

Missionaries, Literature, and Censorship in South Africa. Early Twentieth-Century Cultural Dynamics

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Since the late 1990s, after the demise of apartheid, literary criticism concerning South African textual production has mainly focused on contemporary issues, with the question of apartheid censorship at the forefront. Black and white writers under the National Party underwent pre- and post-publication censorship from 1954 (with the first Commission of Inquiry against “Undesirable Publications”) to the Publications and Entertainments Acts of 1963 and 1974. As Christopher Merret pointed out as early as 1994, it is crucial to consider “the multiplicity of means by which individuals were censored by the state: naming, listing, banning, banishment, restriction, detention, torture, murder, house arrest, deportation, political trials and general harassment. Similarly, organizations were declared unlawful, restricted and affected; put on effective trial; or subjected to violence, through arson, bombing and burglary” (*A Culture of Censorship* 203).¹ In the case of printed texts, all subjects involved in their production, publication, and diffusion were potentially exposed to bans and restrictions, from authors to editors, printers, publishers, librarians, and booksellers. Less overt means of repression, like surveillance and intimidation, often preceded coercive measures when the writer was white, as in the well-known case of André Brink.²

It would be beyond the scope of this article to do justice to the considerable body of scholarship that has tackled the issue of textual control and punitive regulations in apartheid South Africa. Peter McDonald’s

authoritative *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and its Cultural Consequences* (2009) has been preceded and followed by in-depth research on the same topic. To give a couple of examples – besides the above-quoted *A Culture of Censorship. Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* by Christopher Merret (1994) – we can mention Margreet De Lang's *The Muzzled Muse. Literature and Censorship in South Africa* (1997) and the much more recent *Real and Imagined Readers: Censorship, Publishing and Reading Under Apartheid* by Rachel Matteau Matsha, issued in 2018.

Relatively less attention has been paid to the pre-apartheid period, although the first decades of the twentieth century are crucial to grasp the meaning and relevance of what happened in the near future. All the same, histories of South Africa's textuality (of printing, of book and reading cultures) have recently proliferated: those studies go back to the beginning of the twentieth century and even to the end of the nineteenth; accordingly, they form part of the background of the present research.³

With no pretence of exhaustiveness, this article proposes to discuss some aspects of the South African early twentieth-century literary and political context by investigating the cultural dynamics at play in well-known missionary institutions present on the territory. In South Africa, like elsewhere, the white man's culture spread all over the country by means of the myriad mission schools set up by European and North American religious denominations throughout the nineteenth century. Since the task of instructing the blacks rested firmly in the hands of the missionaries for about a century and a half (from the first decades of the nineteenth century to the National Party's 1953 Bantu Education Act),⁴ their monopoly of the written word must be taken into account when discussing their educational commitment: a decision-making power over what could be read and written that often resulted in more and less overt forms of censorship. At the same time, I also contend that the relationship between missionaries, state power, and black South African writers was much more ambivalent than one may think; for this reason, polarising the dynamics at play in the country's social and political contexts would be of little help in the attempt to investigate a still recent and significant past. Far from assuming unequivocal roles in the colonised territories – either as harbingers of true religion and progress or as unscrupulous supporters of political power – missionaries mostly acted as mediators between black communities and local or national political agents. Accordingly, the outcomes of their actions are not easily classifiable as 'positive' or 'negative' for the people

entrusted to their care. Once admitted that tutelage and control, guidance and imposition, enrichment and deprivation inevitably go together when the relationship between two bodies is based on social and economic inequality, it is less difficult to envisage the complex, contradictory, and often painful relationship that established itself between missionaries and converts. The former felt entitled to change the ‘soul’ of other people through education; the latter, for their part, submitted to the project of being culturally destroyed to be made ‘new’.

This article confines itself to two case studies. The first concerns the Scottish Lovedale Institution because, by the early twentieth century, it had become the most important printing site in South Africa; holding the means of literary production, missionaries often acted as pre-publication censors, but their ‘censorious’ attitude should not be asserted without evidence, as we shall see. The second case study is Mariannhill, a Roman Catholic mission station that offers another example of the ambivalent dynamics at play in missionary educational contexts. No doubt, ethnocentric world views were everywhere the rule. Yet, as the twentieth century progressed, missionaries could be sharply criticised by their former ‘pupils’, namely African journalists and politicians; at the same time, they could be harassed by the white government for alleged subversive activities and for taking too openly the side of the ‘natives’.

