English and the Colonisation of Form

Leon de Kock

Summary

This article poses the question whether formal procedures of colonisation generated in the nineteenth century have been reproduced in the adoption, by critics of black South African literature, of the implicit assumption that the received generic forms of "imaginative literature" should form the basis of scholarship and enquiry. The article suggests that the context of "English" and "literature" should be sought in the broader signifying practices of colonialism, and seeks to describe the wider context in which black subjects of missionary teaching were compelled to negotiate identity in terms of a civilising colonialism founded in English as a master-discourse.

Opsomming

In hierdie artikel word die vraag aan die orde gestel of formele prosedures van kolonisasie wat gedurende die negentiende eeu gegenereer is, gereproduseer is in die oorname deur sommige kritici van swart Suid-Afrikaanse letterkunde van die implisiete veronderstelling dat die oorgelewerde generiese vorme van "imaginative literature" die basis behoort te vorm van wetenskapsbeoefening en ondersoek. Daar word in die artikel aan die hand gedoen dat die konteks van "Engels" en "letterkunde" gesoek behoort te word in die breër tekenpraktyke van kolonialisme, en daar word gepoog om die breër konteks te beskryf waarbinne swart subjekte van sendingonderwys verplig was om oor hulle identiteit te onderhandel in terme van 'n beskawende kolonialisme wat gegrond is in Engels as 'n meesterdiskoers.

1 A Double Colonisation?

Can it be that modern South African commentators on black writing have unthinkingly reproduced formal procedures of colonisation initiated in the last century? Have we all overlooked something so obvious, so invisibly hegemonic,[1] that it has become an entirely unreflexive critical habit?

These questions came to me as I sat down to revise this article for publication. One (unnamed) referee, recommending publication subject to revision, had found my language "crude" and "extreme", presumably because I had made the blunt statement (among others) that English had been *won by blood* in the nineteenth century "frontier" struggle in the Eastern Cape. In my original formulation, I had insisted on regarding "English" as a wide range of signifying practices by which colonial agents – principally missionaries – had instituted an orthodox, broad social "text"[2] for self-apprehension and identity-formation by autochthonous South Africans in the process of Western acculturation. For me, this meant relocating the focus of enquiry about the black experience of English from the strictly literary realm (what did they write?) to the sociohistorical and discursive realm (how were they written into English?).

Why had I felt the need to be so blunt? My desire to push this line of enquiry had been motivated by a feeling that, (a) English is and has always been centrally implicated in processes of social power in South Africa, and (b) that we as the scholarly establishment had never quite managed to embrace

this question fully or satisfactorily. I had just read two studies seeking to describe historically the development of English departments in South Africa (Penrith 1972; Doherty 1989), when intuition (or interest) told me that our *generic,* departmental-institutional point of departure was precisely the limitation I had been feeling. *That* was why when we sought to understand black colonial experience, we looked for novels, poems or plays – the formal *results* of colonisation – instead of the causes and the processes. That was also why when we sought to write genealogies of the development of English and its relations to power, we looked for English departments and early professors of English instead of colonial soldiers killing and laying waste, and missionaries bearing printing presses, the Bible and *The Pilgrim's Progress.* These were strong feelings, so I expressed them bluntly.

How and where did black South African literature start? The very nature of this question reproduces a colonial point of view. When literary scholars ask this question, they often turn apologetically to the first signs of black literary work in the imitative forms fostered by missionary colonialism. Guy Butler, in his introduction to the encyclopaedic work, *English and South Africa* (Lennox-Short; undated), does not even ask the question, but sees autochthonous South Africans as backdrop: "The Bushmen, the Hottentots and the Bantu have exerted a powerful influence on the South African [white] literary imagination" (p. 5; my addition). Butler saw no problem with the following statement: "Not that the African has been neglected in South African fiction. It is to the credit of the best writers that, from Pringle onwards, they have never ceased to attempt to speak for him" (p. 6). Finally, Butler identifies the point of emergence of black "literature" when he notes that "Solomon Plaatje's *Mhudi* (1930) was the first substantial attempt at a novel in English by an African" (p. 6). For Butler, the history by which Plaatje and others came to use English in the first place, and the novel form, is anterior, invisible and irrelevant. The point at which his interest begins is where people like the Rev. R.H.W. Shepherd of Lovedale left off, with titles such as *Literature for the South African Bantu* (1936) and *Bantu Life and Literature* (1955), in which missionary paternalism reaches its apotheosis. Shepherd came at the far end of a protracted process of Anglicisation by Nonconformist missionaries in South Africa which involved the attempted "re-creation" of generations of black South Africans by means of a discursive regime of which the novel form was but one end-product.[3] Butler's silence can be read as tacit or implicit endorsement, by default, of the kind of literary colonisation pursued so assiduously by Lovedale, or merely as a lack of interest in these prior processes. This means, by implication, that the institutions of tertiary English teaching, for which Butler was a major role-model in his own time, were an implicit extension of missionary colonialism. When such institutions bothered to show an interest in black writing (and this was quite rare), they merely picked up where the likes of Shepherd had stopped.

More recent commentators do talk about the beginnings of black "literature". In her definitive study of black South African literature in English, *A Vision of Order* (1983), Ursula Barnett describes without comment or

question the missionary origins of black writing and praises Shepherd because his "enthusiasm in encouraging writers over a period of many years clearly superseded the call of the cross" (1983: 9). She goes on to place the emergence of black South Africa into English at the publication of John Knox Bokwe's *Ntsikana, the Story of an African Convert* (1914). From here on, the description of black writing is straightforward. But again there is an implicit suggestion, in the omission of any comment at all, that events prior to the emergence of black South Africans into English form belong elsewhere, in historical studies perhaps. English studies do not concern themselves with the processes of colonisation, but investigate and endorse the results – black writing is a "good" thing.

