

Institution: Bangor University, 10007857		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 27 – English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Creative Writing, Translation and Cross-Cultural Understanding: Placing Wales in the World.		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013 – 2019		
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:
1) Professor Zoë Skoulding	1) Professor of Poetry and Creative Writing	1) October 2005 – present
2) Professor Carol Rumens	2) Professor of Creative Writing	2) September 2000 - August 2005; September 2006 - July 2020
3) Ms Alys Conran	3) Senior lecturer in Creative Writing	3) February 2016 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 August 2013 – 31 July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Bangor University's pioneering research into translation, award-winning creative writing and poetry criticism from Wales has preserved, enhanced and transformed the global understanding of English writing from and about Wales. Specifically, it has had significant reach and impact in terms of influencing translation as creative practice; raising local and international audiences' awareness of Wales's bilingual literature in innovative and powerful ways; and contributing to a sense of local and international community through cross-cultural understanding. Beneficiaries of this research are the general public in Wales and the UK, as well as writers and translators in Wales, Europe, Latin America and other anglophone countries.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Creative writing research at Bangor University responds to its bilingual context by placing literary creativity in close relationship with translation. Researchers have framed writing in English as an innovative response to other languages and cultures through an exploration of North Wales localities in a multilingual, cross-cultural context. Through poetry, poetry criticism and fiction, Alys Conran, Zoë Skoulding and Carol Rumens foreground the connections between translation, intercultural understanding and literary creativity, and the ways in which these contribute to local and international communities. These practitioners are highly respected and recognised within their respective overlapping research areas.</p>		
Exploring Welsh bilingual culture in the context of World Literature		
<p>Conran's prizewinning novel <i>Pigeon</i> [3.1] is a representation of Welsh-language experience through the medium of English. It is original in its approach to Welsh contexts, since it is set in a recognisable North Wales and foregrounds the complexity of bilingual experience and identity. It is rigorous in its approach, not only to language and style but also to the development of a well-conceived imaginative structure. Conran's second novel <i>Dignity</i> [3.2] explores postcolonial relationships between the UK and India, as viewed from a Welsh perspective. Conran has also contributed cross-cultural short stories (<i>Zero Hours on the Boulevard: Tales of Independence and Belonging</i> [Parthian Books] and <i>Renegade Wales: Revolutionary New Voices in Welsh Fiction</i> [Wales Arts Review/Bee Books]).</p>		

Translation as creative practice

Pigeon [3.1] is the first novel to be published simultaneously in English and Welsh. It is therefore unusual in connecting readerships from both languages, a choice that emphasizes the text's concerns with language and community and the creative role of the collaborating translator. Its significance is apparent through its reception in two languages. The decision to publish simultaneously in Welsh and English was a bold experiment on the part of the publisher and a mark of the novel's national significance, as illustrated by its prizes and awards.

Skoulding's AHRC-funded network Poetry in Expanded Translation [3.a] draws on her expertise in poetry translation as a creative practice, whether in terms of translation between languages, where the translator is an important cultural mediator, or in terms of contemporary approaches to creative rewriting. It developed from her previous publications, including translations from French, while her poems in *The Museum of Disappearing Sounds* (shortlisted for the 2014 Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry) often engage with creative translation strategies [3.3]. Rumens' work translates from Russian and draws on a wide range of cross-cultural influences, while her recent work, *Perhaps Bag*, includes a translation of Dant 's *Purgatorio*. The publication by a well-regarded American press of this substantial volume of Rumens' poems, from collections spanning 1968 to the present, indicates the international high standing of Rumens' work [3.4].

Writing in English as an innovative response to other languages and cultures

Skoulding's poetry explores underground rivers as material spaces that link communities through memory and language. She held a Laureateship at Les R collets in 2014, hosted jointly by the Institut Fran ais and the City of Paris for a three-month artist residency in which she wrote *Teint* (2016), a series of translation-based poems on the Bi vre. Her Hidden Rivers project linked this lost river in Paris with Bangor's Afon (River) Adda. Poems from this project are featured in her 2019 collection, *Footnotes to Water*, an original exploration of water through attention to two rivers. Making inventive use of a variety of forms and offering a significant creative response to the writing of place, it was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation and winner of the Wales Book of the Year Poetry Award 2020 [3.5]. Skoulding's research is now exploring the potential of poetry and poetry translation to reveal new routes of multilingual, cross-disciplinary engagement in the broader concept of Europe and the Americas [3.b]. Cross-cultural influences and cultural understanding are also central tenets of Rumens' poems and poetry criticism, the latter being a sustained project carried out in public (running to over 600 blogs over 12 years), in conversation with a global audience, now published as a book [3.4, 3.6].