Except for a few pioneer individuals, the first missionary societies reached present-day South Africa between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth; from the Cape region, where European ships landed, they spread northwards and eastwards, covering, in due time, the whole territory. Some of the most prominent Christian denominations include the Moravians, who opened a station as early as 1737 at the Cape, where they clashed with the dominant Dutch Reformed Church; the London Missionary Society, which arrived at the Cape in 1799 after the first British occupation of the region in 1795; the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society and the Presbyterian Glasgow Missionary Society, which founded their first stations between the 1820s and the 1830s – the former in the arid regions of Namaqualand and the newly-formed colonial District of Albany, the latter not far from present-day King William’s Town (Lovedale Mission Station).⁵ As anticipated above, we will also consider the Roman Catholic Mariannhill mission, founded by Trappist monks near present-day Durban, even though it was established much later, in 1882. Indeed, Lovedale’s and Mariannhill’s cultural policies are the focus of the present discussion.

Despite belonging to rival denominations, they shared the ethnocentric ideology at the basis of missionary proselytism, had faith in the moralising effect of ‘good’ (i.e., European) literature on the native mind and soul, were prestigious printing sites, and believed in the advantages of providing bookish as well as agricultural/industrial training to their pupils.

As is well known, converting people to Christianity went hand in hand with educating and instructing them. In his detailed history of the Lovedale mission station from 1824 to 1955, Principal Robert Shepherd⁶ reports that Lovedale committed itself from the very beginning to promote both sides of the blacks’ instruction: primary and higher literary education – the latter to ensure that “promising Africans could be trained as teachers and catechists” – and, in accordance with British Governors, industrial training, through which “African men should, under properly qualified masters, be trained to the exercise of some of the more useful mechanical arts” (*Lovedale South Africa* 10, 23). Bringing the African populations to strive after the values of the Western world made sense not only to the missionaries, who saw the future of the blacks as slow and painstaking progress towards assimilation into the white community, but also to nineteenth-century British governors, who understood that education and the manual/technical training of young folks were the best policies to bring the hostile African tribes under control. Sir George Gray, appointed in 1854 as Governor of the Cape, insisted that the education of Africans should not be too bookish and that forms of public employment were essential to instruct the ‘natives’ and keep them safe from the evils of their traditional way of life: savagery, superstition, ignorance, and idleness (see Shepherd, *Lovedale South Africa* 22). Yet, the widespread appreciation and encouragement of missionary work on the part of the British political power would change significantly at the turn of the century.

After the discovery of diamonds and gold in the interior (Orange Free State and Transvaal) and the constitution of the Union of South Africa (1910) in the wake of the South African war, the whites’ territorial colonisation could be considered complete. What was then strongly needed was a cheap labour force to work in the mining industry and agriculture; if the moralising action of the missionaries was still considered indispensable, the question of African literacy and training became more and more an obstacle rather than an asset. Moreover, generations of mission-educated African intellectuals were entering the cultural and political field: if Shepherd of Lovedale could still support the idea of a progressive upliftment of black South Africans

through instruction in the 1940s (“No individual and no nation will reach their highest development without a thoughtful and reverent love for good literature,” *Lovedale and Literature for the Bantu* 26), white politicians, entrepreneurs and farmers found it much more profitable to take advantage from a low-cost and apparently inexhaustible workforce than to spend money on native education, which could encourage the growth of a ‘hot-headed’ generation of political opponents to boot. Consequently, the missionaries faced financial difficulties throughout the first half of the twentieth century due to progressively decreasing governmental funding.

Lovedale mission station was the most relevant establishment for the development of black literature in the Eastern Cape, not only because of an educational activity begun as soon as 1838 but also in consideration of its being a printing site. The Glasgow Missionary society had sent its first agents to South Africa in 1821; as early as 1823, Reverend John Ross arrived at the Cape bringing with him

[...] a small Ruthven printing press, with a quantity of type, paper and ink. These the missionaries put on a wagon and travelled with it overland from Cape Town to Chumie, a journey of a thousand miles [...] Arriving at Chumie on 16th December, the press was got in order on the 17th; on the 18th the alphabet was set up; on the 19th fifty copies were thrown off; and on the 20th Bennie recorded that a new era had commenced in the history of the Bantu people. He spoke even more truly than he knew. (Shepherd, *Lovedale and Literature for the Bantu* 3)⁷