Barnett's book appeared a few years after Stephen Gray's major revisionary critical study, *Southern African Literature: An Introduction* (1979), but her study did not take Gray's careful exposition of what he called the "standing orders of literary merit" (1979: 162) into account, and one wonders whether Gray's now out-of-print observations have been left behind at some intellectual frontier of the recent past. Gray clearly distinguished between "black culture" and its conditions of emergence: "The conditions on which white critics will countenance black oral culture are clear: it must conform to British standards of English expression, appropriateness and even humour before it can be welcomed into the fold" (p. 164); he described Pringle's act of rendering Xhosa songs into English as an "act of incipient language colonialism" (p. 165); he found it unfortunate that "hybridization" such as *Kaatje Kekkelbek* never really occurred in southern Africa (p. 166); and, finally, in his consideration of how Plaatje's *Mhudi* emerged out of authorship and missionary censorship, Gray wrote:

> An understanding of the emergence of black English written literature, then, is important not only to a study of any beaconed-off compartment in the literature marked "Black Studies", but as a reflection of the processes at work integrally within the whole.
>
> (Gray 1979: 171)

Gray's work, self-proclaimed as provisional and introductory, does not seem to have led to any research which further investigates the "standing orders of literary merit" and the social hierarchies and processes of which those "orders" were a part.

Not long after Gray's study, Tim Couzens's (1984) extensive research into the origins of black literature began to appear. Couzens made a case for appreciating the beginnings of black writing in the nineteenth century as a range of expressive modes not strictly or necessarily "imaginative" – the formal lecture, the essay, the newspaper editorial, polemical letters to newspapers, the synoptic biography, and travel writing. But there are tensions in Couzens's presentation. Take, for example, his essay in *Literature and Society in Southern Africa* (1984), in which his research into the beginnings of African writing is documented in concise form. Here Couzens quotes many examples of nineteenth-century black writing, but makes little comment on his material, except to place in historical context and formally

describe the excerpts he presents. At one point, however, there is the following sentence: "With such a small number to draw on for writers, and with such a small number for audience, it is not to be expected that a Shakespeare could be produced overnight" (1984: 64). Whether or not this remark was meant as a deliberately ironic comment on the expectations and/or standards of the literary community, or an apology for the imaginative paucity of early black writing, it draws on the unspoken idea that good literary form is ultimately the kind of thing Shakespeare wrote. In the conclusion to his book on H.I.E. Dhlomo, *The New African* (1985: 353), Couzens referred to Dhlomo's "spectacular failures" in the area of style and language, tacitly acknowledging the normative framework of the literary establishment from which Couzens also distanced himself by his very choice of subject.

I am not saying critics ignore oral culture; that is an old argument, and Couzens himself has urged scholars not to overlook the oral origins of black "literature" (1984: 60). Rather, I want to suggest that critics have, unreflexively perhaps, bracketed off their interest in English and the South African colonial experience within the idea of "imaginative literature". In Couzens's two works cited here, which go further than any others in exploring the totality of the origins of black literary work, there is nonetheless a sense of defending the unimaginative and the imitative. Piniel Viriri Shava, in his work on black South African writing in the twentieth century, *A People's Voice* (1989), simply begins with the statement of fact that "[w]ritten literature arose mainly in response to missionary initiative" (1989: 5). For the rest of the book, Shava presents straight discussion of literature without any critical view of these origins. Mbulelo Mzamane (1984) discusses oral literature and its influence on written forms, but the structure of his argument implies that such an opposition is sufficient. This in turn suggests that discussions of literary culture are adequately captured in generic categories (praise poem, oral storytelling, written poetry, written drama, and so on), and that discursive processes beyond generic boundaries are not worthy of the literary scholar's attention. Similarly, Jane Watts (1989), relegates the question of black writing prior to its emergence into colonial generic form to a "lack of literary tradition" (1989: 24). Malvern Van Wyk Smith in *Grounds of Contest* (1990) locates black South African writing in English in "the mission schools, training colleges and presses of the late nineteenth century, the Lovedale Press in the Eastern Cape being the earliest and perhaps the most influential of these" (1990: 38). Van Wyk Smith is forthright about his affiliation with the exclusive standards of English form. The mission press and the early black newspaper were "mixed blessings" (p. 38) because "the early products of most presses were cast entirely within the idiom and sentiments that contemporary religious piety, literary decorum, and political propriety demanded" (p. 38). Van Wyk Smith describes the efforts of early black writers as work in the terms of "mission-based Christian and liberal humanism" (p. 39), but he points to a "major problem for the modern reader: the discrepancy between the evident sincerity of intention on the one hand, and the poverty of register on the other" (p. 40). He elaborates as follows:

> Critical pitfalls yawn on either side of the cultural historian's way through such work. To explain away the wooden phraseology by apologies for the conditions of production, or to make readily conceded claims for such writing's socio-political significance while disregarding its equally evident inadequacies, does not make it more readable or escape the charge of being patronizing. To judge its value and function in terms of literary originality is impossible; not to do so is to fail to distinguish between poet and scribbler, thinker and imitator.
>
> (Van Wyk Smith 1990: 40–41)

The terms of debate here are instructive: it is patronizing to apologise for "wooden phraseology" and "evident inadequacies" by citing "conditions of production" and "socio-political significance". Formal adequacy as literature remains an ineluctable touchstone of value. The process by which the "inferior" product *became* literature is clearly of secondary significance in such a debate.

At the other extreme, there is this kind of statement, which supposedly draws on a radical critical tradition:

> Much black South African writing forms an important component of a developed counterhegemonic culture. This counterhegemonic culture pits itself against a discourse of capitalism which it continually seeks to subvert and deconstruct. I shall be examining black fiction within this context and using the short story to illustrate black South African literary trends. I suspect the conclusions reached here would be little changed if the genre I had chosen had been different. This in turn suggests the relative unimportance I attach to formal differences between literary texts. What's of relevance to me is the content of the form.
>
> (Trump 1990: 161)

If formal differences between texts – and forms themselves – have become of little importance, then the homogenisation of the past century's colonial processes has been completed. At such a point, the means by which black South Africans were made English subjects have become thoroughly invisible, and uncritically taken as read. If "counterhegemonic" writing is just a matter of content (saying the politically right thing), it has become a paltry, acquiescent business. The history of colonial coercion implicit in the very form of black "literature" is then completely obscured.

