

Devolving English Literature: KE Fellowship Proposal **Lynne Pearce (English & Creative Writing)**

Encouraged by the positive reception of *Postcolonial Manchester* (Manchester University Press, 2013) – which has included an enthusiastic review in *The Times Higher* and BBC radio coverage (local and national) – this KE proposal seeks to maximize the impact of the AHRC-funded project, ‘Moving Manchester’ (2006-10), while it is still fresh in public consciousness.

Since it was always the aim of ‘Moving Manchester’ to promote the work of the region’s writers as well as conduct research on them, this KE project would fulfil a commitment that was not entirely possible during the lifetime of the project owing to the fact that its principal public-facing output – i.e., *Postcolonial Manchester* – had yet to be published and disseminated. Although *Postcolonial Manchester* is unquestionably a text that speaks to current academic debates within postcolonial studies, great effort was made to ensure that its content is accessible. As a consequence, we now have a publication whose research-content may be readily exchanged with a more general audience, especially when specifically targeted at the school-sector as is the plan here.

The objective driving this proposal is simple and yet, it is hoped, far-reaching. Led by the principle that guided our research – namely, the need for a ‘devolution’ of English Literature away from its current predominantly white, predominantly metropolitan bias --, the current project seeks to introduce a selection of North-West writers to the region’s secondary schools (years 7-9). However, this is not merely in order to increase those writers’ visibility and/or stimulate pupil-interest in reading and writing, but rather to fulfil a longer-term objective of ensuring those writers’ publications a place on school, college and university syllabuses.

The core work of the Fellowship will therefore centre on the identification of schools in Greater Manchester and Lancashire with whom the KE and RA can develop a pro-active relationship together with the production of information packs/on-line resources that will make the research represented by *Postcolonial Manchester* immediately accessible for the teachers concerned. We believe that literature exploring issues of *writing, identity and place* will be of common interest, especially if this theme is approached via less orthodox modes and genres such as crime fiction or ‘stage and page’ poetry. Colleagues at Lancaster Girls’ Grammar have already confirmed that this focus would work well and said they would love to be involved in the project.

The school-liaison work will be undertaken by the KE Research Assistant (a doctoral / post-doctoral student with research interests in regional / diasporic British writing), while the information packs and on-line resources will be co-authored by the RA and the KE Fellow. The RA will be responsible for visiting the schools and demonstrating the materials/resources to the teachers and also for setting-up the writers’ visits and soliciting feedback.

The external partner organisation for the Fellowship is the literature development organisation and publisher, Commonword / Cultureword (www.cultureword.org.uk). Commonword has been based in Manchester for nearly 40 years and, has supported and promoted the work of hundreds of North-West writers, many of them black and Asian. The ‘Moving Manchester’ project team worked closely with Commonword and the KE Fellow applicant has the trust and support of the current Artistic Director, Peter Kalu, who is privy to this bid. Mr Kalu has already provided a list of Manchester-based writers who would be suitable for this project (he has knowledge, for example, of those who have experience in the school sector) and will also be invaluable in advising upon which Manchester-based schools we should approach. The writers will, of course, be paid for their work (see budget).

In terms of benefits, Lancaster University would be advantaged as follows: fulfilment of the University’s commitment to the region; KE impact originating in ‘Moving Manchester’ that could feature in REF 2020; increased UG recruitment (in particular, developing links with schools in inner-city Manchester which are not part of our typical catchment); work placement / career-development opportunities for the RA; the possibility of a follow-up bid to the AHRC KE programme if this Fellowship (effectively a pilot) proves successful. Such a follow-up would aim to extend the geographical range of the programme, targeting schools and colleges outwith the North-West. Commonword, in turn, will benefit from being seen to be developing new (HE/research-led) links that will raise the profile/reputation of the writers with whom it works at a time when its continued (Arts-Council) funding is under review. The schools’ adoption of books by Mancunian authors – some of

whom will have been published by the Commonword imprints, Crocus/Suitcase – would make an especially positive statement in this regard as well for the authors themselves.

The Fellowship's success as a whole, meanwhile, will be measured in terms of our ability to interest a respectable number of schools in the initiative (given the budget constraints we have limited this to eight) and – most importantly – to get these partners to commit to finding a place for the author/s they elect to work with on their syllabus: i.e., we would expect the teacher to *adopt some portion of the author's work as a 'course text'* as well as discuss it as part of the writer's visit to the school. Feedback from the teachers concerned will enable the KE Fellow to assess the success/future potential of the initiative; a teacher's decision to make the author/text a permanent feature on his/her syllabus will be considered the most important index of success. A longer-term ambition is to see certain authors/texts included on exam syllabuses (GCSE and A'Level) but this will inevitably take time. However, positive take-up of our authors by teachers working with years 7-9 is most certainly a step in the right direction.

WORK PLAN

Consultation Phase: April 2014-July 2014

The RA, in discussion with the KE Fellow, will decide how best to target schools throughout the region and how to identify/involve the participating writers. This will require the RA to spend a week in Manchester, meeting with the KE partner (Commonword) and identified writers and schools. Most of the preparatory liaison work will have been done through email correspondence with / phone calls to these stakeholders. It is hoped that Lancaster UG Admissions team, as well as Commonword, will be of help in identifying likely school partners. ECW also has its own contact list on account of the Lancaster Writing awards. By the end of this phase, the featured writers and participant schools will have been identified and the terms of their contract established.

Preparation Phase 1: August 2014- end-September 2014

The RA, working closely with the KE Fellow and project-partner, Commonword, will prepare the course-pack (focusing on the theme of Writing, Identity and Place). Drawing on the research presented in *Postcolonial Manchester*, this will outline the different ways (thematic, generic, stylistic) that the region's writers have engaged with these issues and suggest uses for certain texts in the classroom. Commonword is itself a publisher of children's books and colleagues in the organisation will be able to advise on this. We envisage these materials being available both on-line and in print (a pamphlet of c.8-10 A4 printed pages). Ahead of the new school year, the RA will meet with teachers in the selected schools to discuss when the authors/texts are to be included in the curriculum: given the time needed to prepare the materials properly, it will be recommended that this is *not before* January 2015 but flexibility will be required.

Preparation Phase 2: October 2014-December 2014

The RA will complete work on the course-pack. The RA, with the help of a web-designer, will create a project website on which extracts of work from the participating authors will be made available for classroom use. The RA, in consultation with the authors, will also draw up a 'profile' page for each author. [A similar resource already exists in the 'Moving Manchester' 'Writers' Gallery' and it may be possible to transmigrate some of this material]. During this phase the RA will meet with teachers in the selected schools to demonstrate the course pack and will help them decide which writer they would like to work with; s/he will also draw up a timetable of writers' visits to the participating schools.

Participating Phase: January 2015- July 2015

The RA will mediate between the schools and the writers to ensure that all is running to plan. During this phase the participating writers will be paid to perform their work and/or facilitate workshops at the schools with which they have been paired. The RA will solicit feedback from both the teachers and writers after each visit. The RA will meet with the KE Fellow on a regular basis to report on how the adoption of the authors/ course material and placements are progressing and, in July 2015, they will jointly prepare the final report on the Fellowship.