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## 'Make them roll in their graves': South African Writing, Decolonisation, and the English Literature A-Level

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### ABSTRACT

This article analyses the activities and early outcomes of an ongoing co-designed and co-delivered research impact project entitled "Decolonising the English Literature A-Level". It draws on examples from three case studies, classroom experiences, and student and teacher feedback to show how efforts to support the decolonisation of taught content and pedagogies aimed at A-Level learners can generate benefits for students relating to knowledge and understanding; skills development; personal motivation and well-being; academic attainment; and educational and career ambitions and prospects.

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### Article

"Literature exists outside of old, white men. It is your job to make them roll in their graves" – Student "postcard to my future self", Runshaw College (March 2023)

In this article, we outline the processes and findings of a co-designed and co-delivered research impact project that seeks to promote, advance and aid the decolonisation of English Literature A-Level curriculum content and teaching. Our project began in January 2021 with three initial aims: to support the decolonisation of English studies; to extend the reach and impact of the AHRC-funded project "South African Modernism 1880–2020"; and to assist student learning and preparation for A-Level assessments. Our nine team members (past and present) are mostly comprised of current and recently graduated PhD students from the universities of Salford and Manchester, and to date we have delivered over 120 hours of curriculum-targeted teaching, training and podcast production experience to over 920 A-Level students and teachers across 20 secondary schools, sixth forms and colleges located primarily in the North West of England. In what follows, we present an account and assessment of our pedagogical methods and practices that draw on examples from three case studies, classroom experiences, and student and teacher feedback. We argue that our work with Further Education (FE) providers affords

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a range of benefits for students, including improved knowledge of, interest in, and engagement with the literature, literary theory and contexts discussed; the development of key and new skills in literary and theoretical analysis, communication and public engagement; and improved motivation, sense of belonging, self-worth and well-being in classroom settings and beyond. Other impacts are traced via specific examples in which students and teachers opted to expand the range of topics and texts used in A-Level assessments to include African writing as well as postcolonial and decolonial materials, methodologies and pedagogies. This has in turn led to student success in terms of grades awarded and associated educational and career goals and prospects.

Our work with FE providers takes pointers from other teacher-led efforts to “disturb the waters” by “teaching global literature” (2018, 17) as in Kelly Wissman’s formulation, and by responding to calls such as Clare Chambers’ to “creatively connect with [...] students through meshing the literacies which exist both in and out of school” (Wissman 2018, 144). So too does our work take inspiration and steers from decolonising initiatives originating from outside of Britain, particularly from movements such as #RhodesMustFall, Indigenise Education and “Why Is My Curriculum White?”.<sup>1</sup> As such, our use of the term “decolonise” in this article conveys the partial, ongoing nature of the processes of decolonisation at all levels of politics, economics, society and culture (Beyer 2022; Eve and Wayne Yang 2012). It is not presented as a synonym for internationalisation, diversification or recognition, nor do we see our work with colleges and sixth forms as possible to finish, perfect or complete. What we try to do is use some of the in-roads provided by new educational interest in global and diverse histories, literatures and cultures, in conjunction with more radical decolonising theories and praxes, to introduce meaningful changes within our own spheres of influence, working with specific colleges. Our project, then, supports efforts to decolonise English Studies in that it is anti-racist; it accounts for, and challenges, colonial legacies and structural inequalities; and it promotes broader and balanced educations in the discipline.

Our project takes place in a national educational context shaped by the reforms of the 2010–2015 Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government. Though not directly related to A-Level teaching, their reforms pushed postcolonial, decolonial and anti-capitalist thinking and writing to the margins of primary and secondary school curricula, or outlawed them altogether. In 2013, for example, the study of “seminal world literature” (Department for Education 2013, 4) was removed from the GCSE English Literature curriculum. More recent guidance on “Political Impartiality in Schools” issued under Boris Johnson’s Conservative government prohibits the use of resources that express “extreme political positions”, defined as those that “promot[e] the adoption of non-democratic political systems rather than those based on democracy, for any purpose” or express “a publicly stated desire to abolish democracy, to end free and fair elections, or violently overthrow capitalism” (Department for Education 2022, np). Though, as one of the authors of this article has noted elsewhere, “A-Level teaching [...] is not subject to the same prohibitive guidelines” imposed on primary and secondary schools, the “nevertheless encourage a culture of hostility towards decolonising discourses and praxes” in English Studies, because just as “the global spread of capitalism went hand-in-hand with colonisation, so too do many works of anti-colonial and postcolonial literature draw on, and espouse, anti-capitalist ideas” (Munslow Ong 2021, 247). In much the same way, John Yandell and Monica Brady declare that the current “national curriculum that confronts

teachers in England is one that makes explicit from the very start its cultural conservatism", and it "promotes an English (or sometimes 'British') literary heritage and the virtues of Standard English" (Yandell and Brady 2016, 44–5).

To be clear, we do not necessarily think that there are significantly prohibitive or restrictive elements embedded into the 2015-issued Department for Education guidance for GCE A-Level subject content. This remains sufficiently open to allow for the teaching of world literatures, postcolonial theories, and literatures in translation, as well as the use of decolonial pedagogies and approaches. Yet A-Level set texts, anthologies, and teacher- and student-led textual choices are still dominated by a canon heavily skewed towards white, male, heterosexual, English writers where postcolonial theories, colonial and anti-colonial source material, and work by female, queer, ethnically and racially diverse, and global majority writers are less common, so that they tend to appear only in optional assessment components that can be easily passed over. This narrowing of focus happens at all points of access and delivery: from curriculum and programme content in primary/secondary schools and Further Education; for teaching staff pursuing undergraduate degrees, PgCE and CPD training; in the syllabi set by the five approved A-Level exam boards; in the availability and breadth of multi-media resources on set texts and topics available to teachers and students to enhance and enable learning; and all the way through to college and departmental cultures and directives. Additional pressures as outlined by Chambers include "statutory assessment, The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) world rankings, school inspections [...] mass-produced schemes and resources, educational websites, teaching trends, school policy and parents" (2018, 139). In short: the centring of certain writers, writing and pedagogies in English Literature A-Level content, form and delivery is the combined and cumulative result of various external and internal factors. It is our contention that this results in limited and limiting forms and habits of reading and analysis, leading to detrimental, even damaging, educational and personal effects. A similar point is made by Thomas et al. in their claim that "we can no longer afford to believe that canonical reading lists are harmless and do not influence how students value, or fail to value, non-white lives" (Thomas, Christian and Jewett 2017, 95).

A further consequence of the educational reforms brought about by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government is, as Robert Eaglestone argues, the "mission-creep of scientific ideas from their right realm to a wider world" (Eaglestone 2021, 5), which forces students and teachers of English Literature to pursue a "right-or-wrong-answers approach which contradicts the National Curriculum, relies on simplistic misapplications of historical context, fosters a bad version of direct instruction and devalues the learner's own creative reading" (6). In our work with FE providers and A-Level learners, we endeavour to tackle the ideological scientism that is, as Eaglestone contends, "distorting the teaching of literature" (12) by introducing students to writing beyond set A-Level texts that in many cases contradicts and challenge dominant Anglo- and Eurocentric accounts of major literary movements, developments, connections, histories, genres and forms. It was unsurprising, then, that we encountered significant barriers to access in the earliest stages of our project, as teachers invariably questioned how our proposed sessions on South African literature, and postcolonial and decolonial theories and criticism, would support student learning about set texts and topics. In response to this challenge, we devised a number of conceptually and contextually-broad lectures and seminars

grounded in comparative analysis approaches to ensure that we were able to provide curriculum coverage as part of our decolonising activities. For example, we read set texts such as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* in dialogue with Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* and Es'kia Mphahlele's "The Suitcase", respectively.

Though most student and teacher feedback has been positive about our taught sessions, isolated examples of student feedback lend credence to Eaglestone's arguments about the shift to ideological scientism in English Studies. One student participant at Runshaw College used a "postcard to my future self" to note that the seminar could have been "more relevant to [their] curriculum", with another from the same college agreeing that they "didn't think it was useful to study something that isn't part of the syllabus" (March 2023).<sup>2</sup> In these examples, the students saw value only in taught sessions that related directly and fully to curriculum content, so that the exploration of alternative creative readings, global perspectives and exercises in critical thinking, communication and teamwork were not interpreted as meaningful transferable skills. On the whole, however, we have found that our work with sixth forms and colleges supports young learners to look outwards from both a contracted view of English Literature that prioritises white English (and occasionally other British and American) voices and the similarly reductionist political perspectives that block anti-capitalist critique in primary and secondary education. For example, another student from the same college used a postcard to state that our lectures and seminars "widened [their] perspective on English literature" (Runshaw College, March 2023), and a student from elsewhere commented explicitly on the benefits of comparative analysis, explaining that they "want[ed] to find more ways to link two topics that seem to be unrelated" because the sessions provided "further incentive to do more research" (Burnley College, March 2023, postcard) in their own time.

