Bernard O'Donoghue was born in Cullen, County Cork, in 1945, later moving to Manchester.

He studied Medieval English at Oxford University, where he is a teacher and Fellow in English at Wadham College.

He is a poet and literary critic, and author of Seamus Heaney and the Language of Poetry (1995). His poetry collections are Poaching Rights (1987); The Weakness (1991); Gunpowder (1995), winner of the 1995 Whitbread Poetry Award; Here Nor There (1999); and Outliving (2003). His work of verse translation, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, was published in 2006 and a Selected Poems in 2008.

Bernard O'Donoghue received a Cholmondeley Award in 2009. His most recent poetry collections are Farmers Cross (2011) and The Seasons of Cullen Church (2016), both of which were shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize