

Institution: University of York		
Unit of Assessment: 27 - English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Literary history promoting national self-definition, reconciliation, and cross-cultural awareness in South Africa		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2006 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Professor David Attwell	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of English	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1/1/2006 - 31/7/2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Attwell's work on the multilingual nature of South African literature and on Nobel Laureate J.M. Coetzee has had substantial impact on the country's understanding of how its literary culture is intertwined with national identity and political process. Collaborative work with Amazwi, the South African Museum of Literature, has helped to define its post-Apartheid direction, and, in its coordination with the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas, contributed to the internationalisation of both institutions. Attwell continues to have substantial impact on South African public discourse and linguistic diversity, through the increasingly pervasive influence of the seminal <i>Cambridge History of South African Literature</i> (2012), and through his significant public presence in public lectures, literary festivals and in the media coverage of his major publications.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Attwell has worked on and collaborated with J.M. Coetzee since 1987. <i>J.M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing</i> (2015), his latest book in the field [3.3], published by trade and academic publishers on four continents, and translated into Dutch and Mandarin, examines the creative process of this globally distinguished Nobel Laureate. Attwell was granted early access to Coetzee's archive at the Harry Ransom Center [HRC] and the book is the first to use the writer's papers in an inquiry into his creative processes. As a major world author, Coetzee remains one of South Africa's most influential but also perplexing writers, and Attwell's role in mediating his work to a range of audiences is a key feature of his impact. The biography mediates Coetzee's complex, elusive authorship to national and international readers, enabling them to appreciate the ethical and aesthetic impact of South Africa's landscapes and history on one of the world's most distinguished oeuvres. Coetzee's place in the complex cultural politics of South Africa, and the sometimes fraught relationship between the literary and political, are dealt with in articles on the politics of shame [3.2] and the intellectual landscape of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa [3.1]. These and other articles [3.4] have likewise emerged from Attwell's engagement with the archives at the Harry Ransom Center.</p> <p><i>The Cambridge History of South African Literature</i> (CHSAL), co-edited with Derek Attridge [3.5], has, since its publication in 2012, become a significant point of reference in South African academic and cultural life. As the first multilingual, and therefore properly national, literary history, it reimagines the country's literary historiography, offering a radical post-apartheid account of the history of South African literature from its oral beginnings to the postmodern present. The aim of the volume is to discover the common threads underlying the diversity of the various cultural groups in South Africa and to trace their shared, though often conflicting, literary 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, Attwell and Attridge convened a conference of contributors in Johannesburg and created online tools for the collective discussion of draft chapters. These were reviewed and revised by the editors and organised into an 877-page volume with 41 contributors, including an introduction written by Attwell that makes the case for multilingual literary historiography, with headnotes to six periodised sections and a forty-page index. CHSAL, in turn, built on Attwell's work on black literary history, notably Esk'ia Mphahlele [3.6], a major figure of the global African diaspora. This collection of letters and introduction documents the networks of his intellectual life and influence. Attwell's collaborator on the volume, Chabani Manganyi, was Minister of Education in the Mandela presidency. Attwell's appointment as Extraordinary Professor at the University of The</p>		

Western Cape, and his award of a prestigious A1-rating from the country's National Research Foundation, testifies to his standing as a researcher in the South African literary community.

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

- 3.1 "J.M. Coetzee's South African Intellectual Landscapes," in Tim Mehigan and Christian Moser, eds. *The Intellectual Landscape in the Works of J.M. Coetzee*, Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2018.
- 3.2 "Writing in, of, and around Shame: J.M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*" in David Attwell, Annalisa Pes and Susanna Zinato, eds. *Poetics and Politics of Shame in Postcolonial Literature*. London: Routledge, 2019 (submitted to REF2021)
- 3.3 *J.M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing* (Penguin, 2015). Editions also published by Oxford University Press (UK), Jacana Media (South Africa), Text Publishing (Australia). Dutch translation, as *Het universum van J.M. Coetzee*, by Uitgeverij Cossee, Amsterdam (Peer reviewed and submitted to REF 2021)
- 3.4 "Reading the Coetzee Papers: 'Mother / Age of Iron' " in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 58, 4 (Winter 2016) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26155331>
- 3.5 *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*, Eds. David Attwell and Derek Attridge. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521199285> (submitted to REF 2014)
- 3.6 *Bury Me at the Marketplace, Esk'ia Mphahlele and Company, Letters 1943-2006*. Edited and introduced by N. Chabani Manganyi and David Attwell. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009 <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/bury-me-at-the-marketplace/791A2B49CFBCA58655E5D11DBA6FA67D> (submitted to REF 2014)