To date, our work with 15 FE providers has delivered teaching relating to four of the five UK exam boards: OCR, AQA, Eduqas, and Edexcel. In our sessions, we have introduced students to poems, short stories and novels by South African writers including the aforementioned Schreiner and Mphahlele, as well as Adam Small, Antjie Krog, Peter Abrahams and Bessie Head, often comparatively analysing these texts with writing by other international figures such as Selvon, Richard Wright and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and canonical curriculum-set novels by Fitzgerald, Joseph Conrad, Thomas Hardy, Bram Stoker and James Joyce. We have also introduced students to postcolonial and decolonial theories and criticism by thinkers and activists including Frantz Fanon, George Padmore, Kwame Nkrumah and Edward Said, amongst others.

### **Decolonial and inclusive pedagogies**

We prepare our A-Level sessions as a team, working together to select primary texts, share our responses and interpretations, explore a range of methods of analysis, co-create lesson plans, and select appropriate examples of secondary criticism to support. Though loosely guided by the parameters of the assessment criteria in terms of topic/theme/period, we nevertheless seek to avoid too-narrow, assessment-focused objectives in order to support and encourage individual and creative responses. As such, we always prioritise what Eaglestone calls "the core of the book, its genre, its structure, symbolism and themes" (2021, 32) in our own discussions in the preparation of teaching materials,

and in delivery. Our taught sessions often also serve as “university tasters” for those interested in pursuing undergraduate degrees in English Literature, because just as the lecture-seminar structure still dominates university-level English education, so too does it remain our most commonly-used method of delivery. Together the lecture and seminar constitute what Lee Shulman calls the discipline’s “signature pedagogies” (Shulman 2005), and in combination show how “[d]isciplines are not collections of ‘inert facts’ but continuing conversations which change over time: each has its own complex and profound tradition of thought from which it has arisen, its own specialised way of teaching” (Eaglestone 2021, 32). The lecture helps to position members of the team as emerging and leading scholars in the field and establishes “ways of teaching that embody both the practitioner and the developing tradition of the discipline” (Eaglestone 2021, 31). The seminar then allows us to establish a non-hierarchical, welcoming and collegial learning environment, and, by showing high enthusiasm for individual contributions, we encourage students to feel valued and empowered in engaging the “experts” in their ideas and interpretations of the literature.

Typically, our lectures introduce key theories, contexts and concepts, and our seminars involve close analysis of unseen texts. In the latter we deploy heuristic pedagogical methods which require the understanding of literary theory as something to be engaged *in* rather than passively learned *about*, as per David Myers’ formulation (Myers 1994, 331). This approach is supported by our use of what Kate Exley and Reg Dennick dub “skeleton handouts” (2009, 107) that include only key quotations, functioning “as a tool to nurture and support active learning” (109). Skeleton handouts encourage interactive learning and highly individualised contributions by supporting annotation and discussion, with students often divided into small groups to analyse extracts of text in advance of sharing with the class, and can then be taken away to support revision and assessment preparation.

Our use of unseen extracts is a necessity when introducing students to diverse, marginal and marginalised works global literature outside set curriculums, but also mirrors the unseen element of the exam components of A-Level syllabi set by all five UK exam boards. Student feedback reflects the benefits of our taught sessions for assessed work, but often also includes comments about how our lectures and seminars spark and enhance their wider interests in global literatures, enabling in turn personal reflections on the value of their own distinctiveness, responses, feelings and experiences. To this end, one student commented on their postcard that “[i]n today’s lesson, I further developed my close reading skills. This will be helpful when looking at unseen extracts during exams. I also broadened my knowledge on minority writers and how important it is to include them in our studies” (Burnley College, February 2022), which responds directly to our key aims; and another used one of our postcards as a reminder to “learn about your own history so you can shed light on the importance and relevance of that” (Loreto College, May 2023). The second of these comments can be further explicated by attending to Victoria Elliott’s assertion that “[i]t is essential that we reach a place where the imaginations of all students are populated with a wide range of visions for Black, Brown and White lives” (2020, 59), and by recognising Sandra Styres’ (Kanien’kehá:ka) point that the study of literature helps “students to understand their world by engaging with [...] age-appropriate complex understandings of their everyday realities” (Styres 2019, 35). In both content and delivery, then, we invite students to share their creative and highly

individualised responses to the literature through conversation, then contextualised as part of an ongoing conversation over time between writers and readers from all over the world. As a result, students and teachers often request follow-up reading lists to uncover new works of global literature beyond set curriculums, enquire about the types of modules taught at university level, and request further sessions with our team.