Njabulo Ndebele, on the other hand, has argued strongly against the uncritical adoption of English as though it were an "innocent language":

> Basically, I think that we cannot afford to be uncritically complacent about the role and future of English in South Africa, for there are many reasons why it cannot be considered an innocent language. The problems of society will also be the problems of the predominant language of that society, since it is the carrier of a range of social perceptions, attitudes and goals. Through it, the speakers absorb entrenched attitudes. In this regard, the guilt of English then must be recognized and appreciated before its continued use can be advocated.
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> (Ndebele 1987: 229)

This suggests to me that one should not take a view of "black literature" in South Africa without regarding such a category problematically as writing in a language fraught with a history of domination and contestation within a

historical context far broader than the merely "literary". This does not mean simply acknowledging the political content of such writing, but taking a critical view of its emergence into the form in which it is encountered.

I am sure South African critics of black literature might argue that they are fully aware of the "anterior" history by which English *forms* were adopted by black writers, and that in discussing black "literature" in its "colonised" forms they are simply attending to the literary situation as it exists and not bothering with the obvious. But the choice of focus does point to an uncritical acceptance of English as a "received" language. I want to argue that black writing is predated by discursive processes of subject-construction which need to be unpacked so that the full history of literary colonisation may come into view.

2 Situating "English" Within Colonial History[4]

When I said "English was won by blood", I was referring to English in the special sense as "discourse" – a historically particular, constitutive medium of knowledge and self-apprehension linked to imperial-colonial power by which "natives" were defined and placed in relations of dominance and subjection.[5] I meant that the ascendancy of English as an orthodox discourse, in which many black South Africans would be compelled to seek social empowerment, was secured in the nineteenth century on "frontier" battlefields by colonial soldiers who committed the predictable atrocities of war while decimating their "savage" enemies. For black South Africans, the link between "culture", "English" and power was more than a matter of debate. The ultimate consequence of, for example, the Frontier Wars in the Eastern Cape between 1779 and 1878 for the Xhosa was that the locus of cultural – and therefore social – empowerment shifted substantially from an autochthonous sphere to a politically compromising colonial sphere. Once the Xhosa were reduced by war, attrition and the loss of land to materially disadvantaged people, and in many cases forced to work for their former foes, the only avenue open for advancement in the new social order was peasantry (cf. Bundy 1988) and the mercantile economy, while the educational infrastructure supporting the new system was largely in the hands of missionaries. In this educational system, the Protestant, individualist, capitalist, and ultimately racist[6] values embedded in the exalted medium of English reigned supreme. By the end of the twentieth century, the relationship between English and social/cultural empowerment is arguably similar, but many of us have lost sight of the bloody genesis of this link, and the need continually to gauge the relationship between English as a discipline and its position within broader relations of power, so that an informed, critical awareness may be possible of the roles such a discipline does and can play in the wider ensemble of practices of which it is a part.

The colonisation of people in what only later became known as an entity ("South Africa"), I suggest, was influenced by the irruption of a powerful new order of representation, founded principally in the medium of "English" as a master-discourse. My postulate is that a violence of similar proportions to that

of warfare was committed on the representational level by the powerful repressions, the far-reaching censorship and the iron hand of what historians Robinson and Gallagher call the "Victorian world mission" (Robinson & Gallagher, with Denny, 1962: 7). The vehicle of this world mission was an English which bore terrible certainties and was intolerant of alterity. It was a language of closure and myopia, yet it represented an empire which could cause seismic turbulence for those who would not respect its insistence on orthodoxy.

I have chosen to concentrate on the Eastern Cape "frontier" area because of its singular importance in the history of cultural contestation in South Africa (cf. Crais 1992) and because developments there are, I believe, illustrative of the wider theatre of struggle between European cultural agents in South Africa and autochthonous Africans in the nineteenth century. At stake in the struggle on the "frontier" was nothing less than the nature of reality, the proper forms of social life, and the highest questions of morality, religion and philosophy. Wars were waged on the ground, policies were framed in Cape Town and London, missionaries were afoot in the "interior", driven by the spirit of evangelism, but the greater context of all this activity was what one might call a social textualisation, a narrative and a representation of the world providing legitimacy and divine sanction to what might otherwise be seen as little more than military conquest and expansionism for the sake of influence, power and wealth. The term "frontier" is problematic (cf. Legassick 1980) and I use it here to suggest both a geographical and cultural "contact zone" (cf. Pratt 1992: 6–7) where forms of knowledge and identity were contested at the same time as wars were fought for land and physical control of the environment.

The new order of representation which helped to reshape the world of Africans in the nineteenth century was, I suggest, implicated in what Michel Foucault (1982: 781) calls a "government of individualisation" – a process related to "the way in which knowledge circulates and functions, its relations to power". Such power

> . . .applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognise and which others have to recognise in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.
>
> (Foucault 1982: 781)

Foucault argues further that "[t]o govern . . .is to structure the possible field of action of others" (p. 790), although he submits that a condition of power is the freedom of refusal (to distinguish power in this sense from a relationship of slavery). Such freedom he qualifies as "agonism" (p. 790). "At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it," he writes, "are the recalcitrance of will and the intransigence of freedom" (p. 790). Power in this sense is a complex interplay between consensus and violence (p. 789) in

which subjects are tied to an identity, by conscience or self-knowledge, which they are nevertheless able to resist. Representation is the means by which such self-knowledge is transmitted. In this regard, Montrose (1989: 16) writes:

> Representations of the world in written discourse are engaged in constructing the world, in shaping the modalities of social reality, and in accommodating their writers, performers, readers, and audiences to multiple and shifting subject positions within the world they both constitute and inhabit. Traditionally, "ideology" has referred to the system of ideas, values and beliefs common to any social group; in recent years, this vexed but indispensable term has in its most general sense come to be associated with the processes by which social subjects are formed, re-formed, and enabled to perform as conscious agents in an apparently meaningful world.

