

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Aberystwyth University		
Unit of Assessment: 26: Modern Languages and Linguistics		
Title of case study: Enhancing knowledge and empowering understanding of Welsh-language poetry in Wales and beyond		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2016–2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Eurig Salisbury	Lecturer in Creative Writing	1 September 2015–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p><i>Cynghanedd</i>, a unique sound-based system for composing Welsh-language strict-metre poetry based on patterns of alliteration and internal rhyme, has been a defining feature of Welsh literary culture since the Middle Ages. Salisbury’s creative and critical work radically challenges traditional perceptions of its history that have been perpetuated for centuries and remain dominant in current academic and creative discourse around Welsh poetry. He has transformed the popularity and accessibility of <i>cynghanedd</i> by developing a permissive, creative and pedagogical practice that opens up the contemporary potential of <i>cynghanedd</i> to a new and broader range of audiences at both national and international levels. His pioneering work, particularly in schools, has led to a wider reappraisal of the relevance of both <i>cynghanedd</i> and poetry in general.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Salisbury has produced a wide-ranging body of work as a researcher of medieval Welsh literature, translator, editor, and highly accomplished strict-metre poet. His mission, through publications and public engagement activity, has been to broaden the horizons of Welsh poetry both within Wales and further afield, particularly in relation to current understandings and applications of <i>cynghanedd</i>. Both his creative output and research – represented primarily by the three principal publications that underpin this impact study [3.1, 3.2 and 3.3] – challenge assumptions about the development of <i>cynghanedd</i> from the Middle Ages to the present day, as well as its authorisation by poets, institutions, and the broader Welsh establishment.</p> <p>Salisbury’s research into the use of <i>cynghanedd</i> by medieval and early modern poets [3.2, 3.3, 3.4] has shown that they used the form with more latitude than their twentieth century and early twenty-first century successors allow, especially within what is considered the poetic establishment in Wales, namely the Eisteddfod, local eisteddfodau, and certain cohorts of the strict-metre community that coalesce around Y Gymdeithas Gerdd Dafod and its quarterly magazine, <i>Barddas</i>. His research in this field focuses on questions surrounding participation in, and ownership of, <i>cynghanedd</i>, and challenges its perception as a craft that is closed off to the uninitiated. Whilst recognising traditional and conservative attitudes towards strict-metre poetry, Salisbury’s radical reinterpretation of the development of <i>cynghanedd</i> repositions it as a fundamentally democratic poetic phenomenon.</p> <p>His research has also uncovered widespread historical use of <i>cynghanedd</i> in less traditional so-called free-metres [3.2]. With its focus on the primary principles of <i>cynghanedd</i>, uncoupled from the seven-syllable line of traditional strict-metres, his significant new approach has simplified and democratised the introduction of <i>cynghanedd</i> and the teaching of strict-metre poetry to new audiences and widened its potential use [3.5].</p>		

Salisbury's research is also practice-based, and the form, content, and performative aspects of his own poetry [3.1, 3.6] are informed by his research into the literature and bardic culture of medieval Wales, and as an editor of medieval Welsh poetry [3.3, 3.4]. His poetry knowingly explores the modern significance and functionality of themes that he investigates in his research: bardic forms, motifs, generic conventions, and diction, and also the performative dimension of the historical tradition. His textual and literary scholarship provides a coherent 'bardic' frame for his poetry, which both re-establishes and enhances the traditional public and social role of a Welsh-language poet.