3. References to the research**Research Outputs**

3.1 **Conran, A.** (2016) *Pigeon* (Parthian Books, Cardigan). Submitted to REF2021 (REF identifier UoA27_20) (Winner of Wales Book of the Year, Wales Arts Review People's Choice Award and the Rhys Davies Trust Award, 2017. Serialised in the *Western Mail* in 2018, and it is also one of the twelve novels selected for the AHRC project Literary Atlas of Wales, led by Cardiff and Swansea Universities).

3.2 **Conran, A.** (2019) *Dignity* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London). Submitted to REF2021 (REF identifier UoA27_11)

3.3 **Skoulding, Z.** (2013) *The Museum of Disappearing Sounds* (Seren, Bridgend) (Shortlisted for the Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry). Submitted to REF2014. (Copy available on request)

3.4 **Rumens, C.** (2017) *Perhaps Bag* (Sheep Meadow Press, New York). Submitted to REF2021 (REF identifier UoA27_19) (Shortlisted for Washington Independent Review of Books for Best Collected Poems)

3.5 **Skoulding, Z.** (2019) *Footnotes to Water* (Seren, Bridgend) Submitted to REF2021 (REF identifier UoA27_15) (Poetry Book Society Recommendation and winner of the 2020 Wales Book of the Year Poetry Award)

3.6 **Rumens, C.** (2019) *Smart Devices: 52 Poems from The Guardian 'Poem of the Week'* (Carcenet, Manchester).

Grants

3.a **Skoulding, Z.** (2017 - 2018) *Poetry in Expanded Translation*. Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) AH/P00539X/1, GBP35,549 (Bangor University: R02R02)

3.b **Skoulding, Z.** (2020 - 2022) *Poetry in Transatlantic Translation: Circulation and Practice Across Languages*. Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Leadership Fellow, AH/T007087/1, GBP170,002 (Bangor University: R16R01)

4. Details of the impact

Bangor University's research has had significant reach in terms of ***influencing creative practice; raising local and international audiences' awareness of Wales' bilingual identity in innovative and powerful ways; and contributing to a sense of local and international community through cross-cultural understanding.***

Influencing creative practice

Bangor University researchers have facilitated novel local engagement practices, using translation as a methodology and a topic, which has influenced creative practice by providing a model of direct community participation. Bangor University research has increased awareness of how translation, as a topic and a practice, is a means to enhance public awareness of their culture. Translation is also a way to develop a new understanding of Wales' dual but shared identity, language and culture. Media attention singled out how the novel *Pigeon's* bilingual publication and reception foster transcultural creativity [5.1]. Cross-cultural influences and cultural understanding are central to Rumens' poems; explored with schoolchildren via lectures and included as part of AQA's (the largest exam board in the UK) GCSE English Literature syllabus from 2017 onwards [5.2].

Skoulding's *Hidden Rivers* ESRC Impact Acceleration Account project involved over 100 local people in remapping Bangor through poetry walks along the culverted Afon (River) Adda, including groups such as the North Wales Society for the Blind and schoolchildren at Ysgol Glanadda. Comments from local people in both Welsh and English about their changed perceptions informed a collaborative poem sequence in her collection *Footnotes to Water*. The power of this poem sequence, as observed in *Poetry Wales* by Dai George [5.3], is that local people, rather than being considered passively, are central to the creative process. It shows their changed reactions to the city voiced through the text itself, particularly in '*Walking the Adda: A Collaboration*', a prose poem comprised entirely of Bangor citizens' comments as they see their city from a new perspective. This was further reflected in a well-attended public performance of the resulting work, with an audience of over 70.

