

Decolonising the Curriculum: Diversifying the Scholarship

INTRODUCTION:

When considering how to best decolonise the Classics and Ancient History Curriculum, I wanted to find a goal that was very actionable for Durham University to complete. Having a specific and measurable end goal will also make it far easier to quantify the impact of this research. The thing I chose to focus on was the reading list for the year 2 module ‘Introduction to Epic’.

I am really interested in the way culture, language and nationality can impact our perspective. The culture we are raised in, especially our national culture, creates patterned ways of thinking (Kluckhohn 1954) that affects how we respond to and understand the world around us. It affects the conflict resolution strategies people turn to (Bond, Leung and Schwartz 1992), our values and goals (Brett 2014), and what is considered right and wrong (Parboteeah, Cullen, Victor and Sakano 2005). It has a specific, massive influence on how we understand and react to stories. Our culture affects the way we read stories and the way we understand characters, plot points as well as impacting our spatial and time perception of stories (Zhang and Lauer 2015). Currently, the reading list attached to the ‘Introduction to Epic’ module is dominated by American and British perspectives.

This means a western, specifically a British and America, perspective is the one students will learn when doing reading for their course. This limits the understanding they will be able to have about the classical literature they are studying.

By broadening the origin of where the scholarship students read is published, we broaden the culture and environment that this scholarship was thought up in. As Korn-Bursztyn found, the “assumptions that underlie the stories” we study “are brought into relief when they are considered from a different cultural perspective” (Korn-Bursztun 1997). The more cultural perspectives we consider these classical epics through, the better we will understand the classical cultures they are from.

I believe diversifying the reading list will bring a multitude of benefits. It will encourage students to read from scholars from underrepresented backgrounds and learn from a broader array of cultures. This will allow students to more deeply engage with the classical literature they are reading due to having a broader range of sources to draw from.

GOAL:

Increasing the diversity of the ‘Traditions of Epic’ reading list. This is a second-year module from the classics course. I am monitoring the countries in which this scholarship is published and aiming to increase the range of countries which this scholarship is published from.

RESEARCH:

My first step in this project was gaining an understanding of what the current reading list is like. I wanted to be able to see where each book and article was published so as to better know how to improve its cultural diversity. Therefore the first thing I did was create a spreadsheet with a list of every book on the reading list. I noted down the country of original publishing for each item. This gave me the data that allowed me to analyse the reading list.

There are 162 books on this reading list. The full breakdown of where these books are published is shown on Figure 1. Of these 162 books, 90.8% were published either in the UK or the US, as shown on Figure 2. This means the perspective of scholars from the UK and the US will absolutely dominate students' understanding. To counteract this, I want to add sources from a variety of different countries to this reading list.

As part of the data I collected on the current reading list, I also monitored what topics the reading list related to. This was as a way to hold myself accountable. I wanted to make sure the reading I recommend adding to the list is spread across the different topics this module covers, rather than just focus on the specific authors I am most interested in.

One challenge to this goal is the language barrier. A lot of scholarship written and published outside of English speaking countries is, rather unsurprisingly, not written in English. While I would love to encourage students to read non English scholarship if they do speak a second language, I cannot suggest adding it to the reading list unless there is a reputable english translation of the work already out there.

To get around this, I was able to find certain publishing houses based outside of the UK and the US that publish work in a variety of different languages. Some of the publishing houses I found most bountiful were ‘Brill’, ‘The Amsterdam University Press’, ‘De Gruyter’, and beyond. By creating a list of books and academic articles released by publishers like these I was able to build out my reading list recommendations. .

When finding works to add to the reading list, I put a focus on works that looked at these epics from a different perspective from the one currently found on the reading list. I also wanted to focus on work that considered spatial and time perceptions within these stories, as we know these are two narrative aspects that cultural differences can greatly impact people's understanding of

At the end of my research, I had a list of 10 books and 25 academic articles that I believe would help students in better understanding and critically engaging with these classical epics. The addition of these recommendations to the current reading list would greatly increase the cultural diversity of the literature.

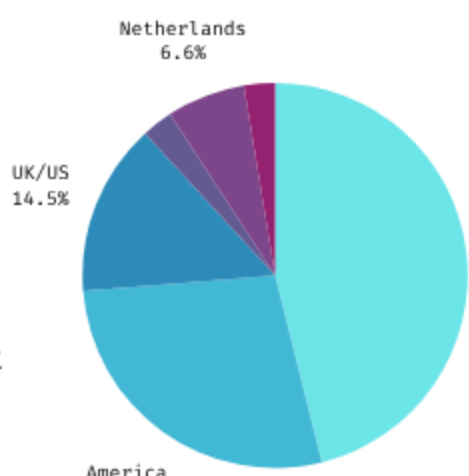


Figure 1

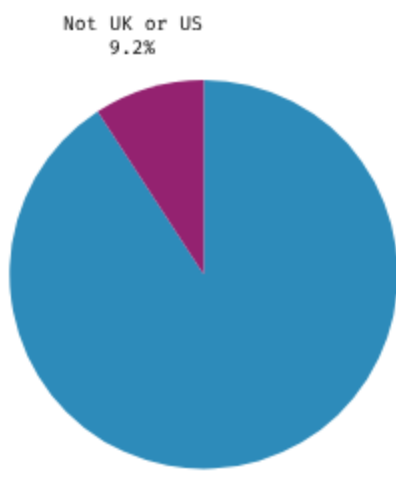


Figure 2

CONCLUSION

By adding the scholarship I recommend, the diversity in origin in the reading list for the ‘Traditions of Epic’ module would greatly increase. Figure 3 shows the new breakdown by country of origin upon my recommendations being added. This broader range of origin for the scholarship students read will allow them to learn from a border range of perspectives.

I believe this will allow them to more meaningfully and effectively engage with the ancient texts being analysed, and will allow for more fruitful academic discussions. The 35 scholarly works I recommend are from a variety of different places, including Denmark, South Africa, Canada, Ireland and beyond.

I do want to recognize the shortcomings in this work. Language barriers mean I am not able to consider the full breadth of international scholarship when building out my reading list.

While I believe this research project is a step in the direction, it shouldn't be the final one. I hope Durham University continues to champion decolonisation efforts across topics and curriculums, and I hope teachers encourage students to read a wide range of sources from a diverse range of scholarship.

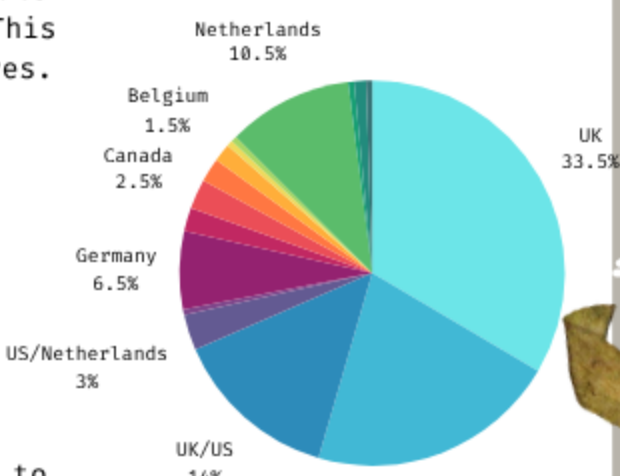


Figure 3

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