As Welsh-language editor of *Poetry Wales*, he has commissioned poems, and given a platform to experimental and up-and-coming poets who could not find a 'fit' for their poetry on other cultural platforms. As a translator, he has translated his own poetry into English and the poetry of his various collaborators into both Welsh and English [3.6, 3.7].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1** Eurig Salisbury, *Llyfr Gwyrdd Ystwyth* (Cyhoeddiadau Barddas, 2020) – a seminal poetry collection that showcases a new and dynamic take on a poet's established role. [Submitted to REF2]
- 3.2** Eurig Salisbury, "Fi a'm holl gymdeithion': Golwg newydd ar farddoniaeth gaeth y Cyfnod Modern Cynnar', in Aneirin Karadog and Eurig Salisbury (eds.), *Y Gynghanedd Heddiw* (Cyhoeddiadau Barddas, 2020) – an essay that presents a radical reappraisal of the long-maligned strict-metre poetry of the Early Modern Period.
- 3.3** Eurig Salisbury (ed.), editions of medieval Welsh poems for Cult of Saints in Wales project, 2020 (<https://www.welshsaints.ac.uk/>) – a project to produce critical editions of medieval Welsh poetry to saints and saints' lives.
- 3.4** Eurig Salisbury, 'Ymgyrch farchnata o'r flwyddyn 1475: moliant Huw Cae Llwyd i seintiau Brycheiniog', *Brycheiniog*, vol. 47 (2016) – a new critical edition of a fifteenth-century poem and a reassessment of its significance as a marketing campaign similar to a modern crowd-funding project. [available at https://brecknockociety.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Brycheiniog-Published-Proof-Volume-47-2016_AT.pdf].
- 3.5** Eurig Salisbury and Sampurna Chattarji, *The Bhyabachyaka and Other Wild Poems* (Scholastic India, 2019) – a co-authored collection of poetry in English for children framed as a cultural exchange between Wales and India and as an introduction to the principles of *cynghanedd*.
- 3.6** Collected poems and translations composed between 2016 and 2020, published on Salisbury's open access website <http://www.eurig.cymru>.
- 3.7** Eurig Salisbury and Sampurna Chattarji, *Elsewhere Where Else / Lle Arall Ble Arall* (Poetrywala, 2018) – a co-authored and multi-lingual collection of poetry that is the product of an eleven-year partnership with a highly acclaimed poet based in Mumbai (English and Welsh, with translations into English and Bangla). [Submitted to REF2]

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Salisbury's work has introduced new perspectives to discussions of historical and contemporary strict-metre verse and its practice, within Wales and on an international stage, broadening the horizons of contemporary Welsh poetry. The main impact has been twofold:

Influencing conceptual understanding of cyghanedd and approaches to teaching poetry in schools

Salisbury has engaged with over 40 primary and secondary schools throughout Wales, and has delivered enrichment sessions that interpret medieval and contemporary set texts for GCSE, AS, and A Level candidates. Feedback evidences his impact both on student understanding and attainment, and on teachers' subsequent approaches to teaching strict-metre poetry. An *'extremely valuable'* session held in February 2020 *'helped the students to reach their potential ... and the Department to raise and sustain standards within the Welsh GCSE course'*. At another school (November 2019) a teacher observed that a number of students noted their surprise at the ease with which they had been able to compose poetry *'once they understood the basic principles of cyghanedd'*. The school now uses Eurig's ideas when teaching poetry: *'The workshops have offered new ways of introducing the subject that we [the teachers] hadn't considered before'* [5.1].

The Talwrn y Beirdd Ifanc project (young people's *talwrn*, January–July 2019) is at the heart of Salisbury's engagement with schools. This ground-breaking poetry project for secondary school students is based on the traditional format of *talwrn y beirdd* – a unique competition in local and national guises that is part of eisteddfod culture and broadcast on BBC Radio Cymru – in which teams of poets compose short poems on a variety of metres and themes. Salisbury was the first to adapt the format for young people, designing his own project with input from his target audience. Teacher feedback describes the event as *'inspirational'*, and an *'incredible project'*, noting that participation in the project *'changed their [students'] attitude towards poetry as a means of expression relevant to their lives'* [5.2]. Student feedback consistently refers to the transformative nature of the project for their understanding of *cyghanedd* and strict-metre poetry: *'I wasn't too keen on poetry before today but the talwrn has changed my perspective'; 'now that I understand more about poetry, I enjoy it'; '[the session] has helped develop my understanding of poetry'; 'I now respect and can better relate to poetry'; '[poetry] is more modern than I thought'* [5.3].

Interactive workshops prepared the students for the competition aspect of the project by putting into practice Salisbury's research and using his bespoke techniques that focus on the basic principles of *cyghanedd*. The workshops resulted in collaborative work and original poetry co-produced by Salisbury and participants. Teacher feedback states that Salisbury's introduction to *cyghanedd* *'succeeded in enhancing the students' understanding of strict-metre poetry and changed their perception of Welsh poetry'*, and the workshops *'certainly broke the stereotype that many of our students tend to hold, that poetry is boring and middle-aged'* [5.4]. Student feedback on the impact of the workshops (held in April and May 2019) states that students thereafter viewed Welsh poetry as *'unique'* and *'modern'*, and that the session had prompted a *'better understanding and appreciation'* of poetry, and that *'writing poetry is fun'* [5.5]. Teachers also remarked on how Salisbury's workshops managed to *'change young people's attitude towards poetry'; 'inspired [students] to continue with writing poetry'; 'led them to want to study poetry further ... [and] equipped them with valuable skills by which to analyse poems in preparation for their GCSE exam'; and 'offered a new dimension to our work as teachers'* [5.6].