Raising local and international audiences' awareness of Wales's bilingual literature and identity in innovative and powerful ways

Bangor University research has raised the profile of Welsh literature and poetry contributing to local and international audiences' awareness of Wales's bilingual literature. This is bolstered by a strong and continuing presence in mainstream media through which Bangor University researchers sustain and represent Welsh literature and poetry. Conran's novel *Pigeon* won three prizes at the 2017 Wales Book of the Year and Literature Wales now uses it as an example of how the prize '*increases the perceived value of Wales's literature amongst our citizens and those of other nations*' [5.4]. Winning the Wales Arts Review People's Choice Award, as well as the Rhys Davies Trust Award and Wales Book of the Year, indicates the critical appreciation and popularity of Conran's writing across different readerships in Wales, further enhancing the profile of contemporary Welsh literature in general. Since winning these awards *Pigeon* has been serialised in the *Western Mail* (circulation: 10,341) in 2018, and it was also one of 12 novels selected for the AHRC project Literary Atlas of Wales, led by Cardiff and Swansea Universities. In addition, the film, stage and audio rights have all been sold [5.4]. Wider awareness of Wales's bilingual literature was reinforced by the significant media attention that followed and the invitations to contribute essays and articles for a range of publications including *National Geographic*, the *Times Literary Supplement* and the travel magazine *Suitcase*, further enhancing the global reach of Bangor's work. Similarly, Skoulding's poetry has featured on Radio 3 and 4 and in July 2020 *Footnotes to Water* was announced as the Wales Book of the Year for the poetry

category [5.5]. As a mark of Rumens' extensive reach, her collected poems have been published in the USA and her weekly blog for the *Guardian Online* (digital readership: 35,200,000) has an international influence [5.6]. Rumens' *Guardian* blog engages with global poetry networks, often presenting poetry from other cultures. It is discussed on social media by poets and readers of poetry across the English-speaking world and has 5,000 hits a week. Her selection and in-depth discussion of individual poems are informed by her high-profile work as a poet and translator. She highlights the capacity of online and social media to transcend national boundaries, stimulating discussion between non-academic readers of poetry and poetry in translation on several continents. In 2019, 52 of Rumens' hand-picked poems and commentaries from her *Guardian* Poem of the Week blog were published in the Carcanet anthology *Smart Devices* [3.6].

Bangor researchers play an ambassadorial role, representing Wales to international literary communities, leading to increased awareness of their distinctive cultural perspective among bi- and multi-lingual cultures. This has led to the connection of Welsh writing with international audiences. Following many appearances at the Hay Festival, Conran was selected as Hay International Fellow between 2019 and 2020, an extremely prestigious programme including festival appearances in Mexico, Peru and Spain [5.7]. Similarly, Skoulding performed to an audience of 40 people at the Maison de Poésie, Paris, in April 2016, linking Bangor's Afon Adda with the Bièvre, a hidden river in Paris, and was consequently invited to give five further readings of this work in France between 2017 and 2019 [5.5]. These follow-up invitations, to audiences totalling over 200, demonstrate sustained international interest in Skoulding's poetry and its perspective on French culture. Skoulding has contributed to the internationalisation of Welsh writing through co-directing, curating and hosting the North Wales International Poetry Festivals (2014, 2015, 2017) and working with beginner translators (2019) in collaboration between Literature Across Frontiers, Wales Literature Exchange and Pen Cymru [5.8]. She has performed her poetry with translation at the invitation of over 20 international festivals since 2014 (including Nicaragua, Ecuador, Colombia, Argentina, Morocco, Turkey, Croatia, Costa Rica, Chile). Each of these invitations is a highly prestigious mark of international esteem, and her travel to such events has been regularly funded by Wales Arts International (a branch of the Arts Council of Wales). The Director of Literature Across Frontiers writes that Skoulding "*is one of the best travelled poets of Wales [...] and she is always generous with what she brings back: the influences on her writing, translations and the many contacts leading to collaborations and projects she curates, that grow almost organically from another*" [5.9]. Through readings in numerous schools, colleges, parks and urban spaces to audiences of over 10,000, Skoulding has contributed to the intercultural aims of these events, for example, the Medellín Festival's role in supporting Colombia's peace process. Her selected poems in Spanish (University of Costa Rica Press) was published in 2018 and she has contributed poems and written the introduction for the anthology *Nuestra Tierra de Nadie*, Welsh poetry in both languages translated into Spanish by Víctor Rodríguez Núñez and Katherine Hedeon, first published in Mexico and republished in Colombia. The Development Officer for the Arts Council of Wales and International Coordinator for Wales Arts International reported that Skoulding "*has played a significant role in developing international literary links with Wales, particularly in Europe and South America*" [5.10].

Contributing to a sense of local and international community through cross-cultural understanding

Working in English in Wales's bilingual context, Bangor University researchers have engaged with audiences around the world via prestigious local, international and virtual platforms. Their practice-based research enacts, reflects and strengthens cross-cultural relationships through creative writing and criticism.