As disciplines are “ever-evolving traditions, which are built around working out what they should and shouldn’t contain, how they are or are not relevant, and how their processes work” (Eaglestone 2021, 31), we have more recently endeavoured to explore alternative methods of student-led, interactive teaching and learning through a collaboration with our colleague Jimmy Ewing and the National College Podcast (NCP) at the University of Salford. This involves taking a “pop-up” radio station into FE colleges to co-create podcasts about literature. Our team collaborates with University of Salford undergraduate students on the BA TV and Radio Production and BA English programmes, alongside A-Level English Literature students from the host college, to co-devise, present and record a freely-available podcast about reading and studying global literature. Our experiments with “podography” or “podagogy” (Laing and Wootton 2007, 7–9) – creating podcasts in educational settings – serve as a highly workable and enjoyable student-led method of “active learning” (2022, 820) as Rebekka Jolley explains in her analysis of the role of student-generated podcasts in education. Podagogy decentres traditional teacher-student dynamics in the classroom in ways that we consider closely aligned to our commitment to developing decolonial pedagogical praxes (Styres 2019, 32). In this, we are also inspired by the work of Rosalba Icaza and Rolando Vázquez, who state that “independently of the content of the curricula being taught”, decolonisation “should include a transformation of the relationships established in the classroom” because “[t]he classroom is a space in which power hierarchies and forms of exclusion often get reproduced” (Icaza and Rolando 2018, 119). Although Icaza and Vázquez’s arguments are based in analysis of teacher-student dynamics in Dutch university settings, they have broader applicability to the contexts we discuss here and below in Case Study 3.

Other forms of delivery that we employ in our project include pre-recorded lectures (some as consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic) that continue to be used by FE teachers independently from, and in advance of, our visits. The team have also developed a series of materials to support teacher-led delivery outside of our direct involvement, and which are circulated after our college visits. In one teacher “pack”, we included handouts printed with sections of text from Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (Sale Grammar, March 2023), alongside teacher notes to support students in developing their understanding of content, form and contexts related to, and beyond those discussed in, our workshops. In our most recent experiences teaching during the academic year 2022–2023, student feedback has indicated a preference for longer seminars/workshops and shorter lectures for reasons of access and engagement. We are therefore now exploring more inclusive methods of teaching using Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) frameworks to support, and are in the process of creating an Open Access “teacher toolkit” that will provide a series of learning materials based on global literature for teacher use (forthcoming Autumn 2024).<sup>3</sup>



### **Case study 1: Inter-Racial Love, Anti-Colonial Politics and the AQA Syllabus A: 'Love Through The Ages'**

AQA Literature syllabus A component “Love Through the Ages” implements a “historicist approach to the study of literature”, requiring students to analyse the “central theme of love” in a “shared context” across examples of drama, poetry and prose (2021, 5). Although this theme offers the potential to examine a key element of human experience across a variety of temporalities and geographies, the syllabus focuses predominantly on white heterosexual relationships that uphold idealised modes of what Carolyn Ureña terms “colonial love”, which is “based in imperialist, dualist logic” (Ureña 2020, 87). Overwhelmingly, the “Love Through the Ages” component centres white heterosexual experiences through the inclusion of set texts by writers such as Hardy, Jane Austen and Daphne Du Maurier. When interracial relationships and desires are depicted in the set texts, as in William Shakespeare’s *Othello*, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, the black, creole, or otherwise racially-Othered characters are never represented as viable romantic partners. They are damaged and damaging, insane, cruel, violent and murderous, because, as Nelson Maldonado-Torres et al. explain: “[u]nder antiblack modern/colonial catastrophe, language and love are meant to be used as means to create and recreate a world that keeps everything Black at the polar end of what it is to be human” (Maldonado-Torres et al. 2021, 245).

The activities we designed to enhance student learning and support decolonising efforts in the teaching of “Love Through the Ages” draw attention to the ways that colonialism, and colonial modes of thinking, have vilified, even criminalised, homosexual and inter-racial relationships. In February 2022 and March 2023, we delivered seven seminars on the topic of “Inter-racial Love Under Apartheid” to approximately 300 English Literature and English-Combined A-Level students at Runshaw College in Lancashire. Students were invited to analyse a translation of the poem “What about’ de Lô” by South African writer Adam Small, with the support of an animation of the poem by Badenhorst and Small (2016), and an introduction to relevant language concerns relating to dialect and translation.<sup>4</sup> The poem, originally published in *Kaapse Afrikaans* in 1961, depicts the ways that inter-racial love confronted and opposed the white-supremacist logics and apartheid laws imposed by South Africa’s ruling National Party Government during the latter half of the twentieth century.

In the seminars, students were asked to consider how apartheid politics informed the representation of love in both the form and content of “What about’ de lô” (What about the love). Students noted that Small begins the poem in a way that reflects South Africa’s spatialised, racial politics, as when he introduces his romantic leads, they are separated by a line break: “Diana was a white girl / Martin was a black boy” (2009, 251).<sup>5</sup> Students commented how, at the beginning of the poem, Small represents Diana’s higher social status as a white woman through structure, syntax and layout, as Diana always comes “above” Martin. Her experiences, and the experiences of her family, are always prioritised over Martin and his family: “Said Diana’s folks / What about’ de Lô / Said Martin’s folks / What about’ de Lô / Said everyone’s folks / What about’ de Lô” (Small, 251).<sup>6</sup> Their names appear on the same line for the first time only at the end of the poem, when “Diana and Martin commit suicide” (Small, 252).<sup>7</sup> Students were able to explain that the only context in which the two lovers are able to be together is in death. One student then went on to offer a highly original



comment connecting the structural prioritisation of Diana to the apartheid context even in this last, unifying line, by pointing out that, under National Party rule, hierarchies of race prevailed even in death via the racial segregation of cemeteries.

By using South African literature to reveal the politics of “love”, the limits of its expression and its policing, we were able to discuss with students the idea that “central” themes in literature are not necessarily universal themes, and that the historical, social and political contexts in which texts are produced directly inform the form and content of writing (AQA 2021, 5). The student feedback that we collated about these sessions reflects this understanding, and can be grouped broadly into one or more of four categories, with responses noting: a) an increased understanding of the colonial contexts of literary production; b) personal reflections on positionality; c) improved confidence when reading unfamiliar material and sharing ideas in large groups; and d) enhanced skills relating to formal analysis. In relation to the first category, students’ comments convey that the taught sessions had made them aware of the exclusionary nature of existing curriculums. One wrote of “how common it is to study British, white and male literature”; another on “[t]he importance of P.O.C writers and voices within literature and the way they challenge social normalities through structure and metaphors”; and a third made a note to themselves about broadening their reading experiences by “look[ing] at poems from different cultures and maybe even your own. Literature exists outside of old, white men. It is your job to make them roll in their graves” (Runshaw College, March 2023, postcards). The student feedback made clear their sense of the value of reading literature beyond set A-Level texts, and the associated partiality and limitations of existing curricula. Beyond an awareness of the whiteness of the literary canon, the teaching of South African literature prompted students to reflect on their own positionality and heritage, and the way these relate to literary production and histories more broadly. The students who chose to offer information relating to this commented that our sessions inspired them to find literature from their own countries of ancestry, or religious or ethnic groups. One student used a “postcard to my future self” to suggest: “maybe write some Indonesian poetry, at some point. The Islamic poets might teach you something” (March 2023). Another commented: “I think [the sessions] will push me to think about my own background, being mixed-race myself, and realise the risks my own ancestors took for love and also celebrate how the situations have bettered to some extent” (March 2023, postcard). This feedback indicates that although the seminars focus on the political and geographical specificities of South Africa, they still communicate the creative and cultural value of writers and texts from literature in a wider global purview. Beyond academic improvement, feedback spoke to our aims relating to improving students’ senses of belonging, self-worth and associated well-being, as one teacher also commented via a written questionnaire that the sessions were “[g]ood for their confidence” and “opened their minds” (February 2022).

### ***Case study 2: Modernism at the Margins and the WJEC Eduqas Exam Component ‘Unseen Prose’***

Our leading intervention aimed at supporting student learning on the WJEC Eduqas syllabus involves using examples of South African writing as preparation for the “Unseen Prose” exam component of the English Literature A-Level qualification. In this, candidates are required to analyse a passage of prose from either the period 1880–1910

or 1918–1939 alongside a critical quotation. This assessment provides the opportunity for WJEC Eduqas to incorporate global, racially and ethnically minoritised and marginal/ised writers into assessed papers, as the specification states that students must “be given the opportunity to read a wide range of prose” and “show an understanding of the ways a variety of contexts can influence texts” (2020, 9). It also, as a result, provides teachers with scope to include similarly diverse writers in teaching exercises designed to prepare students for the exam. Despite this level of flexibility, past exam papers have predominantly featured the work of male, heterosexual, English and American writers, including Maxwell Gray’s *The Silence of Dean Maitland*, Graham Greene’s *Brighton Rock*, George Moore’s *Esther Waters*, John Galsworthy’s *The Hedonist* and H. G. Wells’s *Tono-Bungay*. To begin to diversify the “range of prose” studied by the students, our seminars prompted them to undertake an analysis of extracts taken from texts by South African writers including Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) (for those students sitting the 1880–1910 paper) and Solomon Plaatje’s *Mhudi* (written 1920, published 1930) (in the case of those students sitting the 1918–1939 paper).

Our workshops are designed to follow one-hour lectures on “Modernism and Empire 1880–1910” or “Global Modernisms 1918–1939”, which we variably deliver in-person, online or through pre-recorded videos. In 2021, 2022 and 2023, we delivered the “Modernism and Empire” lecture to students at Loreto College in Manchester, then invited them to analyse an extract from the first chapter of *The Story of an African Farm*, entitled “The Watch” (Schreiner [1883] 2008). We encouraged the students to analyse the significance of the items described in this extract, such as the Bible, by linking its presence to the way that colonialism was coded as a “civilising” and “Christianising” mission; and the clock, which was used to manage and control exploitative labour in the colonies, and functions as a key motif in modernist literature. Students were able to make these connections between form, content and contexts by commenting on how the text departs from traditional, realist modes of representation in the personification of the watch, so which the onomatopoeic, monosyllabic repetition of “Tick – tick – tick – tick!”, that initially represents the daily, monotonous repetition of industrialised labour, turns into the spoken “Dying! Dying! Dying!” of the workers exploited under colonial capitalism (Schreiner, 3; see also Munslow Ong 2018, 74–76). The novel’s modernist aesthetics and use of allegory were also key points for discussion as students used these formal aspects to explore the representations of unequal power dynamics between characters and the metaphorical significance of the deteriorating, decaying colonial homestead in which these interactions take place. Students also made a number of original observations not directly connected to the content of the lectures or workshop plans. For example, some were able to connect the position of the clock at the “head of the father’s bed” (Schreiner, 3) to patriarchal lineage and systems of control associated with colonialism. Feedback included one postcard noting that the student “enjoyed learning about a form of literature [they] hadn’t come across before”, whilst another commented on their newly developed understanding of the relationship between context and form: “it was useful to understand how history impacted on literature [...] the structure of the extract could represent imperialism. The way the author describes the setting and later zooms into the [character’s] life emphasises how individuals within colonies are affected in contrast to the overall idea of empire” (Loreto College, February 2021, postcards).

One key theme that emerged in student feedback from our “Unseen Prose” sessions at Loreto College, as well as at Carmel College, was their realisation that empire and the legacies of empire inform and sustain literary production. Examples include: “[r]emember how context and the decline/growth of cultures and influence have changed literary techniques”; “I would like to remember how the colonialism affected literature of the time, specifically about Schreiner’s work/views on colonialism” (Loreto College, May 2023); and “[t]he links between the colonial, technological and domestic issues are vast and constantly explored through ‘Modernism’ as a literary genre. They (the links) may appear in discreet or unexpected aspects” (Carmel College, February 2022). This student feedback was reported via postcards and suggested that our seminars made visible, and filled, the gaps that exist in current curricula relating to narratives of empire. Student comments to this effect include: “[w]e learn about literary movements but never from an African perspective or any other perspective other than British”; “I learnt more about the empire from those lectures than any of my history lessons”; “whenever I learn about the empire it is usually about South Asia so it was nice to learn about something new”; and “the seminars offered a ‘broader perspective’ on literature rather than just Britain” (Loreto College, February 2021, postcards).

### ***Case study 3: Podagogy, Skills Development and Careers for A-level English Literature Students***

Our first exploration in using “podagogical” methods (Laing and Wootton 2007, 7–9) for literary analysis took place at Burnley College in April 2023. Though NCP has an established reputation and record in delivering professional radio and podcast production training and experience to FE and HE students, our collaboration marked a first attempt at combining scholarly and industry methods from English Literary Studies and Radio Production. Once at Burnley, ten A-Level students worked alongside four undergraduates from the University of Salford, three members of our teaching team, and NCP director Jimmy Ewing to co-create an hour-long podcast. This activity was designed to enhance and develop skills in close reading and critical analysis, as well as provide professional experience in podcast presenting and production. Our collaboration with NCP was prompted by reading the work of Laing and Wootton, who suggest that “podcasts can be a passive approach to learning – I speak, you listen – unless you involve students in producing their own podcasts” (Laing and Wootton 2007, 7), in which case they “offer a more sophisticated (and popular) mechanism for delivering educational content” (9). They explain further that podcasting is “not intended to replace the lectures/seminars” but rather “reinforce concepts or issues that [are] raised” (Laing and Wootton 2007, 8) by working synergistically alongside traditional taught content. More recently, Jolley has argued that “[a] student generated podcast is a current and engaging way of allowing students to co-create and complete group work” (Jolley 2022, 820), developing varied skills such as “research, collaboration, criticality, debating, and presentation skills” (820–821).

In our work with NCP and colleges, we endeavour to combine discipline-specific and industry methods as part of the process of podcast production. As the recording began with two students in presenting roles, the other nine college students worked with our team on a close reading task. Signature pedagogies such as student-led

group work and skeleton handouts enabled us to be heuristic in our teaching by mobilising an engaged and interactive style. Together, the students examined intersecting themes of race and gender in Schreiner's allegory "Three Dreams in a Desert" from the collection *Dreams* (1890), presenting their findings at various points as part of the podcast. The students offered insightful points about the text, including the observation that:

I think the way it presents a woman being oppressed by the man's burden is shown in a more complicated manner because the man – at least at first – is as much confined by the woman's suffering as she is. The "broad band" [...] could represent an umbilical cord because even after the ties are cut the man still doesn't leave, which could be like the ties between a mother and a child, like the mental connection. (Student Participant, "Burnley College English Students" 2023, 48:53–49:26, verbal feedback)

Here, the student showed awareness that Schreiner's depiction of gender exceeds any simplified interpretation and that themes of confinement and oppression are central to Schreiner's understanding of the differing experiences of men and women, whilst also proposing a distinctive and original reading of the "broad band" as representative of an indivisible connection between a child and their parent.

The postcards collected from the participants reveal a number of benefits. Students who took part in the close reading exercise commented that they felt empowered and encouraged by "podagogical" learning as "[t]he close reading task helped with improving my analysis skills and also broadened my views [...] It also improved my confidence in public speaking". Additional comments include: "[t]his session was greatly interactive and enriched my interpretation skills"; "this has strengthened my resolve and confidence in expressing my own interpretations"; and "I think it was really good to closely analyse a text. It developed my comprehension skill and confidence". As this feedback demonstrates, the students' experience in co-creating the podcast enabled them to develop their knowledge and understanding as per their references to improved critical thinking skills; had personal benefits in improving their confidence; and developed their communication and presentation skills in new contexts of learning and delivery. Podcasting thus serves as a particularly fruitful means for engaging students to close-read African literature in fun and engaging ways, whilst supporting them in developing new skills and gaining valuable experience in synthesising and presenting their research findings in accessible ways for public audiences. In addition, we were able to track clear evidence that the students felt they had improved their ability to close read primary texts. One student postcard included the note that "[t]he close reading task helped with my analysis skills", and another that the experience "developed [their] analysis skills" because they "had to contend with an extract [they] had never encountered before". As the English Literature A-Level requires students to analyse extracts of unseen prose in timed exam conditions, the exercise had clear benefits in supporting student preparation for A-Level assessments. Importantly too, the A-Level student who took on a role as presenter confirmed that "[t]his was an amazing experience that has solidified in my mind that I would love to seek a career in broadcast journalism". In this example, a student was able to connect the development of skills in literary analysis, presentation and communication to their professional development and future career goals.

