

<b>Institution:</b> University of York
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 29 English Language and Literature
<b>Title of case study:</b> Literary history promoting national reconciliation and cross-cultural awareness in South Africa.
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Attwell and Attridge’s paradigm-shifting research on the culturally and linguistically diverse literary history of South Africa has had a significant influence on the country’s reassessment of its cultural past, present and future. In a national situation in which literature has always been embedded in political life, apartheid divisions left different racial and linguistic groups out of touch with each other’s literary heritage. Attridge and Attwell undertook to bridge these differences by producing the first comprehensive history of literature across all languages and in all periods, widely seen as a major step forward in national cross-cultural awareness. The key beneficiaries are a range of political, cultural, media and educational institutions, and the people served by them, in South Africa and across the world.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>This research was carried out at the University of York by Professor Derek Attridge (joined HEI in October 1998) and Professor David Attwell (joined HEI in January 2006), building on a long investment in Southern African studies at York.</p> <p>Joint research by Professors Attwell and Attridge between 2006 and 2011 investigated the history of South African literature from its oral beginnings to the postmodern present, examining original publications and earlier attempts at South African literary historiography. Their aim was to discover the common threads underlying the diversity of the various cultural groups in South Africa, and to trace their shared, though often conflicting, histories in order to contribute to the rebuilding of national identity. Negotiating the difficulties of bringing together scholars from different, often divided, linguistic and racial communities, they convened a conference of contributors in Johannesburg and created online tools for the collective discussion of draft chapters. These were reviewed and revised by Attwell and Attridge and organized into an 877-page volume with 41 contributors, including an introduction, headnotes to six periodised sections and a forty-page index. <i>CHSAL</i> was published in January 2012; for the first time, an in-depth, comprehensive picture of the entirety of South Africa’s literary production was made available to a global readership. <i>CHSAL</i> has been shortlisted for <i>Times Higher Education’s</i> International Collaboration of the Year Award (2013).</p> <p>Underlying this project was the research Attwell and Attridge conducted on specific South African authors. Between 2006 and 2013 Attwell carried out research on the writing of the Nobel laureate J. M. Coetzee, interviewing him on a number of occasions, publishing four essays in peer-reviewed journals and two chapters in collected editions. In 2011 he was awarded a Leverhulme Research Fellowship (£45,000) to write a critical biography of Coetzee, a book commissioned by Coetzee’s Dutch publisher and aimed at a broad audience. From 2006 to 2009 he collaborated with the distinguished intellectual N. Chabani Manganyi (Chair of South Africa’s Council for Higher Education, a former Vice-Chancellor and Director-General of Education in Mandela’s Presidency) to collect and annotate the letters of Es’kia Mphahlele, published in 2009. This research probed the life and writing of one of the most significant members of the South African intelligentsia and an important political voice in the apartheid era; a key element was tracing Mphahlele’s world-wide connections with leading intellectuals throughout the Black Diaspora.</p> <p>Attridge undertook research on the novels of Coetzee between 1998 and 2010, investigating, by means of close analysis and theoretical discussion, their importance in current discussions of the ethical dimension of literature. This research led to a monograph, six chapters in collections, and three articles in peer-reviewed journals. He co-edited a special issue of the journal <i>Interventions</i> on Coetzee, and was invited to contribute the introduction to a collection of Coetzee’s non-fiction. His research demonstrated the centrality of Coetzee’s work in contemporary global literature and its relation to the modernist tradition of European writing.</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