Montrose argues that "New Historicism", the kind of criticism he advocates, must "reorient the axis of intertextuality, substituting for the diachronic text of an autonomous literary history the synchronic text of a cultural system" (1989: 17). Representation is central to "shaping individuals as loci of consciousness" on the one hand (p. 21), and "subjecting them to social networks and cultural codes" (p. 21) on the other.

In view of these theoretical premises, how does one view the role of English in creating a representational order in which a government of individualisation and new forms of subjectivity were imposed by colonial agents in South African history? One relies on established historical studies for several important postulates. First, that missionaries, the principal communicants of English as missionary-colonial discourse,[7] were "harbingers of capitalist exploitation and prime-movers in the expansion and consolidation of white political power" (Cuthbertson 1987: 16; cf. Bosch 1991: 304), but that their role was far more extensive than political. As Jean and John Comaroff (1988: 6) argue,

> [i]n Southern Africa, nonconformist missions, the vanguards of empire, conjured up new maps, new systems of relations, new notions of time, production and personhood. From their very first encounters with native communities. . .they sowed the state of colonialism on which the colonial state – and a more enduring condition of dependency – was founded.

Further, established studies tell us that while missionary work, particularly in the Eastern Cape, was not conspicuously successful in the first half of the century (cf. Williams 1959), military and political successes of imperial Britain over Nguni people paved the way, in the second half of the century, for more successful evangelisation and created coercive conditions for apparently consensual processes of acculturation at the hands of missionaries (Hunt Davis 1969: 172). Despite important *differences* between missionaries as "friends of the native" and other colonial agents (cf. Ross 1986: 36; Comaroff 1989: 680–681), one can insist on a conjunction of interests in cases such as The War of the Axe (1846–47), when the Lovedale institution was used as barracks and the lead type of the press melted down to make bullets (Shepherd 1940: 400). After the complete humiliation of the Xhosa in this

war, Sir Harry Smith, who was in the habit of demanding that Xhosa chiefs kiss his feet (Peires 1981: 165), had the following to say to his defeated adversaries:

> Your land shall be marked out and marks placed that you may all know it. It shall be divided into counties, towns and villages, bearing English names. You shall all learn to speak English at the schools which I shall establish for you ... You may no longer be naked and wicked barbarians, which you will ever be unless you labour and become industrious. You shall be taught to plough; and the Commissary shall buy of you. You shall have traders, and you must teach your people to bring gum, timber, hides etc. to sell, that you may learn the art of money, and buy for yourselves. You must learn that it is money that makes people rich by work, and help me to make roads. I will pay you. You tell me many of your youths desire to go into the Colony as servants, they shall be allowed to do so.
>
> (Cited in Peires 1981: 166)

It is here, in the conjunction of an imperial-colonial military defeat of the Xhosa, and the ideas of cultural transformation central to the efforts of missionaries, that the long view of ultimate complicity between different agents of British colonialism, and the discursive regime founded in "English", becomes clear. While making chiefs kiss his feet was a show of extreme arrogance alien to the style of missionaries, Smith nevertheless articulated in a classic way the British desire to remake indigenous South Africa in the image of "counties, towns and villages", with English as the medium of a capitalist economy in which individual ownership would supplant the pastoral communalism of the Xhosa. In the 1850's, another Governor of the Cape, Sir George Grey, elevated Smith's subdue-and-civilise intentions to the status of official policy in the Grey Plan (cf. Hunt Davis 1969: 214), by which substantial financial support was given to missionary education as part of a project to "civilise" the African so that peaceful conditions might prevail on the frontier.

The missionaries of the Cape Colony and beyond were therefore deeply involved in the overall policy of the three Cs – Commerce, Christianity and Civilisation (cf. Bosch 1991: 305). After the devastation of the great Cattle Killing of 1856–57 and the final frontier war of 1877–78, the autonomous power of the Xhosa was shattered (Hunt Davis 1969: 48–49). More and more Africans became dependent upon the European economy and, by implication, on Western education such as offered at Lovedale, the pre-eminent centre of missionary education. But this education involved an act of huge epistemic violence.[8] It was centrally implicated in consolidating, in representational forms, the modes of othering which "natives" had to negotiate in order to achieve the social and cultural empowerment of education. In this education, English was both a means of transmission and a state of ideality, so that missionary eduction became the place where the coercion of colonisation was transformed into the cultivation of civilisation. This process was only indirectly related to *literature* as such; English literature was but one form of the greater ideality in which morality, philosophy, Christianity and aesthetics were definitively universalised in the image of a little island north

of Africa. One work of English literature, *The Pilgrim's Progress,* was partially translated into Xhosa by the first ordained black minister, the Revd. Tiyo Soga (Shepherd 1940: 145), and had a strong influence on the so-called *kholwa* or mission-educated Africans of the Cape Colony and beyond. "Literature" therefore had a clearly-defined, but circumscribed, role in the colonisation of consciousness and the recreation of form.

3 Modes of Othering[9]

"Othering" – the metaphorical hardening, in discourse, of descriptions which stabilise what is regarded as other and therefore dangerously beyond control and comprehension – does not necessarily coincide with actual processes of subjectification.[10] Often, the "other" created by colonisers revealed more about their own subjectivity than about that of the colonised. However, African missionary subjects were compelled to make some concessions to the regulation of individuality premised on the conceptions of self handed down to them by missionary teachers, since such conceptions were embedded in the very fabric of "truth" and "knowledge" implicit in missionary teaching.