Salisbury employed the same techniques in workshops aimed at introducing *cyghanedd* as an inclusive craft to primary school children in Delhi, India (December 2019 and January 2020). The workshops used Salisbury's unique and accessible English-language introduction to *cyghanedd* in his co-authored collection of poetry with a long-standing collaborator. *The Bhyabachyacka and Other Wild Poems* represents the first time that the principles of *cyghanedd* have been outlined and made available in print for children in India. The organisers note how the workshops *'made poetry accessible to people of all ages who had not thought about poetry in that way prior to the workshops ... The students were inspired and wished to explore the medium further'*. Using English as a bridge language facilitated the children's use of *cyghanedd* in Hindi, Bangla, Marathi, Malayalam and other Indian languages: *'They left the session having gained a much broader understanding of how words work both in their own languages and in Welsh'* [5.7].

Enriching public appreciation, understanding and imagination, and furthering the agenda of key cultural institutions

Salisbury's impact on public audiences and on key cultural institutions in Wales and beyond has been significant.

As co-founder of Cicio'r Bar, a quarterly event held at Aberystwyth Arts Centre since 2018, Salisbury has been instrumental in popularising poetry reading as a live, social event. This work extends to events held at independent bookshops, such as Siop y Pethe, Aberystwyth, whose owner confirmed that Salisbury's '*enormously valuable*' poetry sessions had facilitated '*a much broader understanding of Welsh poetry*' amongst members of the audience [5.8]. Salisbury is regularly invited to participate in workshops supported by key agencies seeking to widen participation in literature and the arts in Wales: Literature Wales, Tŷ Newydd, Literature Across Frontiers, and Literature Exchange. The Head of Tŷ Newydd national Writing Centre identifies Salisbury's instrumental role in the development of its intensive residential course on *cynghanedd*: '*Eurig played a pivotal role in shaping the structure and content of the course – one that has developed as a result into a quiet revolution in terms of its ability to teach cynghanedd to beginners in a short space of time*' [5.9].

Salisbury disseminates his research and practice widely on Welsh-language television and radio. His outputs also reach new audiences through his website (<http://www.eurig.cymru>, January 2016–) and Clera (https://soundcloud.com/podlediad_clera, October 2016–), a unique monthly Welsh-language poetry podcast edited and co-curated with a fellow poet. Viewing statistics are on average above 350 per month and compare favourably with cultural podcasts broadcast by BBC Radio Cymru. The podcast also provided an important platform for the Talwrn y Beirdd Ifanc project, allowing the students' work, recorded and curated by Salisbury, to reach a much broader audience.

Building on the success of Salisbury's Talwrn y Beirdd Ifanc project, Wales's largest youth organisation, Urdd Gobaith Cymru, launched its own Talwrn yr Ifanc in partnership with BBC Radio Cymru (November 2020). The Urdd's National Arts Organiser *noted*: '*Talwrn yr Ifanc ... was inspired by the Talwrn y Beirdd Ifanc project, and its framework was used as the basis for our own talwrn. The project demonstrated that Talwrn y Beirdd was the ideal format by which to raise awareness of Welsh poetry amongst young people ... and to give them the confidence to perform their own poems*' [5.10]. BBC Radio Cymru also commissioned a special Talwrn y Beirdd Ifanc programme coordinated by Salisbury and based on the success of his original version (March 2020), again demonstrating the impact of his research on the arts in Wales. The producer acknowledges Salisbury's project as inspiration for the new collaboration in similar terms [5.11].