In the following decades, Lovedale expanded and diversified its activities, but the diffusion of vernacular texts became its prerogative.⁸ Lovedale press issued both ‘literature for the Bantu’ in their languages and works written by ‘natives’, either in the vernacular or in English; thus, the institution granted a vehicle for South African black authors to publish their work. Between the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, Lovedale’s press developed along with the mission school, which provided for the education of Africans of both sexes and included white, coloured, and Indian students and teachers.⁹ The cultural dynamics that originated from such a picture were complex and, in a way, inherently contradictory: on the one hand, the missionaries cared for the blacks’ education and, paradoxically, in the long run gave them the cultural weapons to react against European oppression and segregation. On the other hand, they exerted political and cultural patronage and control on writers, often exercising overt and hidden practices of textual authorization.

As early as 1979, Jeffrey Peires investigated the relationship between Xhosa historians and the Lovedale press under the principalship of Robert Shepherd in light of the latter's tendency to reinforce missionary control on publications and set up a sort of "press monopoly" ("The Lovedale Press" 156). Indeed, in *Lovedale and Literature for the Bantu* Shepherd proudly stated that there was "a rising tide of education among African peoples" and, consequently, "a growing demand for the right kind of literature" (46). He argued for fewer mission presses in the region, one for "each language area; [...] indeed, more than one area could profitably combine in supporting jointly one press, thus ensuring better results. For example, Morija for the Sotho cluster and Lovedale for the Nguni cluster might be developed sufficiently to undertake all vernacular work [...]" (48). The number of "literary missionaries", though, was too small to meet the task of promoting "literature suited to Bantu needs and to arrange for its adequate distribution" (46), and had to be increased. That missionary institutions should fulfil their educational vocation by choosing, in the first place, the "right kind of literature" for their pupils and young converts is no surprise. Apart from religious instruction, anglophone missionary institutions mainly followed the nineteenth-century British literary syllabus to instill in their students the reverence for a venerable tradition, proposed as the normative model par excellence. As Tim Couzens puts it, "Since the scholars were being 'civilised' and the language of civilisation was English, a knowledge of the 'peaks' of the literature of that language was a distinct status symbol" (*The New African* 51).

Literary instruction and assistance in textual production were considered powerful pedagogical tools (as well as dangerous weapons if mismanaged); consequently, missionaries of all denominations tended to exert strict control on what we would now call the literary market. Shepherd of Lovedale was among the most committed advocates for cultural surveillance: according to Peires, besides recommending the reduction of the number of mission presses to exert better control on native publications, he also "exercised the monopoly of his individual judgment" ("The Lovedale Press" 156):

When he first arrived at Lovedale the press was directed by the Principal, who convened meetings of the Press Committee on an *ad hoc* basis. In 1930 Shepherd became convenor, and in 1936 he staged a mini-coup whereby the Press Committee was relegated to a ceremonial annual meeting and all decisions, including the

approval of manuscripts, passed into the hands of the Press Sub-Committee, which consisted of Shepherd and the two European employees who supervised the bookshop and the mechanical side of the press. (157)

Once a text was rejected by Lovedale, it was unlikely for a black writer to find another press willing to publish it. Manuscripts could be refused for several reasons, which predictably included real or alleged seditious, irreverent, and ideologically unorthodox tenets; therefore, the first and most common form of textual control was pre-publication censorship justified by religious or political reasons. A case in point is the refusal, on the part of the Paris Evangelical mission press at Morija (Lesotho), of Thomas Mofolo's novel *Chaka*, an epic tragedy written in SeSotho on the rise and fall of the eponymous nineteenth-century chief of the Zulus. Apparently, the novel was ready by 1909, but it was rejected by missionaries because in their view it dealt with pre-Christian, pagan times apologetically.¹⁰ As Neil Lazarus points out, though, the enigmatic quality of *Chaka* has puzzled readers since its first appearance:

In 1910, for example, when the *Chaka* manuscript was first submitted to the missionaries who ran the Morija press, for which Mofolo worked, it provoked sharp dissent. Some of these initial readers saw the manuscript as inflammatory and subversive of Christian values, and urged that it not be published. Others disagreed, arguing not only that the manuscript possessed a positive educative content, but also that it said nothing that was not in accord with the mission's teaching. ("The Logic of Equivocation" 41)

Once revised in 1922, *Chaka* was finally published in 1925; in 1931 it was translated into English and in 1940 into French, before appearing in many other languages (see Sandwith, "History by Paratext" 472).