The period under review bears the marks of an attitude to language and to the idea of "truth" formed in the spirit of the supposed rational empiricism of the Age of Reason, buttressed by the vaunted certainty of God's plan for the world. There is no appreciation of the "contingency"of language as articulated by philosopher Richard Rorty when he argues that there is no essential truth "out there", only what Nietzsche called a "mobile army of metaphors" (1986: 6). For Rorty, the idea that truth and the world are out there "is the legacy of an age in which the world was seen as the creation of a being who had a language of His own", in which case one capitalises the word "truth" and treats it as something identical with God or with the world as God's project. "Then one will say, for example, that Truth is great, and will prevail" (Rorty 1986: 3).

Rorty captures very precisely the spirit of the writings and thinking of missionaries, who did indeed believe in a "God with a language of His own" whose language of Truth coincided with their own. What nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries did, by implication, was to "privilege some one among the many actual and possible languages in which we habitually describe the world and ourselves" (Rorty 1986: 3), leading to a metaphor-encrustation in which "old metaphors are constantly dying off into literalness" (p. 6). When the language of a man such as James Stewart, Lovedale principal between 1870 and 1905, is examined, such encrustation is clearly evident. In a volume entitled *Lovedale South Africa: Illustrated by Fifty Views from Photographs* (1894), Stewart articulated the classic metaphor of dark and light:

> And that is just what we labour for – a day in the future when the Dark Continent shall be a continent of light and progress, of cities and civilisation and Christianity.
>
> (Stewart 1894: 15)

Stewart, writing at the close of the century, was distilling the gathered terminology and metaphoric of a century's "work among the heathens". His language reveals many of the preconceptions which operated throughout the century and which were enforced as education on the subjects of missionary endeavour. After introducing the light-darkness idea almost as a literal fact, Stewart exerted his language even further:

> [The] new religion took [the African] by the hand and led him out of a land of thick darkness, gloom, and horror – filled with malevolent shades and dreaded spectral powers – and brought him into the clear, sweet light of a simple belief in a God of goodness and love, such as Christianity reveals.
>
> (Stewart 1984: 43)

One is reminded of Frantz Fanon's idea of a "Manicheism" in colonial relations (Fanon 1961: 32), which Abdul R. JanMohamed (1985) has developed as a theory of relations of power and interest in colonial societies. In terms of this theory, the opposition between the "putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native" (p. 63) becomes the "central feature of the colonialist cognitive framework and colonialist literary representation" (p. 63). JanMohamed typifies the Manichean opposition as an allegory: "[A] field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilisation and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object" (p. 63).

Despite the historically diffuse sweep of my argument, and the danger of oversimplifying the field in terms of such binaries (cf. Mukherjee 1991: 28), the "Christianise and civilise" credo performed an essentialising function throughout the century in terms of which otherness was discursively reduced to Manichean dimensions. Indeed, the imperative to re-create the "savage" called for a complete overlay, and a remaking of social and cultural modalities of identity. This depended on a conception of the Other that was entirely xenophobic in its inability to appreciate difference. In the eyes of missionaries, difference was seen as idleness, vacuity, degradation ("witchcraft", marriage rites, circumcision rites, etc.) and then transformed by metaphor into "low" and "fallen" states. Sir Harry Smith's invective against "wicked barbarians" aptly captures the manner in which a metaphoric trope, derived from cultural xenophobia, acquired in the South African colonial context the force of orthodox declaration endorsed by the new authorities in the spheres of government and education, and ultimately backed up by the military policy of "fire and sword" (Peires 1981: 135), or in the words of R. Hunt Davis, the "normal manner of 'clearing Kaffirs': burn their homes, destroy their crops, and run off their herds" (Hunt Davis 1969: 37).

In retrospect, one may look at a composite of practices by which European cultural agents helped to prepare the ground for a remaking of the African Other, and by which they introduced a new order of representation in which identity would have to be negotiated. This composite was clearly no general conspiracy. The various practices were haphazard and piecemeal, although a

remarkable concordance can be discerned when one reads the documents relevant to the period.

The foundation of all missionary efforts was the "reduction" of African languages to a written orthography (the choice of the word "reduction" is significant, and it is still used today without much self-consciousness)[11] The printing press accompanied the missionary as his foremost weapon of civilisation from the earliest of times. Dr Johannes Van der Kemp, the first missionary of the London Missionary Society and a pioneer figure in South African missionary history, brought a small printing press when he arrived at the Cape in 1799 (George 1982: 59). The Glasgow Missionary Society's first press was carried into the country by John Ross in 1823, along with a supply of type, paper and ink (Shepherd 1940: 62). John Bennie, who was to lead the efforts at "reducing" and learning Xhosa, wrote: "On the 17th [December 1823] we got our Press in order; on the 18th the alphabet was set up; and yesterday we threw off 50 copies. . .a new era has commenced in the history of the Kaffer nation" (cited by Shepherd 1940: 62–63). Bennie was describing the founding of the first mission press, later to become known as Lovedale.

The printing press made it possible to realign an entire cultural order. In the words of Mike Kantey, "one of the most important effects of these early mission presses was to reduce a rich and diverse oral tradition to a few centres of literary patronage" (Kantey 1990: vii; cf. Peires 1979). But this realignment was only the foundation. It would serve as the basis for a strong literary role in the cultural conversion of people. Meanwhile, cultural codes for the inculcation of new forms of identity would touch on almost every aspect of living. Housing, clothing, forms of labour and agriculture, modes of belief and worship – in short, almost every daily cultural practice – would be affected by the representations of the missionaries.