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

Attwell's work on South Africa's multilingual literary history [3.5], together with his archival research into South African Nobel Prize winner, J.M Coetzee [3.3], has produced an impressive record of **international cooperation** and a major exchange of materials between **archival institutions** in South Africa and the US. His research has contributed significantly to the way the country continues to evaluate its own troubled cultural legacy, as well as its linguistic and literary heritage, in the post-apartheid era, and in a context where the **multilingual** nature of **literary culture** is intertwined with political process. Attwell's research has also had impact through public events, lectures and media appearances, and collaborative work on a new documentary film. His research on the country's multilingual literary legacy and on Coetzee played a major part in the change in focus and the renaming of the country's most important literary archival centre, Amazwi, The South African Museum of Literature, with its 'new mandate to be the custodians of the literature of all of South Africa's official languages' [5.1]. This culminated in an international exhibition, emerging directly from Attwell's archival study in Texas, on the idea of the **Global South** through Coetzee's engagements with the cultural and geographical landscapes of South Africa, Australia and Argentina.

Attwell's research into the Coetzee papers held at the Harry Ransom Center (HRC) in Texas – a two-year excavation of the archive – and the success of the resulting book (cited by the HRC as 'a global publishing event' [5.2]), has directly underlain a set of international **collaborations** and **exchanges**, with cultural and institutional benefits. The culmination was a series of events to mark the re-launch and rebranding of Amazwi, the South African Museum of Literature (formerly NELM - National English Literary Museum), whose role, as a museum run under the auspices the South African Department of Arts and Culture, is 'the collection, preservation and promotion of South Africa's rich and diverse literary heritage' [5.3]. Its history, however, is complex: NELM's founding ethos, guided by Guy Butler, was to curate a colonially derived, Anglophone literary heritage. Attwell's involvement consolidates NELM/Amazwi's **rebranding as a multilingual, national institution** (Amazwi meaning 'Voices' in the Xhosa language). The Museum's director notes the direct influence of Attwell's work on the multi-lingual character of South Africa's history to the museum's presentation of its literary past: 'David's research on South African culture ... has had a significant impact at the Amazwi South African Museum of Literature in Makhanda'. She speaks of the 'landmark exhibition' curated by Attwell, at the relocation of the Museum to its new, state-of-the-art facilities, as part of this 'rebranding as a national, multilingual institution', and the events' bringing together 'an array of South African literary talent ... reflect[ing] the ethos and goals' of the museum [5.4]. The exhibition, *Scenes from the South*, launched in February

2020, speaks to Coetzee's conception of the literary-geopolitical dynamics of the Southern Hemisphere, and a cultural-political realignment reflected in Amazwi's new directions.

The exhibition was conceived directly out of Attwell's research at the HRC [3.2, 3.3, 3.4]. It consisted of '**key archival collections**' discussed in *The Life of Writing* and transported from Texas to Makhanda. It garnered widespread attention, exemplified by an account of the event in one of the nation's most important periodicals, *Johannesburg Review of Books* [5.5], which noted the diversity (and the eminence) of the writers giving readings and participating in panel discussions: 'a host of South African poets (including Ingrid de Kok, Rustum Kozain and Antjie Krog), and writers of fiction (including Siphiwo Mahala, Nthikeng Mohlele, Ivan Vladislavić and Zoë Wicomb)'. The novelist and playwright, Siphiwo Mahala, a communications officer in the South African presidency, summed up the impact on participants and audience, noting how the event represented 'different epochs, racial and social backgrounds', and was a 'momentous occasion' in bringing together 'some of the leading literary scholars, public intellectuals and prominent writers in South Africa' [5.5]. Amazwi's council chair speaks of the museum's purpose as mediating the political and the literary, 'to achieve ambitious objectives and nurture nation building and social cohesion in South Africa' [5.3]. Attwell's event, with its array of leading figures in the nation's complex and ongoing cultural debates, was an important contribution to this and the Museum Director writes: 'The breadth of this line-up reflected the ethos and goals of Amazwi's rebranding as a multilingual institution, a truly national centre devoted to all of South Africa's literatures, seeking worldwide impact' [5.4].

A further measure of the impact of the exhibition is its inclusion in the country's most important annual arts event: 'The exhibition was a major success and has been chosen for the main programme of South Africa's National Arts Festival' [5.4], the equivalent of the UK's Edinburgh Festival, which has been described as, 'one of the largest and most diverse arts gatherings in Africa' and '*Africa's* largest and most colourful cultural event' [5.6]. Covid-19 [see statement of mitigation] interrupted the longevity and economic impact of the exhibition, but the curated digital exhibition has enabled it to retain a considerable profile, and has also given it a longer life, remaining live online.