Another better-known but more puzzling example is Solomon Tshekiso Plaatje's *Mhudi*, a mythical-historical novel written in English around 1920; the manuscript was submitted to British and North American publishers in the following years and was finally issued by Lovedale Press in 1930. Plaatje, like Mofolo, was mission-educated: he belonged to a Christianised Tswana family who, about the time he was born, had moved to Pniel, a mission station not far from Kimberly held by the Lutheran Berlin Missionary Society. There, the young boy received his elementary teaching and improved his education; at the turn of the century, he left the mission and began his remarkable literary and political activity. Among his many cultural

achievements, *Mhudi* stands out as the first South African novel written in English by a black writer. As anticipated, the novel's editorial history is rather intricate and has been the object of a distinguished body of scholarship in less and more recent years, starting from the late 1970s. Stimulated by the import of a book that challenged Eurocentric narrations of the African past in a very early stage of black literary achievements, scholars tended to see in the belated publication of *Mhudi* and in the alterations made to its typescript a clear example of missionary censorship. Couzens and Gray's "Printers' and Other Devils" (1978) opened the way to a number of contributions that left the charges against Lovedale press – and against Robert Shepherd in particular, who at the time was convenor of the publications committee – ultimately unchallenged. Brian Willan's article "What 'Other Devils'?" (2015), instead, invites caution when evoking the spectre of censorship: through a philological investigation of Plaatje's typescript and its careful comparison with the text published by the missionaries, he rejects the mainstream argument for ideological control and subversion of authorial intention. In Willan's words: "I revisit the evidence and the assumptions underlying these arguments and conclude that there is nothing to suggest that changes made to the text were not entirely at the author's volition, and that Plaatje's role and agency as author, and that of the Lovedale Press as publisher, have been seriously misrepresented" (1331).¹¹

I have drawn on the controversial example of *Mhudi* to make a point I consider of primary importance: it is undeniable that missionary institutions, which owned and controlled the means of publication in early twentieth-century South Africa, exerted forms of pre-publication censorship on the blacks' literary production. We shall briefly discuss another case regarding Lovedale presently. Yet, it would be wrong to apply the labels of 'coercion' and 'censorship' to all cultural exchanges between black writers and their mentors. The ultimately undecidable nature of the process through which the novel *Mhudi* saw the light should prompt us to acknowledge the existence of multi-layered situations that sometimes can be clarified thanks to painstaking philological research and lucky discoveries, but sometimes simply cannot – in that case, better not to pass judgment and accept the conjectural nature of any critical interpretation.

The second example concerning Shepherd's evaluation of black writers' literary output regards Herbert Dhlomo (1903-1956), a Zulu journalist, essayist, poet, playwright, and short-story writer who tried to have his historical plays published by Lovedale Press in 1938.¹² He

accordingly submitted them to Shepherd's judgment, who, after due consideration, rejected them. In this case, an exchange of letters between the playwright and the Director of publications allows us to interpret the missionary's refusal with a fair approximation of what his reasons might have been. Dhlomo had written his first play, *The Girl Who Killed to Save*, in 1935: that work had been accepted by Lovedale, and two thousand copies were published the following year (see Couzens, *The New African* 177). Yet, by 1938 only three hundred and thirty-six copies had been sold – not a great number, and certainly lower than expected. In Shepherd's refusal of other plays by Dhlomo the fear of financial loss was possibly decisive, as Couzens suggests; still, in his reply the missionary gave a different reason, which I think is worth considering.