## Looking Forwards

Since our project began in January 2021, we have been able to track specific changes, benefits and impacts of our work relating to subject content, delivery and assessment outcomes. By way of one example: following our lectures and seminars for Withington Girls' College students in 2022, three students wrote on postcolonialism for their AQA Specification B coursework, which requires candidates to use theoretical approaches (e.g. feminism, Marxism, ecocriticism) to analyse independently selected works of literature. We were informed one year later that, prior to our lectures and seminars, no student at the college had ever previously opted to write on postcolonial theory in this assessment component. The three students who did in 2022 received top grades and were offered places to study English Literature at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. We have also observed FE providers taking steps to integrate South African literatures into their curricula, with Loreto College and Cheltenham Ladies' College initiating conversations to newly incorporate primary texts introduced by our project, Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* and Plaatje's *Mhudi*, into their teaching as part of the Eduqas syllabus and Comparative Literature component of the OCR A-Level, respectively. Additionally, our sessions continue to demonstrate developments in student understanding. Teacher feedback relating to this includes: "the sessions definitely changed the way our students think. I was impressed that they could now examine modernist aspects in two unseen texts, which was evident during the tutorial sessions" (Withington Girls College, March 2022, teacher questionnaire).

Our work is also having impacts beyond direct delivery. An earlier article about this project (Munslow Ong 2021) was circulated by the WJEC Eduqas A-Level Exam Board to its mailing list of 3061 secondary and FE teachers as part of their January 2022 newsletter to provide a model and method for decolonising A-Level curriculums and pedagogies. We have recently received further funding from the University of Salford Public Policy Fund to allow us to deepen and develop our work with key stakeholders, users and focus groups; and to co-create resources to better support FE providers in teaching a wider range of world literatures, postcolonial theories and criticism. Our aim is to use these initiatives to support FE providers and exam boards in taking lasting steps to decolonise English Literature curriculums and pedagogies. We have evidence that our efforts thus far have led to the introduction of new topics, texts and activities in A-Level English teaching; enhanced students' senses of belonging, self-worth and associated well-being through subject content and delivery; and supported and developed a sense of community cohesion within and across FE and university settings. Student and teacher feedback reveals that our work with colleges has improved student understanding, motivation and confidence; is contributing positively to academic performance in relevant components of A-Level qualification; and is encouraging students to pursue related further study and/or employment. We intend to continue to provide meaningful opportunities for students to engage with marginalised voices and perspectives that have, throughout history, been systematically silenced and suppressed, so that more students are made aware that "literature exists outside of old, white men", and they too can feel empowered as the student author of our epigraph is, to "make them roll in their graves" (Runshaw College, March 2023, postcard).

## Notes

1. See for example “RhodesMustFall” and “Why Is My Curriculum White” campaigns on social media ([www.facebook.com/RhodesMustFall](http://www.facebook.com/RhodesMustFall); <https://twitter.com/RhodesMustFall>; <https://rmfoxford.wordpress.com/>; <http://www.dtmh.ucl.ac.uk/videos/curriculum-white/>), as well as Bhambra, Gebrial and Nişancioğlu (2018); Alvares and Saleem Faruqi (2012); and Sammel, Whatman and Blue (2020).
2. A “postcard to my future self” is a qualitative written method of data collection regularly employed by the team to gather student feedback. At the end of a workshop or lecture, the team member asks participating students to record something that they wish to remember on a postcard. This may include something they have enjoyed learning about during the session; key skills developed; and/or a topic, text or author that they plan to independently investigate further in the future.
3. It is important to mention here that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is not the same as decolonising because introducing diverse works of world literature is not decolonising in and of itself. However, EDI can provide routes to more radical decolonising work, and the team consider it essential to directly address EDI issues in our taught content and pedagogies in order to make space for more inclusive, accessible and student-led methods of teaching.
4. As Adam Small’s original poem (published in 1961) proved difficult to source, we used a reprint in Smit (2009) as an original language source, and Small in Chipasula (2009) for the translation.
5. The Kaapse Afrikaans version as reprinted in Smit reads: ‘Diana was’n wit nôï / Martyn was ‘n bryn boy’ (2009, 342).
6. This appears as ‘sê Diana se mense / sê Martin se mense / sê almal die mens / what about’ de lô” in Smit (2009, 342)
7. This appears as “Diana en Martin commit suicide” in Smit (2009, 342).

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## Data

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author [JMO] upon reasonable request.

## Ethics

Ethics Approval granted by the University of Salford. Approval numbers: 3491 and 8805.

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