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

1. D Attwell and D Attridge, eds. *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. ISBN 978 0 521 19928 5. Listed in REF 2.
2. D Attwell, "Life and Times of Elizabeth Costello: J. M. Coetzee and the Public Sphere," in *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006: 25-41. ISBN 978 0 8214 1686 0. Can be supplied by HEI on request.
3. D Attwell, "J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of Africa," in *Journal of Literary Studies* 25, 4 (2009), 67-83. DOI 10.1080/02564710903226684. Listed in REF 2.
4. N. Chabani Manganyi and D Attwell, eds., *Bury Me at the Marketplace: Es'kia Mphahlele and Company: Letters 1943-2006*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010. ISBN 978 1 86814 489 1. Listed in REF 2.
5. D Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, and Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2004. ISBN 0 226 03116 0. Can be supplied by HEI on request.
6. D Attridge, "Coetzee's Artists, Coetzee's Art," in *J. M. Coetzee's Austerities*, ed. G Bradshaw and M Neill, London: Ashgate, 2010, pp. 25-42. ISBN 9780754668039. Listed in REF 2.

Evidence of quality: 1, 4, 5 are books published by leading presses; 2, 3, 6 are peer-reviewed collections and journal. 1 and 5 have been widely and favourably reviewed. 2 and 4 were submitted to RAE 2008 in which 95% of department's research was 2\* or above.

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

Designed to have a direct influence on the political, cultural and educational institutions of South Africa, and to play a part in the reshaping of the public's understanding of the country's multiple cultural traditions, Attwell and Attridge's *CHSAL* made a significant contribution to the current process of national reconciliation and self-evaluation after the ending of apartheid. To ensure the book's widest possible reach, especially in South Africa, Attwell and Attridge secured an exceptional agreement by Cambridge University Press to publish a special inexpensive paperback edition for the African market at a third of the international price, making the book accessible to African students as well as readers outside universities. These unusual publishing arrangements were designed to maximise the influence of *CHSAL* as the most comprehensive literary history of South Africa yet to be published, covering the country's huge linguistic range. Within the first year of its publication (2012), the volume had been reprinted three times, demonstrating sales, and thus readership, well in excess of expectations.

In a country where literary culture continues to be integral to the political process, Attwell and Attridge have made possible new perceptions of the achievements of South Africa's writers and new understandings of the complex history of literary production from pre-colonial oral narratives to recent developments in South Africa's eleven official languages. The **beneficiaries** of the impact are: South African **political and cultural institutions and leaders, media, universities and schools, contemporary South African writers, and South African and global reading publics.**

*Beneficiaries*

Attwell and Attridge's research directly impacted on leading South African cultural, educational, political and literary figures. They arranged public events to coincide with the publication of *CHSAL*, most importantly well-attended launches in both Johannesburg and Cape Town in March 2012. The influence of the volume on major cultural leaders was in evidence in their direct involvement in the launches. In Johannesburg, the address was given by Achmat Dangor, leading novelist and CEO of the Nelson Mandela Foundation; in Cape Town, by Njabulo Ndebele, writer, public intellectual and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town. World-renowned South African authors from across the nation's different linguistic communities, including Nobel

## Impact case study (REF3b)

laureate Nadine Gordimer, André Brink and Mandla Langa, attended the launches. The willingness of Dangor and Ndebele to launch *CHSAL* and the presence of major writers illustrates the quick recognition within South Africa of the importance of the volume's social and political intervention. Both Dangor and Ndebele praised its impact on the country's perception of its culture; Ndebele commented that the book will be read "in schools, universities and public libraries, and will spread its intellectual presence in our public lives well into the future." A commentator on the multilingual literary blog SlipNet agreed with Ndebele that the *sharing* of South Africa's history is itself a story that "must be opened up, as this book does, if we are to develop a greater understanding of ourselves and our positioning in the world". Such strong statements recognise the book's contribution to the shaping of **public discourse and civic values**. (See #1, 2, 3, 4 below)

The South African **media** quickly saw the extensive public significance of *CHSAL*. The volume provided the media with new frameworks for debating the country's multiple cultural traditions. The launches were widely reported on literary websites and in the mainstream South African press. The book was reviewed in newspapers such as the *Cape Times* and the *Mail & Guardian*, on popular internet sites such as LitNet and SlipNet, and on South African radio, and was discussed in a public debate at the *Mail & Guardian* Literary Festival at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg in September 2012. (The *Mail & Guardian* is a weekly national South African newspaper, widely read for its political and cultural coverage; it has a distinguished history of oppositional and investigative reporting going back to the 1980s.) The *Mail & Guardian's* solicitation of a full-page article from Attwell is a measure of the volume's success in shaping the media's representation of South African literature and of the widespread sense that the country needed this new, cross-cultural and multilingual narrative about its cultural heritage. (See # 5, 6, 7 below)