Dhlomo had written to Shepherd on the 16th of April 1938, trying to convince him that there would have been a market for his works because the Bantu Dramatic Society in Johannesburg was in great need of newly published plays.¹³ The Director of publications replied one month later (19 May), stating that “the plays ‘on the whole’ were ‘not up to publication standard’, though they showed ‘considerable talent’” (in Couzens, *The New African* 176-77).¹⁴ Here what comes into play is something different from the usual reasons for rejecting manuscripts, namely actual or alleged seditious tendencies: Shepherd grounded his refusal on formal features, rather than moral principles. There is no doubt that Dhlomo's historical plays were also politically provocative, since they depicted the Zulu tribal past in the light of the miseries of a colonial present that was becoming increasingly racist and segregative. Indeed, it is also possible that, by refusing Dhlomo's manuscripts, Shepherd was censoring the way in which his historical drama patently denounced the white government. One year later, Dhlomo would write a journal article entitled “Why Study Tribal Dramatic Forms?”, in which he explicitly referred to preventive censorship:

A wisely controlled African dramatic movement would do much to harmonise and humanise race relations in this country. Yet herein lies the difficulty about plays on modern subjects. The conditions obtaining in South Africa may prevent the free play of talent in matters of race relations. There are subjects, upon which it is not possible to write truthfully without being suppressed. (41)

That said, we should not overlook the missionary vetoes derived from a biased evaluation of the ‘form’ of native literature when it was too atypical for Western standards. Dhlomo's scripts are indeed unorthodox literary

texts: they exceed Western literary conventions by transgressing the rules of dramatic composition, character consistency, and the boundaries between different genres and styles, while proposing the blending of diverse literary and oral traditions.¹⁵ In *Lovedale and Literature for the Bantu*, Shepherd himself specified: “No MS. is accepted, even though the author is prepared to meet the cost of publication, unless it is found after close scrutiny to have reached a certain standard of excellence” (19). Leon De Kock refers *in primis* to Lovedale when discussing the censorial practices of religious institutions as far as literary form is concerned:

Lovedale in the Eastern Cape, along with other institutions and individual missionaries, not only established a widespread literate order that incorporated institutional surveillance, but in doing this it sought to ‘translate’ indigenous forms of subjectivity into excessively narrow limits determined by Western literary forms of expression. This process relied to a very great extent on the existence and continued refinement of a growing culture of print and on the reification of the Book as a pre-eminent source of both knowledge and human understanding in a normative sense. (“Metonymies of Lead” 55-56)

Indeed, the ways in which missionary institutions could curb and re-orient black literary production were not restricted to keeping a tight rein on immoral or revolutionary pens; even before their censorious ‘duty’ came their educational vocation, which justified their efforts to instruct their converts on how to produce ‘good literature’. It was not a question of erasing native cultures, though: quite a few missionaries were polyglots, accomplished linguists, and translators from several South African languages.¹⁶ It was, rather, their unshakable faith in the intrinsic superiority of their own form of spirituality *and* civilisation that justified the cultural colonisation of other lands and peoples, which meant exerting control over literary consumption and production. At the same time, religious institutions in the first half of the century were the only places in which the cultural life of the African people was taken into consideration and encouraged: to be able to provide ‘proper’ educational and recreational activities, the missionaries ran schools and promoted the creation and development of libraries and white-sponsored public forums, such as social and sporting clubs, debating societies, and theatres.

The last case study I wish to discuss here draws on the more general points made above and regards a different institution, the Mariannahill Catholic missionary station. The uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous

position in which the Principal of St Francis College, Father Bernard Huss, found himself due to his educational activities suggests caution in drawing too sharp a line between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ agents in colonial contexts. Bhekizizwe Peterson introduces Mariannhill’s ideological climate in the following words:

The intellectual ideas operative at Mariannhill were very much in the tradition of the ethnocentric ideologies so prevalent in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the heyday of the British empire. Christianity and imperialism – conflated as constituting ‘civilisation’ – were projected as normative models and the ideal negations of African ‘primitiveness’, ‘paganism’, ‘savagery’ and ‘degenerate morals’, states of being that were signified in the ‘nakedness’ of Africans, their ‘aversion’ to labour and the absence of industrial progress on the continent. (23)

No doubt, missionary societies belonging to different denominations shared, for the most part, the same assumptions regarding their political allegiances and their role among the populations they set about to convert to Christianity. Yet, as is always the case, social, political, and cultural dynamics were neither universal nor immutable. Interestingly, Peterson himself illustrates in his *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals* how roles could be reversed, and even missionaries could feel persecuted by the representatives of that same political power whose authority they recognised and often justified in front of the blacks. The figure we are now interested in is the above-mentioned German missionary Bernard Huss, who served as Principal of St Francis College, Mariannhill, between 1915 and 1927.