A moment in the history of the nineteenth century which allows one a comprehensive view of the insistence and strength of these new practices and representations is the response by several missionaries to a circular by Sir Harry Smith in 1848 inviting missionaries to give him their views about the best methods

> to inspire in the Bantu a desire to cultivate their lands by ploughing and to induce them to follow habits of industry, the first steps to civilisation and equally so to their embracing of the Christian Faith. . .to see the necessity of wearing clothes. . .the use of money. . .of establishing schools on such a footing as would ensure hereafter teachers from among themselves. . .of all things His Excellency requests . . .English to the exclusion of the Kafir dialect.
>
> (Government Circular, 17 April, 1848, signed by Richard Southey. Cited by Du Toit 1963: 17)

Prior to this circular, a teacher named Adolphus Schaller had sent a memorandum to the governor entitled "On the Condition and Improvement of the Moral Character of the Kaffir People", in which he articulated the Manichean allegory about autochthonous Cape people. Advocating the introduction of agricultural schools, for example, he wrote that the "hitherto ungovernable passions of the Kaffir people, arising from ignorance, supersti-

tion, and poverty, would be transformed into habits of industry and economy" (Cape, G.H. 22/3, Memorandum, March 16, 1848, from "Adolphus Schaller, Teacher in the family of J. Munnik, Bazarmskraal (Dryersdal), near Diep Rivier, Wynberg, to his Excellency Sir Harry Smith". Cited by Du Toit 1963: 18).

Taken together, Schaller's opinion and Smith's request reveal much about the kind of thinking current in the 1840's and in much of the nineteenth century in general. Clearly, half a century of missionary effort had not reversed the condition of autochthonous Africans to the satisfaction of the colonial agents. Yet Smith and Schaller still maintained the desire to refashion Africans entirely. The reductive paradigm of Schaller, in which "industry" and "economy" are juxtaposed with "ungovernable passions" and "ignorance, superstition and poverty", is typical of European myopia of the time and became an entrenched trope in the colonial discourse of the nineteenth century. Caught in what JanMohamed calls the "vortex" of the Manichean model (JanMohamed 1985: 63), the missionaries were blindly determined to smother completely all traces of existing culture. In doing so, they would be effacing the alterity perceived through the binary model. The key elements of this commitment are present in Smith's terms in his circular: cultivation of land, wearing clothes, using money, using English, and, ultimately, writing English poems, plays, and fiction.

On the discursive level, agriculture and clothing in the Eastern Cape represented a symbolic "redressing" of both the land and the person which was complementary with the transformation of precapitalist modes into capitalist ones. JanMohamed writes that "we can observe a profound symbiotic relationship between the discursive and the material practices of imperialism: the discursive practices do to the symbolic, linguistic presence of the native what the material practices do to his physical presence..." (JanMohamed 1985: 64). There is great emphasis in the various responses of missionaries to Sir Harry Smith's circular on precisely the key discursive markers of dress and agriculture (and one can assume that in their persistent verbal representations to Africans in the mission fields, there would have been an equally persistent emphasis).

For example, a sense of revulsion about the African presentation of the human body is clearly evident in comments such as those of Lovedale's James Laing and James Weir:

> We observe with regret that, instead of purchasing clothes, many of the Kaffers with great avidity give their money for that disgusting red paint with which they bedaub their bodies. To prohibit the sale of this article might perhaps interfere with the principles of Free Trade, but all who seek the improvement of the Kaffers may rest assured that no general change for the better has taken place so long as this barbarous custom is extensively practised.
>
> (James Laing and James Weir to Richard Southey, Lovedale Missionary Station, 6 June, 1848. Cited in Du Toit 1963: 63).

J. Read snr seems quite impervious to the absurdity of his experiment with Scottish kilts among Africans:

> The wooden spade has already given way to the English iron one, also the earthen for the iron Pot, the oxhide Coross to the English blanket, and but few women are to be seen without the blue Handkerchief on their heads. This is a beginning. If the men could be induced to wear the Scotch Kilt in the first instance it would be a great deal gained. I once got a dozen made, and gave them to the Caffres, who wore them, and afterwards took to trousers. . .generally the first Symtems [sic] of religeious [sic] impressions were the change in their clothing.
>
> (J. Read Senr. to Sir H. Smith, Philipton, 25 June, 1848. Cited in Du Toit 1963: 68)

Notwithstanding the absurdity of the picture Read presents, his point that a change in clothing generally accompanied a conversion to Christianity is important. It is borne out by many missionary writings. In particular, the symbolic dividing line between the red clay and European clothing became the standard means of representing Christianised or "school" people as against the "red people". This symbolic division became the central image in the story of Ntsikana, known as the first "New African" literary figure (cf. Couzens 1980).

Ntsikana, composer of the still-famous "Great Hymn", has been valorised in subsequent writings as the "first Christian convert among the Kafirs" (Bokwe 1914: 1) and described by Gray as the "first individualized black African poet" (1979: 171). By the time the story of Ntsikana's conversion began to be recirculated in the writings of later generations of black converts, a crucial element of the story was the moment at which Ntsikana has a mystical revelation (a vision of bright rays of light shining on his favourite ox). He throws off the trappings of "heathenism" by casting aside his blanket and plunging himself into the water to wash off the red ochre on his body (Bokwe 1914: 11–12). Bokwe notes that this "introduced the precedent of washing off the red clay when any one professes conversion, or of becoming what is sometimes spoken of as a *School-Kafir,* because he has discarded red ochre for civilised clothing" (p. 12).

The cultural coding of dress played an important part in marking off forms of identity and giving symbolic and recognisable form to the choices which were being presented to people. Another important "redressing" of the environment was centred on the form of dwellings. Missionary writings are full of references to the desirability of enforcing the custom of building square as opposed to round houses. Wesleyan minister Henry H. Dugmore, responding to Sir Harry Smith's circular in 1848, wrote:

> Could they be induced generally to abandon their grass huts, and adopt a kind of dwelling more favourable to habits of cleanliness, it would greatly tend to promote the use of European apparel. It would indeed, almost render it *necessary.* Their huts are so low, and so hot and smoky, that European Clothes can scarcely be borne in them; and the loose kaross, and squatting posture seem an almost necessary accompaniment to their habitation. The use of walled houses would necessitate the use of more clothing, at the same time it would enable the wearer to preserve it in a way that is impossible in a Fingo hut.

