessment of so-called <i>poesía de la experiencia</i> (poetry of experience). Drawn from the critical work of Robert Langbaum on English poetry, the term <i>poesía de la experiencia</i> was originally applied to Spanish writing of the 1950s – notably the work of Luis Cernuda – which used poetic techniques to evoke sensory experience in the reader. The term was revived in post-Francoist Spain in the 1980s to characterise a type of poetry that emphasised the democratic themes of everyday life and managed, as Cullell contends in her book, 'to establish itself via metaliterary elements as well as socio-political considerations' (p.246). Cullell argues that the new 'poets of experience' of the 1980s constituted a dominant literary school, such that other poetic voices were marginalised, including those of practitioners of something more like the original <i>poesía de la experiencia</i>. The frequent use of the term in critical discourse in the 1980s served the interests of the Socialist State in displaying their promotion of culture, and served the interests of the poets whose work was celebrated and recognised with awards. In her book, Cullell contends that the use of this term proposed a false continuity between the earlier and later bodies of work: 'The misrepresentation of the <i>poesía de la experiencia</i> label and the creation of a deceiving canon that blurred literary foundations and mixed up poetic affinities created false frontiers and poetic divergences that wrongly excluded important poets and works from the experiential ranks' (p.254).</p> <p>Cullell's project aimed to re-evaluate <i>poesía de la experiencia</i> both as an existing body of work and as a poetic tradition, on the grounds that 'ultimately, <i>poesía de la experiencia</i> is not only a style or an aesthetic, it is also a poetic essence that can appear at various levels in different and diverse authors. It is and should be an essence owned by no particular trend' (p.254). The project involved analysing the origins of the tradition in the 1950s, the processes by which the poetry of the 1980s and its legitimating critical discourse had become established, and the contentious hypothesis that certain collections of poetry from the 1990s and beyond should be viewed as more representative of an evolving aesthetic than the politically showcased poetry of the 1980s. To this end, the research deployed a theoretical framework which included concepts from phenomenological studies and cultural sociology. Methodologically, it examined the changing notions of experience</p>

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and taste, and the evolution of conceptions of the human body as a focal point both of lived experience and creative work, thus placing poetics in a sociological context.

Cullell was ultimately able to argue for a radical rethink of the contours of the poetic tradition studied, and was also able to show how political and social factors – the alignment of poets to the power of the State – had contributed to a misleading promotion of *poesía de la experiencia* as a culturally dominant literary practice in the 1980s. The controversy that her book encountered confirmed the force of her findings, since it was read well beyond the circles of academic literary criticism, and was even attacked in the national press. The initial impact thus resulted spontaneously from the nature of the research findings, whose relevance equally captured the attention of a wider public interested in Spain's post-Francoist political order. Subsequent dissemination activity served to enhance this impact. Beyond this, Cullell's analysis of the key components of a *poesía de la experiencia* in terms of the interaction between text and body provided a basis for poets to reflect on their own practice and their place in Spain's wider literary history and landscape.

3. References to the research

Cullell, D. '[Versiones postmodernas de compromiso en la poesía española contemporánea: los ejemplos de Luis García Montero, María Antonia Ortega y Jorge Riechmann](#)', *Espéculo. Revista de estudios literarios*, 43 (2009).

Cullell, D. *La poesía de la experiencia española de finales del siglo XX al XXI* (Madrid: Devenir, 2010).

Output submitted for REF2. Awarded a *Premio de Ayuda a la Edición del Ministerio de Cultura* (2009), value 3.500€. The award (given prior to publication) recognises the value of the monograph for enhancing public understanding of literature. The money awarded is used to send copies of the book to public libraries and cultural institutions to reach a wider public, maximising its impact.

Cullell, D. "Las manos que crean": Esther Zarraluki y la construcción (femenina) de un universo textual a través del tacto', in Diego Falconí and Noemí Acedo (eds) *El cuerpo del significante: la literatura contemporánea desde las teorías corporales* (Barcelona: Editorial UOC, 2011), 377-387.

Cullell, D. 'Angles morts: la poesía de Àlex Susanna y la creación de lo catalán a través del arte', *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*, 18:1 (2012), 29-40.

Cullell, D. 'Ni príncipes azules ni doncellas: el fenómeno de la reescritura en la poesía de Almudena Guzmán', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 90:1 (2013), 51-64.

In 2010-11, the Spanish Ministry of Culture awarded 1800€ to support Cullell's impact activities; in 2012-13, the Embassy of Spain in London awarded £2,500 to support Cullell's impact activities.

4. Details of the impact

The publication of Cullell's monograph sparked controversy in Spain, where studies of the *poesía de la experiencia* trend that had focussed on the poetic production of the 1980s had tended to promote uncritically a wide range of politically celebrated work. Her book swiftly attracted fierce criticism in the press, in newspapers such as [La Nueva España](#). The book's publisher, Devenir, decided to capitalise on the obvious literary polemics of Cullell's counter-argument, rooted in her in-depth research, about the nature and quality of this 1980s poetry. It therefore actively disseminated Cullell's monograph and her findings as widely as possible. On that platform, Cullell's research and the associated public events rekindled important debates in contemporary Spanish literature, and made them more accessible to non-academic audiences (for example, readers of poetry, visitors to museums and other cultural institutions). Her research also inspired cultural

institutions that do not usually participate in literary activities – such as the Ra del Rey arts centre – to host public events.

