

Case Study

| Image from *The Bhyabachyacka and Other Wild Poems* (Scholastic India, 2019)

Enhancing understanding of Welsh language poetry in Wales and beyond



RESEARCHER

Eurig Salisbury

THE OVERVIEW

Cynghanedd is a unique sound-based system for composing Welsh-language strict-metre poetry based on patterns of alliteration and internal rhyme. It has been a defining feature of Welsh literary culture since the Middle Ages.

Eurig Salisbury's creative and critical work has radically challenged traditional perceptions of its history, transforming the popularity and accessibility of *cynghanedd* across 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 *cynghanedd* and poetry in general.



THE RESEARCH

Eurig 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 has been to broaden the horizons of Welsh poetry both within Wales and further afield, particularly in relation to current understandings and applications of *cynghanedd*. His research has shown that medieval and early modern poets used the form with more latitude than their twentieth century and early twenty-first century successors allow.

His research focuses particularly on questions surrounding participation in, and ownership of, *cynghanedd*, and challenges its perception as a craft that is closed off to novices. This radical reinterpretation of the development of *cynghanedd* repositions it as a fundamentally democratic poetic phenomenon. Crucially, his research has uncovered widespread historical use of *cynghanedd* in less traditional so-called free-metres. Uncoupled from the seven-syllable line of traditional strict-metres, this new, permissive, creative approach has simplified and widened the use of *cynghanedd*.

THE IMPACT

INFLUENCING CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF *CYNGHANEDD* AND APPROACHES TO TEACHING POETRY IN SCHOOLS

Eurig has engaged with over forty 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 approaches to teaching strict-metre poetry in schools.

A Talwrn y Beirdd Ifanc project (young people's *talwrn*) is at the heart of Eurig'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. He was the first to adapt the format for young people, designing his own project with input from his target audience. Students took part in interactive workshops to prepare for the competition, resulting in collaborative work and the creation of original poetry. Student feedback consistently refers to the transformative nature of the project for their understanding of *cynghanedd* and strict-metre poetry.

Eurig employed the same techniques in workshops aimed at introducing *cynghanedd* as an inclusive craft to primary school children in Delhi, India. The workshops used Eurig's unique and accessible

English-language introduction to *cynghanedd* in his co-authored collection of poetry with one of India's most prominent English-language authors, Sampurna Chattarji. *The Bhyabachyacka and Other Wild Poems* represents the first time that the principles of *cynghanedd* have been outlined and made available in print for children in India.

ENRICHING PUBLIC APPRECIATION, UNDERSTANDING AND IMAGINATION

Eurig's research has also had a significant impact on public audiences and on cultural institutions in Wales and beyond.

Building on the success of the 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 in November 2020. BBC Radio Cymru also commissioned a special Talwrn y Beirdd Ifanc programme coordinated by Eurig and based on the success of his original version, demonstrating the impact of his research on the arts in Wales.

Eurig's work extends the reach of Welsh-language strict-metre poetry to areas not immediately identifiable as either poetic or literary. 'Weithie', a Welsh-language poem co-written and performed with poet Aneirin Karadog, was used by Nationwide Building Society in a UK-wide television marketing campaign. 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. In November 2020, the Principality Building Society (main sponsors of Cardiff's Principality Stadium) commissioned Eurig 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.

He has also developed creative partnerships on the international stage with key collaborations on projects in the Basque Country and in India, resulting in a broader understanding of Welsh literary culture. Having attended one of Eurig's sessions in India, a renowned Kolkata-based dancer and choreographer, Vikram Iyengar, was inspired to explore the connections between strict-metre poetry and the strict rules and conventions surrounding the traditional Indian dance form, *kathak*.

