

Translation and the work of Thomas Mofolo

Call for Papers

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Literary scholars identify Thomas Mofolo as one of the first writers of note in modern African literature. He published *Moeti oa Bochabela* (1907)—the first novel, as far as can be established, to be written in an indigenous language in Sub-Saharan Africa—and three years later the novel *Pitseng*. His third novel *Shaka* has been named by a committee of African scholars, appointed by the 1998 Zimbabwe International Book Fair in Harare, as not only one of the top 100 books written by Africans in the twentieth century, but also one of the top ten, making him the only South African writer on the list with Achebe, Soyinka, Bâ, Mahfouz, Senghor, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Diop etc. as well as the only writer on the list who exclusively wrote in an indigenous language. C. F. Swanepoel, in a *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, calls Mofolo “the most important African writer of the first quarter of the twentieth century. He still ranks with African Nobel laureates Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer, and Najib Mahfouz.”

Despite these accolades and the fact that all three these novels had been translated into various languages, Mofolo’s work, especially its relationship to the original texts in Sesotho, has been grossly neglected. Interpretation and re-interpretation of the novels in the light of the original texts are long overdue. What do the novels have in common? How does the style of writing differ/develop? The initial angry accusations that the novel *Shaka* was nothing but an anti-Nguni tale, had also not been satisfactorily dealt with in terms of genre or original text and could be the reason why the novel had never been translated into isiZulu or isiXhosa, but only into English, Afrikaans, French and German. What kind of translation problems would a process of translating the novel *Shaka* into isiZulu produce? In the light of the original text, how successful are the translations of *Shaka* into European languages? How do the interpretations of *Shaka* by writers such as Senghor and Soyinka compare to the main thrusts of the original text?

Send abstracts of 200–250 words for intended essays before 30 October 2015 to Prof Chris Dunton (c.dunton@nul.ls) and Prof Antjie Krog (akrog@uwc.ac.za) around the following core themes:

- The original Sesotho text of any of Mofolo’s novels, discussing style, content, development etc.;
- The translation of the original Sesotho text into any other language;
- The influence and/or status of Mofolo’s work: on Sesotho literature, local and international literature as well as the role of the original texts in these influences;
- Mofolo and his peers;
- Mofolo and his life—any additional information regarding his family, writing and his later years;
- Mofolo’s *Shaka*:
 - Insights into translation and the original text
 - Re-evaluation of the “anti-Nguni” accusation
 - Re-evaluation of the Christianity-overlay accusation
 - The philosophical underpinnings of the novel
- Mofolo in modern garb ...

Due date for the finalised essay of no more than 6000 words is 1 December 2015.