In addition to the cultural impact of the event, the impact on both Amazwi and the HRC has been significant. It has contributed to Amazwi's staking out a new international identity: 'The collaboration between Amazwi and the Harry Ransom Center marks an important change in this institutional relationship' [5.4]. Amazwi's forerunner, NELM, was founded in the 1960s to offset the continuing acquisition of South Africa's literary archives by US institutions. The significant legacy of this loss had led to a fraught relationship, from the South African perspective. According to the Director of Amazwi, the collaboration on *Scenes from the South* overturned this decades-long centre-periphery antagonism and 'has transformed the relationship into a professional partnership' [5.4], feeding into the government's mandate and the strategic plans for the museum, as demonstrated in the museum's 2019 Annual Report 'pursuing partnerships, both locally and abroad, in order to increase the footprint of the museum on the international stage' [5.3]. The institutional impact, on both Texas and Makhanda, has been **reciprocal** and **extensive**, and has led to tangible plans for collaborations in the future. A wider cultural impact of the event is noted by Rhodes University in regard to its Heritage Management programme, whose account of the *Scenes from the South* events notes the importance of the internationalisation achieved, as a result of Attwell's work: 'This places us on the world stage in terms of exhibiting ... Coordination has taken place over three continents, which is quite something' [5.1].

On the other side of the exchange, the HRC at the University of Texas describes the collaboration in the context of its own **internationalism**. 'While the Ransom Center has selectively traveled past exhibitions, it has rarely successfully collaborated on the creation of one in partnership with another organization', writes the HRC's lead archivist: 'So, for us, *Scenes from the South's* success is a first and emboldens us toward **future collaborations**' citing a forthcoming project in concert with PEN International [the worldwide association of writers]' in 2021 [5.2]. The impact has emerged most fully in the **depth and longevity of the institutional**

relationships formed: 'What might have merely resulted in an exhibition loan request became, under Attwell's initiative, a partnership,' according to the HRC, noting in particular the importance of inter-cultural literary heritage, and how it 'will help us model future international collaborative projects with the ultimate goal of sharing cultural heritage to diverse, global audiences'. The role played by Attwell was firstly to open up the Coetzee archive in his book and articles, research whose 'ongoing value, influence, and impact cannot be overstated', on the back of which a complex intercontinental archival collaboration was brokered [5.2]. While this connection has been forged around the research on Coetzee, the Director of Amazwi notes plans for 'future exchanges since the holdings of the Ransom Center include other valuable African archives' [5.4]. Attwell, with co-curator Kai Easton from SOAS, helped produce a 'memorandum of understanding' between the institutions, organised the **selection and curation** of the material from intimate knowledge of the archive and contributed to the **practicalities** and logistics, insurance and finance. The significance of this task – and the political and bureaucratic hurdles it involved – is noted by both institutions, with Amazwi writing of Attwell's involvement in its **institution-governmental negotiations** 'with the Board of Amazwi to help strengthen the case and secure budgetary approval for the project from the Department of Arts and Culture' [5.4]. This was described by the HRC in Texas as '**critical to the exhibition's successful realization**', and the HRC noted too that the nature of the complex collaboration will 'be highlighted in a forthcoming edition of the Ransom Center Magazine' [5.2]. An important element in the collaboration is the return leg, with the plans to host the exhibition in the HRC itself from Summer/Autumn 2020, including material that has never left South Africa travelling to the US. Although Covid-19 has delayed the plan, it continues in an online iteration, and will return in physical form to the HRC. The HRC reports substantial activity in the wake of Attwell's monograph, noting the number of applications for fellowships to work on the Coetzee archive which cite Attwell's work. The nature of this collaboration was for all parties dependent on Attwell's research, and emerged from the global success of his critical biography and public appearances [5.2].

An important contribution to this shift is the success of the *Cambridge History of South African Literature* (CHSAL), whose focus on the multi-lingual literary landscape, and indigenous-language literatures of the country, has been widely credited for its reframing of the country's literary legacy. This volume is securely at the heart of South African literary studies within and beyond its universities. This position was underlain by an **exceptional feature** of the book's **publication**: an agreement by Cambridge University Press to publish a local, **inexpensive** African paperback by its Cape Town division at a third of the international price, making the book **accessible** to African students as well as readers outside universities. The text is found in most South African University libraries of all traditions; academics, teachers and others have testified to its use in reshaping the **literary landscape**, and its influence on political debate around culture and the arts. Prof Michael Titlestad of the University of the Witwatersrand writes: 'The CHSAL is among the most important sources' in both undergraduate and postgraduate **educational settings**, to orientate the complex multilingual history. He notes its importance in **transforming** the South African literary **curriculum**, stating that it is 'fast becoming indispensable in our context', going beyond a solely Anglophone conception of the country's literary history [5.7]. Attwell has been invited to give talks to listeners in greater Cape Town via Cape Talk Radio, talks which originated in The University of Cape Town Extension Lecture and Summer School series for the general public in 2014, 2017 and 2020.