Devenir organised a series of activities, held between 13 April and 2 June 2011, in an initiative to bring Spanish contemporary poetry closer to the general public through poetry readings, roundtable discussions, performances and talks. These activities brought together poets (including Begoña Regueiro, Ricardo García, Carmen Herrero, and Rocío Santiesteban) and scholars from both Spain and abroad (Diana Cullell, University of Liverpool; Germán Labrador, Princeton University; Melción Mateu, New York University; Jorge Urrutia, Universidad Carlos III, Madrid; José María Micó, Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona). The events took place in city-centre venues that attract high numbers of visitors and customers, including the Ateneu Barcelonès in Barcelona, and, in Madrid, the Centro Cultural Blanquerna, the Ra del Rey arts centre, the Casa del Libro, and the Ámbito Cultural in the department store El Corte Inglés. These events were all extremely well attended. The events held in the Ra del Rey arts centre and the Ateneu Barcelonès proved particularly popular, attracting audiences of 45 or more. Some of the events were also broadcast live over the internet.

Cullell's work has not only reached wider audiences, bringing poetry closer to the general public. It has also contributed to transforming practices for different poets and poetic groups, leading to new performances in museums and poetry publications. An example of this is the literary group *Otras palabras* – led by Begoña Regueiro – which developed a high profile in *tertulias* (cultural salons) and poetry performances around Madrid, following their performance in the Ra del Rey arts centre as part of the series of events linked with Cullell's book. This activity also led to the publication of Regueiro's new book, *Diosas de barro* (2012). Regueiro had previously only published one book of poetry. Her involvement in the impact activities surrounding Cullell's book drew the attention of publishing houses and readers to her own work and she was subsequently invited to publish *Diosas de barro*. This was launched in Madrid and Seville, and was very well received. Regueiro has since been asked to publish her next poetry book with Amargord and Playa de Akaba, two important poetry publishing houses in Spain. A further example of the impact of Cullell's work on poets is that, in the course of one of the public events, the poet Maria Antonia Ortega said that, for the first time, she had been given a voice. Additionally, Devenir, the publisher, which experienced an increase of 35% in hits to its website, also recognised the impact of the events. The chief editor wrote: 'This series of events, in my opinion, had a great and intense impact. You clearly settled the issues – for anyone who was willing to understand the truth [about the poetic trend]. In my view, it was all extremely positive, and I think we managed to reach a wide and varied audience.'

In tandem with the events organised by Devenir, Cullell was invited to talk about Spanish contemporary poetry at the 'Tertulia Literaria Hispanoamericana Rafael Montesinos', Colegio Mayor Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Madrid (12 April 2011) and to talk on new technologies and poetry at the literary cafe 'Libertad 8', Madrid (2 February 2012).

Alongside its academic reception, Cullell's book was reviewed in the Spanish newspaper [La Nueva España](#) (referred to above) and in the online blog [La Mirada actual](#). Cullell was also interviewed for the Spanish online newspaper [SolidaridadDigital](#).

These activities have also raised Cullell's public profile more locally. Since 2010 Cullell has organised an annual Writer in Residence event in Liverpool, featuring contemporary Spanish authors and including public events. For example, in March 2012 and March 2013 public readings by Spanish, Catalan and Basque poets (August Bover, Kirmen Uribe, Virginia Cantó, and Itxaso Paya) at the city's Bluecoat Centre attracted local audiences of some 40 people. This series of events is on-going, and will see Cullell take a lead in departmental KE and impact activities. In the framework of her most recent research project (on *xarnego* poetry – Catalan poetry written in Spanish by Spanish immigrants into Catalonia or their descendants), she will organise a workshop on Translating Cultures, to be held at the Instituto Cervantes in Manchester in mid- to late 2014. This event will be free and open to the general public. She will also organise a workshop-linked public poetry reading, to be held at the Liverpool Bluecoat Centre and she will collaborate with the Instituto Cervantes in the Manchester Literary Festival in October 2014, writing reviews and

organizing a *xarnego* poetry session.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. The editor of Editorial Devenir can be contacted to confirm audience figures for the various events organized in Barcelona and Madrid from April to June 2011, the content and the impact these events had on the general public, and on the literary and artistic groups and organizations involved. He can also comment on the interest and the importance of the research and the events.
2. A poet from the Grupo Literario Otras Palabras can be contacted to confirm the value that poets and literary groups attached to the events, in terms of increased profile for their poetry amongst general audiences. She can also comment on the impact these activities had on her own poetry and public reception, and on that of the literary group Otras Palabras.
3. As the Writer in Residence in Liverpool in 2013, another poet can be contacted to confirm the value that poets and literary groups attached to the events in terms of increased profile for their poetry amongst general audiences. She can also comment on the impact these activities and Cullell's work on her poetry had on public reception.
4. An academic from Princeton University, who participated in the series of events organised, can be contacted to confirm audience figures for the various events organized in Barcelona and Madrid from April to June 2011, the content and the impact these events had on the general public, and on the literary and artistic groups and organizations involved. He can also comment on the interest, the importance and the impact that Cullell's research and these events had on the field.
5. An academic from New York University, who participated in the series of events organised, can be contacted to confirm audience figures for the various events organized in Barcelona and Madrid from April to June 2011, the content and the impact these events had on the general public, and on the literary and artistic groups and organizations involved. He can also comment on the interest, the importance and the impact that Cullell's research and these events had on the field.
6. An article in the online newspaper [SolidaridadDigital](#) can be consulted to corroborate the impact Cullell's book had on a wider, non-specialist audience in Spain.