Although recently published, the volume has already been adopted as a course text in South African **universities** (e.g., the Honours course in African Literatures at the University of Johannesburg, the "Africa Live" course in the English Department at the University of Cape Town, and the course on "Algemeene Literatuurwetenskap" in the Afrikaans Department at the University of Pretoria) where its definitive status is influencing a new generation of cultural producers, fulfilling Ndebele's prediction. The remark by Linda Kwatsha, Professor and Head of African Languages at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, in her review of *CHSAL* captures the book's importance to black educators and their students: "The question as to what South African literature is has been answered in this volume. South African literature is not South African English literature, but embraces all the languages and cultures of the people of South Africa" (See #4 below). Such comments point to the volume's re-positioning of the country's literary heritage in South African education. (See # 8 below)

The impact of Attwell and Attridge's research has reached South Africa's **National English Literary Museum** (NELM), the country's major manuscript and book archive, with a lively outreach programme. Responding to the same cultural imperatives as *CHSAL*, NELM has expanded its remit to include the indigenous-language literatures. In March 2013, York and NELM's Director, Beverley Thomas, agreed to a partnership which includes an exhibition of literary materials curated by Attwell and Attridge to coincide with the opening of NELM's new multi-million rand facility. Attwell and Attridge have begun to develop funding applications to support collaborative projects enabling NELM's archivists to work with UK and South African researchers. Through this partnership Attwell and Attridge enhance NELM's international profile and provide an academic dimension to their archival training programme. (See #9 below)

Alongside their work in changing South Africa's perception of its own literary culture, Attwell and Attridge have helped to create a wider appreciation of South African literature and its strong political voice within global postcolonial literatures. As a result of the prominence of their research on Coetzee and other South African writers, and their commitment to using it to reframe international perceptions of South Africa, Attwell and Attridge have promoted South African literature in the media (interviews on BBC and Australian Broadcasting Corporation), hosted launches (*CHSAL*) and readings (Coetzee, Wicomb) at York, and participated in literary festivals and public fora around the world (The Netherlands, Poland, Norway, Australia). (See #10 below)