Skoulding's AHRC network Poetry in Expanded Translation involved partnerships with National Poetry Library in London's Southbank Centre, the major arts venue La Kunsthalle Mulhouse and Pontio, Bangor, bringing together cross-language and cross-artform innovation in poetry for audiences of practitioners, academic and local attendees totalling over 300. These events and their reception made visible a multilingualism in poetry that is already present but not always recognised. The concept of 'expanded translation' contributes to a current interest in UK poetry, as evidenced by Skoulding's editorship of *Poetry Wales* 53.3 (Spring 2018) on that theme.

Conran illuminates the untold story of cross-cultural connections between Wales, the former British Empire and racism in her novel, *Dignity*. The *Daily Mail* (04-2019, print readership: 2,180,000; circulation: 1,246,568) described it as 'brilliant....a truly convincing state-of-the-nation novel', with the *New Welsh Review* (03-2019, print readership: 1,500; online subscribers: 700) remarking: 'The work is rich in both language and storytelling and so much is at play between the lines... Conran's work is subtle and complex: there is no one right story about the Empire. Instead we are offered multiple views, ironies and contradictions that only one of most talented, tender writers in Wales could portray' [5.11]. This expertise in telling compelling stories, via cultural connections and tensions, saw Conran invited onto *BBC Radio 4 Woman's Hour* (weekly listeners: 3,700,000) in 2019, changing audience perceptions about diversity and decolonisation in unexpected ways [5.12].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Wales Arts review (2016) The Art of Translation. An online publication in partnership with Bath Spa University and the Centre for Transnational Creativity. Alys Conran and Sian Northey are interviewed about the concept of transnational literature with a focus on the bilingual publication of the novel *Pigeon* and how it fosters transcultural creativity.

<http://www.walesartsreview.org/the-art-of-translation>

5.2 BBC Bitesize website. GCSE English Literature online student resource which corroborates the use of Carol Rumens poem *The Emigree* for GCSE study.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zqchfrd/revision/1>

5.3 Poetry Wales 56.1 (2020) Review of Footnotes to Water. Corroborates the engagement of local people in the creative process.

<https://poetrywales.co.uk/wboty-2020-shortlist-poets-interview-with-zoe-skoulding/>

5.4 Literature Wales (2020) Wales' Literary Culture. Showcases writers (including Alys Conran) who increase the perceived value of Wales' literature amongst our citizens and those of other nations. Highlights the prizes won by Conran and subsequent impacts of the wins on readership, film rights, peer-to-peer recognition and as a platform for industry-wide opportunities.

<https://www.literaturewales.org/about/our-impact-2/our-year-in-review-comm-impact/>

5.5 Seren (2020). Details industry reviews and critical acclaim for *Footnotes to Water*. Corroborates Zoë Skoulding as Winner of Wales Book of the Year Poetry Award 2020.

<https://www.serenbooks.com/productdisplay/footnotes-water>

5.6 The Guardian (2013 - 2020) Poem of the Week. Carol Rumens' weekly blog demonstrates engagement with global poetry networks, ongoing now for over a decade.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog+series/poemoftheweek>

5.7 Hay Festival (2019) news blog. Confirms the selection of Alys Conran as Hay Festival International Fellow 2019-2020 and details her ambassadorial role at international festivals.

<https://www.hayfestival.com/news/blog.aspx?post=970>

5.8 rAdda (2019) Publications, events and performances. Details Skoulding's contribution to the internationalisation of Welsh writing through poetry festivals in Wales and France. Based on *Footnotes to Water*, including audio clips of Paris performances in 2016.

<http://www.bangoradda.org/events.php.en>

5.9 Poetry International Archives (2020) Director of Literature Across Frontier article corroborates Skoulding's poetry international work.

<https://www.poetryinternational.org/pi/poet/30288/Zoe-Skoulding/en/tile>

5.10 Testimonial from the Development Officer and International Coordinator from the Arts Council for Wales (Participant and reporter in the impact process). Corroborates Skoulding's significant role in developing international literary links with Wales.

5.11 Weidenfeld & Nicolson. A prestigious and dynamic British and international publisher hosting reviews for *Dignity*.

<https://www.weidenfeldandnicolson.co.uk/titles/alys-conran/dignity/9781474609463/>

5.12 BBC Radio 4 Womans Hour (09.04.19 @ 35m 59s). Featuring Alys Conran discussing her new novel *Dignity*; changing audience perceptions about diversity and decolonisation. (Evidence submitted is a screenshot; video on file; available on request).

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0003ztp>