Attwell's publications in other areas of the country's national literature, where the cultural politics are quite different, are equally significant. His research on black authors including his editing of the letters of Es'kia Mphahlele [3.6], together with the CHSAL, have proved foundational in the development of the national literature in its current phase of post-apartheid reinvention. Coetzee himself has written of Attwell's work on black literary culture that it 'represents the very best of the new wave of South African scholarship and criticism' [5.8]. CHSAL's extensive work on African-language literature lies behind the seminal translation project, *Africa Pulse*, led by the Centre for Multilingual and Diversity Research at the University of the Western Cape, in which classics of African-language literatures are published in cheap editions, in new English translations by Oxford University Press, for schools, undergraduates and the general reader.

The project was described as a 'Publishing Coup' by *The Cape Argus* [5.9]. Speaking at an event hosted by TORCH at Oxford, the distinguished Afrikaans writer Antjie Krog spoke of the foundational influence of CHSAL in the texts chosen for translation, noting that *Africa Pulse* was funded by South Africa's Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences' 'catalytic' research programme, on the strength of a proposal that cited the CHSAL as the key resource [5.9].

Attwell's work, both on Coetzee and on the multilingual literary landscape of South Africa, has involved a series of unusual **publication agreements**, reflecting its **trans-global subject matter** and audience. The publishing model for the biography was wholly geared to its complex audiences: initiated by Coetzee's Dutch publisher in Amsterdam (Cossee Uitgeverij) it was written expressly for both the **academic and trade presses** in the Netherlands, the UK, South Africa and Australia, with translation in mind. In South Africa it was published by Jacana Media, an **independent publisher** whose South African edition, now in its second printing, was a finalist for the country's most prestigious award for nonfiction, the Alan Paton Prize (Sunday Times Literary Awards) [5.8]. This mixed local-international publication profile has in turn led to a series of public engagement events far beyond any typical scholarly circuit. Attwell has delivered influential public lectures drawn from this work in the UK, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Australia, Japan and China, and been platformed at festivals in Poland and Norway. The book is reviewed in media as diverse as *Die Burger* ("n magnifieke boek"), the *London Review of Books*, and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, who note Attwell's writing as 'indispensable points of reference in Coetzee studies ... that transcends the usual academic monograph ...'. *The Life of Writing* led to a collaboration as **script adviser** on the **feature film** *The Last Days of Elizabeth Costello*, produced by Undercurrent Film and Television and Witfilm and Jotz Productions, further clear evidence of its impact on the public reception of J.M. Coetzee. The film's director credits Attwell with a key contribution to the film's narrative structure and his role as 'story and content consultant' emerged from, the producer writes, Attwell's 'extensive knowledge, experience and international stature in relation to the subject in question' [5.10].

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

- 5.1 Report from Rhodes University on the Amazwi Exhibition, <https://www.ru.ac.za/latestnews/newcourseonheritagemanagementofftoarewardingstart.html>
- 5.2 Testimonial from Associate Director for Education and Exhibitions, Harry Ransom Center
- 5.3 Amazwi Annual Report 2018-19 (pp.7-8) and Performance Plan 2020-21
- 5.4 Testimonial from Director of Amazwi
- 5.5 Testimonial from Sipiwo Mahala about the Exhibition, and review of the Exhibition in *Johannesburg Review of Books*
- 5.6 Websites confirming the nature of the National Arts Festival: <https://www.gov.za/about-sa/sports-arts-culture>; <https://www.southafricanculturalobservatory.org.za/events-overview>; and South African Cultural Observatory Monitoring & Evaluation Summary Report March 2017, p. 12.
- 5.7 Testimonial from Michael Titlestad
- 5.8 Quotation from J.M.Coetzee; and shortlisting of *CHSAL* for Alan Paton Prize.
- 5.9 *SABC News* reports on launch of *Africa Pulse*, 12 Nov 2019; Article in *Cape Argus* on significance of *Africa Pulse*, 13 Nov 2019. Corroboration of the impact of Attwell's CHSAL on the development of the *Africa Pulse* series may also be obtained by the Krog and TORCH event host.
- 5.10 Letter from film director, Undercurrent Film