Huss was a strong promoter of both theatrical performances as a means to educate the Christian converts¹⁷ and agricultural and industrial training. He was also, as Paul Rich puts it, an “adept publicist” (“Bernard Huss and the Experiment” 298): he wrote journal articles, essays, and several monographs, these last published by Mariannhill Press. His readership was European as well as African: in the fields of economics, agriculture, and rural organisation, Huss tried to involve the mission-educated African intelligentsia in the study and practice of innovative theories and methods. Economic cooperation was his favourite topic of research and instruction; he started promoting cooperative societies in the 1920s through lectures and writings, and “By the mid-1930s [he] had effectively become the most prominent voice speaking out in missionary and reformist circles in favor of cooperatives in South Africa” (Rich, “Bernard Huss and the

Experiment” 306). Huss was a reformist, but not a revolutionary: he opposed African trade unionism and tried, instead, to establish missionary-controlled organisms like the Catholic African Union; he stigmatised black political protest and believed that liberal whites and educated blacks should cooperate to promote peaceful progress and oppose radicalism. Peterson quotes from Huss’ *Psychology for Everyday Life for African Students* (1927) to underline the monk’s “social gospel”: “Better homes, better fields and better hearts” (25). At the same time, Huss was profoundly critical of the South African government’s social policy: racism, segregation, social degradation, and uncontrolled urbanisation destroyed African communities and engendered social evils, like drink and crime. He identified at least part of the problem in the prejudices (and greed) of the European settlers:

The European mind is wrong when it believes, as some really do, that the native has no soul, that he is the son of Ham and as such for ever destined to be the white man’s servant, that the natives are an inferior race which should form a continuous available supply of cheap labour, that the Europeans can for ever enjoy a high standard of living or even a life of ease at the expense of the black man and say: *‘Quod licet Jovi non licet bovi’*. (“The Evolution of the South African Native Mind” 448)

Huss was also critical of the kind of capitalism that dehumanised people, considering them as ‘hands’; he believed that societies should strive for an even-handed distribution of wealth – while avoiding, by all means, falling into the grip of communism. In brief, he struggled for what might be called a form of ‘ethical capitalism’ that could be reached thanks to the ongoing educational work of the missions. Notwithstanding his favourable attitude towards black converts, Huss soon found himself in an uncomfortable in-between position, criticized by the blacks and even harassed by the whites, as we shall see. His efforts to improve the agricultural production of African rural communities sadly coincided with the period in which the post-Union governments were laying the foundations for the modern industrial and racially segregationist South African state. As Rich points out, “government segregation policy discouraged the return of educated black leaders to the reserves. This, in turn, reinforced more traditional forces within African society who were resistant to efforts at modernizing African agricultural methods” (“Bernard Huss and the Experiment” 309). Huss meditates bitterly, as soon as 1931, on the growing mistrust on the part of Africans towards Europeans:

The scepticism of the Africans has gone so far that even measures intended to help them, however good and tested by history, are repudiated scornfully as coming from the white race. 'We natives are different', they say. [...] For offering some sound and well-meant advice to educated natives in a certain case, I was attacked in the native press and called a fool. ("The Evolution of the South African Native Mind" 450)¹⁸

Contestations and attacks also came from the other front and were not limited to the printed word. In 1944 Huss wrote his annual report to the philanthropic Phelps-Stokes Fund: there, he seized the opportunity to denounce the mistreatment he had suffered at the hands of white subjects for many years, be they private individuals or governmental agents. The mere fact that he was German worsened his situation during the war years, when he was spied on, had his lodgings searched, and his papers confiscated for alleged subversive activities:

It may be now advisable to mention [...] the persecution which I have had to suffer for 20 years for trying to help the Natives. My book on Elementary Economics published in 1924 was called Forbidden Food for the Natives. One white trader even publicly threatened to thrash me if I should fall into his hands. The persecution took a more acute form with the outbreak of the war although I am a British subject by Naturalisation for many years. [...] Repeatedly rumours were spread that I was interned and white people of the town of Matatiele asked my scholars about my subversive activities. Seven times Policemen came here after me and I had to prove repeatedly that I am a British subject. Spies were appointed to watch me. [...] In September 1941 2 police officers came to me and took away from the following 3 sets of papers. 1. A file of notes on communistic activities collected by me during the last 12 years for 2 reports to the Vatican in Rome [...] 2. A collection of 56 articles published monthly in serial form in the "Southern Cross" [...] 3. A collection of 76 articles published monthly by the "Umteteli" [...] on purely Agricultural subjects. All these papers were taken away to be sent, as I was told, to Kokstad, Umtata and Pretoria to be searched for SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES. After 3 months all papers were returned to me with the verdict: Not Guilty! (In Peterson 39-40; emphasis in the original).