## Impact case study (REF3b)

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

1. Transcript of Ndebele's speech at Cape Town launch of *CHSAL*:  
[www.apc.uct.ac.za/gazette/archive/?id=54&t=int](http://www.apc.uct.ac.za/gazette/archive/?id=54&t=int)
2. *SlipNet*: online South African literary journal: [slipnet.co.za/view/event/an-auspicious-occasion-as-cambridge-history-of-sa-literature-is-launched/](http://slipnet.co.za/view/event/an-auspicious-occasion-as-cambridge-history-of-sa-literature-is-launched/) (report on Cape Town launch of *CHSAL*); [slipnet.co.za/view/reviews/anodyne-cambridge-history-still-hits-the-mark/](http://slipnet.co.za/view/reviews/anodyne-cambridge-history-still-hits-the-mark/) (Review of *CHSAL*); [slipnet.co.za/view/event/many-literatures-few-readers-the-end-of-south-african-literary-culture/](http://slipnet.co.za/view/event/many-literatures-few-readers-the-end-of-south-african-literary-culture/) (report on *Mail & Guardian* Literary Festival discussion of *CHSAL*)
3. *Books Live*, South African literary blog: [bookslive.co.za/blog/2012/03/16/david-attwell-and-derek-attridge-launch-the-cambridge-history-of-south-african-literature/](http://bookslive.co.za/blog/2012/03/16/david-attwell-and-derek-attridge-launch-the-cambridge-history-of-south-african-literature/) (report on Cape Town launch of *CHSAL*); [bookslive.co.za/blog/2012/02/13/margie-orford-and-isobel-dixon-at-the-uk-launch-of-the-cambridge-history-of-sa-lit/](http://bookslive.co.za/blog/2012/02/13/margie-orford-and-isobel-dixon-at-the-uk-launch-of-the-cambridge-history-of-sa-lit/) (coverage of UK launch of *CHSAL*)
4. Sample reviews emphasizing the volume's contribution to South African cultural identity: *African Studies Quarterly* 13.4 (2013), 95-98, DOI 10.1353/ral.2013.0046; [litnet.co.za/Article/the-possibility-of-inclusivity-a-review-of-the-cambridge-history-of-south-african](http://litnet.co.za/Article/the-possibility-of-inclusivity-a-review-of-the-cambridge-history-of-south-african); <http://litnet.co.za/Article/south-african-literature-is-not-south-african-english-literature-linda-kwatsha-reviews>
5. *Mail & Guardian* newspaper coverage of *CHSAL*: [mg.co.za/article/2012-07-26-a-festival-wordy-of-note](http://mg.co.za/article/2012-07-26-a-festival-wordy-of-note) (announcement of discussion of *CHSAL* at *Mail & Guardian* Literary Festival); [mg.co.za/article/2012-03-02-the-many-voices-of-south-africas-past](http://mg.co.za/article/2012-03-02-the-many-voices-of-south-africas-past) (Attwell's invited article in the *Mail & Guardian*); [mg.co.za/article/2012-11-16-the-a-to-z-of-local-writing](http://mg.co.za/article/2012-11-16-the-a-to-z-of-local-writing) (review of *CHSAL*)
6. *LitNet*, online South African literary journal: [www.litnet.co.za/Article/speaking-with-many-voices-the-cambridge-history-of-south-african-literature-cape-town-la](http://www.litnet.co.za/Article/speaking-with-many-voices-the-cambridge-history-of-south-african-literature-cape-town-la) (report on Cape Town launch of *CHSAL*); [www.litnet.co.za/Article/toward-an-inclusive-literary-history-three-scholars-review-the-cambridge-history-of-south](http://www.litnet.co.za/Article/toward-an-inclusive-literary-history-three-scholars-review-the-cambridge-history-of-south) (triple review of *CHSAL*)
7. *Fine Music Radio* (South African radio station) review of *CHSAL*, broadcast on 7th May, 2012: [www.gorrybowestaylor.co.za/reviews/156/the-cambridge-history-of-south-african-literature-editors-david-attwell-derek-attridge](http://www.gorrybowestaylor.co.za/reviews/156/the-cambridge-history-of-south-african-literature-editors-david-attwell-derek-attridge)
8. Example of South African university curriculum including *CHSAL*: archived e-mail correspondence, University of Johannesburg; archived syllabus, University of Pretoria; and [seapointcontact.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/ell2010-africa-live-course-outline-2012.pdf](http://seapointcontact.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/ell2010-africa-live-course-outline-2012.pdf).
9. Correspondence with Director of South African National English Literary Museum
10. European literary festivals featuring Attwell and Attridge: <http://archieff.debalie.nl/artikel.jsp?articleid=354333> (De Balie, Amsterdam: *Is Dit J. M. Coetzee?* Festival, 13-16 May 2010); [malta-festival.pl/public/upload/files/raport-malta-WEB.pdf](http://malta-festival.pl/public/upload/files/raport-malta-WEB.pdf) (Malta Festival, Poznań, 6 July 2012); [www.back2.pl/between1983\\_conference\\_programme.pdf](http://www.back2.pl/between1983_conference_programme.pdf) (Between Festival, Sopot, 18 May 2013); [www.litteraturfestival.no](http://www.litteraturfestival.no) (Norway Literary Festival, Lillehammer, 30 May 2013)