(Henry H. Dugmore to Col. McKinnon, Chief Commissioner, 30 June, 1848. Cited in Du Toit 1963: 73)

One commentator, discussing the missionary obsession with square dwellings, relates the preference to "certain key elements of capitalist society" (the notions of private property, the individual as the basic unit of society, and the nuclear family), and argues that the "African house expressed values that were quite alien to those that the missionaries saw as so crucial. It did not cut nuclear families off from one another, privacy within it was virtually impossible, it did not manifest the owner's industriousness", nor did it mirror the notions of social order and hierarchy as did square buildings (Kate Crehan, quoted by Bundy 1988: 37–38).

Crehan's observations underline the comprehensiveness of attempts by missionaries to remake the forms of culture they encountered. Their representations touched on notions of personhood, production, property, time and godliness.

4 Conclusion

Missionary attempts to re-create the African Other were carried out across a broad front and were met with varying responses, but as mission education became an important bridge between the Xhosa world and the European economy (Hunt Davis 1969: 75), it achieved greater penetration. The discovery of diamonds in the late 1860's and of gold in 1885 took South Africa into an industrial age with a voracious need for a labouring class. Hunt Davis argues that by late in the century, the majority of adult Nguni males were entering the wage-labour force (p. 89), and that in this scenario, it was the African élite – the people who had most fully assimilated European culture – which provided leadership:

> Having witnessed the African defeats in the wars in the late 1870's, the new leaders realised that future African welfare depended on working within the framework of South African society, not opposing it. They found in the franchise clause of the Cape Constitution the needed opportunity for political participation. The political leaders' earliest activities centered around Lovedale, the Colony's foremost African school. . . .
>
> (Hunt Davis 1969: 99)

The African élite in the later part of the century urged their countrymen to obtain an education, to participate in politics (through the limited franchise), to forsake war as a policy for defending their rights, to work hard, and to earn the respect of the Cape's European population through their efforts to improve themselves (1969: 116).

And so the ground was prepared for the entrenchment of a new cultural and social orthodoxy. As the land was reshaped by one hundred years of war into constituencies of the Cape Colony, so the discursive world was recreated and new loyalties, new laws of the individual subject forged, negotiated, accepted and resisted.[12] As the Comaroffs argue, the "spatial, linguistic, ritual and political *forms* [of] European culture" made up the context within

which agreement and disagreement, subjection and rebellion took place (1991: 331; original emphasis). They add: "Colonised peoples. . .frequently reject the message of the colonisers, and yet are powerfully and profoundly affected by its media. That is why new hegemonies may silently take root amidst the most acrimonious and agonistic of ideological battles" (p. 311).

Lovedale began to thrive, ranking as one of the best schools in the Cape (Hunt Davis 1969: 206). Certainly for black South Africans, Lovedale in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century became a pre-eminent centre for black advancement. Noni Jabavu, granddaughter of John Tengo Jabavu, famous Lovedalian and editor of *Imvo Zabantsundu,* and daughter of Professor D.D.T. Jabavu, Lovedalian and Fort Hare professor, wrote in 1963 of the "tens, scores, hundreds, now thousands" of people for whom Lovedale was "a social and political *alma mater,* the cradle where they had shared a social and political background inherited from earlier generations" (Jabavu 1963: 20–21). Jabavu's "tens, scores, hundreds, now thousands" of educated blacks streaming out of Lovedale were multiplied further by Fort Hare University, which grew directly out of Lovedale (cf. Shepherd 1940). Monica Wilson, in her edition of Z.K. Matthews's autobiography, *Freedom for My People* (1981), gives some idea of the centrality of the Fort Hare-Lovedale tradition:

> Students who were at Fort Hare while Z.K. was teaching there have become prominent through Africa from the Cape to Uganda. There are those who have become leaders in their professions and who practise as doctors, lawyers, teachers, headmasters or headmistresses, inspectors of schools, journalists, writers, research scientists, and technicians of one sort or another. There are those who entered politics and helped bring the independent African states into being, and who still hold office in these states. There are those in opposition, in prison, or in exile. Within the Republic there are those who hold office in one or another Bantustan, and those who were active in the ANC, the PAC, or the Indian Congress, most of whom are in prison, in exile, banned, or dead.
>
> (Wilson 1981: 127)

Wilson mentions of scores of individuals who graduated at Fort Hare, including figures such as Nelson Mandela (1940), Oliver Tambo (1941), Robert Sobukwe (1946), Govan Mbeki (1937), Dennis Brutus (1947), Robert Mugabe (1951) and many others (1981: 131–136).

The Lovedale tradition, and its attendant discursive conditioning, was therefore central to the development of the African élite from which political leadership would be drawn. At Lovedale, Africans were educated as "infants" in an adult world of Western civilisation.[13] The apex of African education was the cultivation of an appropriate literary style and register. Elsewhere[14] I have traced the career of John Tengo Jabavu, who matriculated at Lovedale and edited *Isigidimi Sama Xosa,* Lovedale's orthodox Xhosa newspaper for mission subjects, but who fell out with the institution after writing too politically (Odendaal 1983: 104). Jabavu founded the first independent African newspaper, *Imvo Zabantsundu,* in 1884 (Switzer 1979: 4), combining Xhosa and English and reappropriating the formal register of correct Victorian public writing for purposes which were subtly subversive of

missionary orthodoxy (cf. De Kock 1992b). That is another argument, but the point here is that the appropriation of formal, written forms inherited from the Western world, and transmitted in missionary teaching, was never an automatic or natural process. Gray's analysis of Plaatje's *Mhudi* shows precisely how Plaatje's importation of the oral storyteller into his written novel was censored out by Lovedale (1979: 171–181), suggesting how deep the conflict over orthodox use of form ran. But the struggle over appropriation and reappropriation of Western forms by black South Africans can be seen far beyond the generic boundaries of imaginative literature, in the mutations of public discourse which became central to black political struggle. There is much research that can be done in this area.