Salisbury's activities extend the reach of Welsh-language strict-metre poetry to areas not immediately identifiable as either poetic or literary. He was appointed Dyfed-Powys Police's first 'force poet' during its fiftieth anniversary year (April 2018–March 2019), and tasked with using the celebratory nature of Welsh poetry to deepen the force's public ties. The Chief Constable of Dyfed-Powys Police acknowledged the value of Salisbury's achievements: '*Many had said ... that they were surprised at how poetry managed to bridge between our work and the public in a way unique to Welsh culture ... The work led to a broader understanding of both poetry and the work of Dyfed-Powys Police*' [5.12]. Similarly, 'Weithie', a Welsh-language poem co-written and performed with another renowned poet, was used by Nationwide Building Society in a key UK-wide television marketing campaign (October 2017). By broadcasting the advert without English subtitles, Nationwide wanted to underline the agency afforded by poetry as a social medium to convey the bank's key message of loyalty and friendship. The advert, watched 3,760 times on YouTube, elicited a positive response on social media that included engagement with the advert's poetic and linguistic form. In November 2020, the Principality Building Society (main sponsors of Cardiff's Principality Stadium) commissioned Salisbury to write Welsh and English poems, which were read by Cerys Matthews and broadcast as part of a television and radio campaign to raise the spirits of Welsh rugby fans during the Covid-19 pandemic [5.13].

Developing and sustaining creative partnerships has been essential to the success of Salisbury's public engagement on national and international stages. Key collaborations on projects in the Basque Country (Europa Bat-Batean 2017) and in India (Kolkata Tata Steel Kalam 2018, Jaipur Lit Fest 2018), facilitated by Literature Across Frontiers, have resulted in a broader understanding of Welsh literary culture alongside other cultures in which poetry plays a central role. Having attended one of Salisbury's sessions in India, a renowned Kolkata-based dancer and choreographer was inspired to explore the connections between strict-metre poetry and the strict rules and conventions surrounding the traditional Indian dance form, *kathak*:

'Hearing about cynghanedd was the first time I encountered an art form that concentrates on the complexities of sound, rhythm, cadence, and structure with the same focus as kathak. Working on the project together [with Salisbury], I discovered spaces of agreement and spaces of friction that challenged my (and kathak's) assumptions of the elements that both forms use. This has been tremendously educative, enriching and inspiring.... It has opened up a fresh sense of play – one which we can share with many different kinds of participants and audiences' [5.14].

Salisbury has also influenced the work of a celebrated English-language Indian poet and novelist, enabling her *'to foreground the presence of Bangla in my English-language poetry in a way that I could not have hitherto imagined. This was made possible by the nature of the collaboration, that saw each word in our three languages (English, Cymraeg [Welsh], Bangla) presenting multiple opportunities for experimentation' [5.15].*

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1 Emails from teachers from the schools visited (Ysgol Gyfun Gymunedol Penweddig, Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bryn Tawe), 11 January 2021
- 5.2 Emails from teachers (Ysgol Gyfun Llangefni and Ysgol y Preseli), 11 January 2021, 20 January 2021
- 5.3 Questionnaire feedback from pupils who participated in the Talwrn y Beirdd Ifanc project (Ysgol Gyfun Llangefni, Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Myrddin, Ysgol y Preseli), June 2019
- 5.4 Emails from teachers (Ysgol Gyfun Llangefni and Ysgol y Preseli), 11 January 2021, 20 January 2021
- 5.5 Questionnaire feedback from pupils (Ysgol Gyfun Llangefni, Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Myrddin, Ysgol y Preseli), April–May 2019
- 5.6 Emails from teachers (Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Myrddin, Ysgol Glan Clwyd, Ysgol y Preseli), 11 January 2021, 17 January 2021, 20 January 2021
- 5.7 Letter of corroboration from Scholastic India, 2 March 2021
- 5.8 Letter of corroboration from owner of Siop y Pethe, Aberystwyth, 12 February 2021
- 5.9 Letter of corroboration from Head of Tŷ Newydd Writing Centre, 12 January 2021
- 5.10 Email from National Arts Organiser, Urdd Gobaith Cymru, 15 January 2021
- 5.11 Email from Content Producer of BBC Radio Cymru's flagship poetry competition, Talwrn y Beirdd, 13 January 2021
- 5.12 Letter of corroboration from the Chief Constable of Dyfed-Powys Police, 22 January 2021
- 5.13 'Weithie' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EAe92hUvPg&feature=emb_logo); 'Outside Inside Centre' (<https://www.principality.co.uk/about-us/latest/20201124-outside-inside-centre>); 'Ni 'da chi, bois' (<https://www.principality.co.uk/cy/about-us/latest/20201124-Outside-Inside-Centre>)
- 5.14 Letter of corroboration from dancer and choreographer (<https://www.vikramiyengar.in>), 18 January 2021
- 5.15 Letter of corroboration from Indian poet and novelist, 16 February 2021