This extended excerpt provides a clear, if extreme, example of the ambiguous situation in which some missionaries found themselves during the first half of the twentieth century, when the contradictions inherent in the idea of a Christianising and civilising colonial force were becoming more and more evident. "Paramount for missionaries", Peterson remarks, "was the

need for conversion, followed by the attempt to contain the ambiguities of progress in the face of racist discrimination against converts” (*Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals* 29). As educators and owners of the printing presses, they no doubt could and did behave as censors towards black writers; nevertheless, closer scrutiny of specific cases brings to the fore many other aspects of the relationship between converts and mentors. In addition, we should remember that missionaries moved in a context of pressures exerted by other white forces: central, provincial, and municipal governmental powers; the needs and complaints of mining companies and white farmers, who most of all needed unskilled (and therefore underpaid) labour force; not least, the requirements of their own religious institutions, which, back in the motherland, provided funding and determined what course of action could be taken and what, instead, was not advisable. If we add to this the non-univocal character of the missionaries’ beliefs as far as black education was concerned, we find ourselves in front of many-sided political and social contexts that cannot be studied as stereotypical realities.

The often-polarised perception of missionaries as the ‘saints’ or ‘devils’ of the colonial enterprise simply does not hold. The space in which these people moved can rather be visualized as a tangle of contradictions that impacted negatively not only on black populations, but also on their own life and work. At the basis of any proselytising and civilising project there is a strongly ethnocentric worldview; namely, the blind faith in the intrinsic superiority of one’s religion and culture over another. Needless to say, those same assumptions also justified colonial land grabbing and segregative political rule in the South African territories. The underlying contradiction between project and practice that marked European territorial expansion – that is, carrying on ‘civilising’ projects through land appropriation, social discrimination and cultural erasure – proved more and more difficult to justify on the part of religious denominations, which based their very existence on moral grounds. Preaching the equality of all believers in front of God and the right of converts to full admittance into white society became increasingly ‘embarrassing’ for missionaries in the Thirties and Forties; more and more patently, the government’s discriminatory and exploitative practices proved totally incompatible with the evangelical principles that Christian institutions had been tirelessly disseminating for more than a century.



- 1 Merret's more recent "A Tale of Two Paradoxes" (2001) deals with the South African information system both before and after the demise of apartheid. Daniel Kunene's "Ideas Under Arrest: Censorship in South Africa" (1981) highlighted yet another aspect of censorship in connection with propaganda: "Censorship can thus be further defined as a monopoly of propaganda enjoyed by a regime and upheld by force" (204).
- 2 Brink describes the elusive and devious nature of the Security Police's persecution in several publications, like his collection of essays entitled *Mapmakers. Writing in a State of Siege* (1983) and his memoir, *A Fork in the Road* (2009).
- 3 See, for instance, De Kock's "Textual Capture in the Civilising Mission"; Copley's "Literacy, Libraries, and Consciousness"; Rochester's "The Carnegie Corporation and South Africa"; Dick's *The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Cultures*; McDonald's "The Book in South Africa"; van der Vlies's *Print, Text and Book Cultures in South Africa*; Sandwith's "The Idea of Reading in Early 20th-Century South Africa" and "The Appearance of the Book".
- 4 Before the advent of the apartheid government, the great majority of South African educational institutions were state-funded mission schools. The 1953 Bantu Education Act took over the control of black education, which was entrusted to the centralised Education Department; deprived of financial aid, most mission schools were compelled to close down.
- 5 Many other missionary institutions reached South Africa between the 1820s and the 30s, like the Rhenish Mission, the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, the Berlin Missionary Society, and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.
- 6 Robert Henry Wishart Shepherd was appointed Chaplain at Lovedale from 1927 to 1941, Director of Publications in 1932, and Principal from 1942 to 1955.
- 7 Together with Rev. W. R. Thomson, Mr. John Bennie was one of the founding fathers of Lovedale. He was an enthusiastic linguist and the first to transcribe the language spoken by the populations he came in contact with, isiXhosa, using the Latin alphabet. This allowed him to print the first booklet