When modern critics of "black literature" take the use of form as read, or criticise and apologise for poor use of form, they ignore this history of contestation, eliding the history of English in its role as a carrier of hegemonic or other forms of power. To talk of "counterhegemonic" writing while ignoring the struggle around the adoption and re-use of form, and to leave out of account all forms of resistance in discourse except the preserve of "imaginative writing", is to dilute the notion of "resistance" to little more than yea-saying and to empty criticism of its historical content. South African criticism of black "literature" in English would do well to break out of its colonial confinement and begin to look at the wider discursive context in which such writing has been forged. In such an enterprise, neither apologies for, or condemnations of, "poor use of form", nor uncritical flag-waving would be appropriate. The task would be to understand the conditions of emergence, within wider contexts, of written discourse in different forms, and the continuing negotiations and reappropriations of inherited forms by writers and other players who have been thrust into using a language which is loaded with a dense history of struggle.

Notes

1. My use of "hegemonic" has been influenced by an excellent discussion of the origin and development of Gramsci's term by Jean and John Comaroff (1991: 19–27), in which the authors argue that hegemony and ideology are the two forms in which power is entailed in culture. Ideology is the "agentive", visible mode of power (p. 22), while hegemony is a "natural" and "ineffable", "nonagentive" form of power (p. 22).
2. The idea of regarding culture as "text" has different origins. One is anthropologist Clifford Geertz's notion of "thick description", in which, according to one commentator, the critic "reads" the symbolic content of action and interprets it as sign (Biersack 1989: 74–75). In literary studies, see Montrose (1989: 17) and the discussion in section 2 of this article.
3. For a more detailed examination of one example of such a discursive regime – that of Lovedale itself – see my article, "'Drinking at the English Fountains': Missionary Discourse and the Case of Lovedale" (De Kock 1992a).
4. I have chosen to focus on English only and left out the role of Afrikaans in this discussion because I believe an exclusive focus on English orthodoxy is required to bring into relief the important role English played as the language of governance and of formal colonial education, in the Cape Colony particularly.

Further, later generations of mission-educated Africans would retain a very strong loyalty to the figure of the British Crown and the English tradition of democracy as the source "civilised" values, in contradistinction to Afrikaans as the language of a hostile counter-nationalism. See, for example, *Imvo Zabantsundu,* 18 January 1888, in which editor John Tengo Jabavu writes as follows in the context of the Registration Bill, which sought to disenfranchise thousands of black voters in the Cape on a technicality: "In every division in the country where the Native vote exists Bondsmen, or Dutchmen, are busy placing what obstacles they can in the way of the Natives, to what our people believe to be their rights. Among these rights we may mention the common privilege of the Franchise, to which every British subject, who thinks he possesses certain qualifications, is entitled." See also *Imvo* 20 April 1887, 18 May 1887, 6 April 1888, and 31 March 1898.

5. For a book-length discussion of the concept of discourse, see Macdonell (1986).
6. One of the major shifts in missionary thinking in the nineteenth century was from humanitarianism in the early part of the century to racism in the latter part after the advent of Social Darwinism and "scientific racism". Early missionaries wished to elevate their subjects to a position of equality, but later ones adopted the ideas of paternalism and trusteeship (cf. Hunt Davis 1969: 173; Bosch 1991: 309–310).
7. The phrase "missionary-colonial" discourse is a synoptic label which conflates much diversity in "levels" of colonial discourse. Comaroff (1989: 680–681) argues convincingly that "colonialism did (and does) not exist in the singular, but in a plurality of forms and forces". Similarly, there are many refractions of "colonial discourse" – "missionary discourse" being one of them. Comaroff (1989: 681) explains the separate but interdependent strands of colonialism as follows: "[T]he three colonialisms in South Africa each stressed one face of the imperial impulse: the state emphasised the politico-legal aspects of British rule; the settlers, the socioeconomic dimensions of race relations in a new agrarian society; and the mission, the signs and practices of bourgeois European culture. But the substance of the colonising project, over the long term, was all of these things, in proportions determined on the battlegrounds of history – the bodies and societies, the territories and cultural terrains of South Africa, white and black." My use of the term "missionary-colonial discourse" implies a similar understanding of the part-whole relationship of missionary discourse to the broader discourse of colonialism of which it was a part.
8. Spivak (1988: 280–281) writes that the "clearest example of. . . epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other". She adds that Foucault "locates epistemic violence, a complete overhaul of the episteme, in the redefinition of sanity at the end of the European eighteenth century".
9. Michel Foucault uses the terms "Other" and "Same" as follows in his Preface to *The Order of Things* (1970: xxiv): "The history of madness would be the history of the Other – of that which, for a given culture, is at once interior and foreign, therefore to be excluded (so as to exorcize the interior danger) but by being shut away (in order to reduce its otherness); whereas the history of the order imposed on things would be the history of the Same – of that which, for a given culture, is both dispersed and related, therefore to be distinguished by kinds and collected into identities."
10. I am indebted to Annamaria Carusi for suggesting that I make this distinction clear.
11. See, for example, Hunt Davis (1969: 200); Jordan (1973: 37); Williams (1959: 225).

12. For archivally-researched documentation of such acceptance, negotiation and resistance, see De Kock (1992b).
13. For a detailed discussion, see De Kock (1992a).
14. In "The Literary and the Historical: Missionary Discourse at Lovedale and the Contestation of Subjectivity" (De Kock 1992b).

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