- in isiXhosa in 1824, the same year in which he started working on a grammar and a vocabulary. ‘Chumie’ was the location where the Glasgow Missionary Society established its first station, on the banks of the Tyhume (Chumie) river, near present-day Alice.
- 8 As Leon De Kock reminds us, Lovedale was not the only early nineteenth-century mission to dispose of a printing press from the very beginning: “Johannes van der Kemp, the first missionary in the region from the London Missionary Society, carried a small printing press with him when he arrived at the Cape in 1799” (“Metonymies of Lead” 52). The Paris Evangelical Missionary Society started running a printing press in Morija (Lesotho) since its settlement in 1833. Also the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society imported a press in 1825, and it is thanks to the co-operative effort of the Wesleyan, Glasgow, and Berlin Societies that the first versions of the Scriptures in isiXhosa were produced and printed between the 1840s and the 1860s.
 - 9 In 1916, Fort Hare University (originally called The South African Native College) was founded on the territories adjoining Lovedale mission station and put under the chairmanship of the Principal of Lovedale. It grew in the following years, until in 1923 it was given the standing of a University College.
 - 10 For a cultural and editorial history of Mofolo’s *Chaka*, see Sandwith “History by Paratext”; as Sandwith argues, “In its immediate pre- and post-publication history, the novel occupied the anomalous position of a mission-sponsored text, which, by virtue of the weight of attention given to sorcery, witchcraft and Zulu mythology, had the potential to undo the painstaking work of the mission itself” (4). A much earlier but insightful article is Neil Lazarus’ “The Logic of Equivocation in Thomas Mofolo’s *Chaka*” (1986).
 - 11 Willan traces a brief history of the book’s difficult path towards publication, according to which the belated appearance of the novel is to be ascribed to British and North American publishers, not to Lovedale Press: “He [Plaatje] sent his manuscript to Macmillan, Harper Brothers, Scribners, Harcourt – all leading American publishing houses – but they declined it. On his return to London in 1922, an approach to the London firm of Allen and Unwin elicited a more positive response. [...] The only problem was that [they] required a £75 subsidy, which Plaatje did not have and could not raise. Plaatje then tried some other London publishers, but to no avail” (1334-35). Lovedale, instead, received the manuscript in 1929 and accepted it in a very short time. Willan also mentions other critical “dissenting voices” who, like himself, have underlined the conjectural nature of Couzens and Gray’s account of coercive agency on the part of Shepherd to modify Plaatje’s manuscript (see 1333-34).

- 12 On H. I. E. Dhlomo's historical plays, see, among others, Couzens, *The New African*; Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals*; Wenzel, "Voices of Spectral and Textual Ancestors"; Voss, "Refracted Modernisms"; Iannaccaro, "The Teacher and the Bard".
- 13 Herbert Dhlomo was founding member and promoter of the Johannesburg Bantu Dramatic Society, which had been established in 1932 to encourage the production of African plays; its lifespan was relatively short, from 1932 to 1940.
- 14 Lovedale Records are kept at the Cory Library, Rhodes University.
- 15 On a reading of Dhlomo's historical plays that combines the analysis of thematic issues with the scrutiny of formal attributes, see Iannaccaro, "The Teacher and the Bard".
- 16 In the same book, Shepherd also stated: "[the natives'] own language is an integral part of the individuality of a people, so that their intellectual development would be prejudiced by any measure which imposed on them for educational, and ultimately for literary purposes, a language to which they could not readily accommodate themselves" (57-58).
- 17 On theatre and mission education at Mariannhill under the principalship of Bernard Huss, see Peterson chapters 1-3.
- 18 Although personally wounded by the attitude of people he considered his protégés, Huss lucidly observes: "So the natives began to look more closely at the white people and to survey critically the whole position, asking such questions as these: 'Why are these white people here, what do they want from us, how much are we doing for them and what are they doing for us in return, what rights have we, the baby race, being taxed heavily, but inarticulate because unrepresented in the council of the white men, why have they taken from us the land where our ancestors are buried, and why must we carry passes and be restricted in our movements in the land of our birth?' They began to analyse the actions of the government and of public bodies and to scrutinize the private life of white individuals" ("The Evolution of the South African Native Mind" 450).



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