Daniel M. Mengara. 2024. *Colonial Discourse and the Jesus-fication of King Chaka: How Thomas Mofolo's Chaka Turned the Zulu Monarch into a Messiah*. New York: Lexington Books. 201 pp.

Daniel M. Mengara approaches Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* as an anticolonial novel that has a nationalist agenda. He notes that the novel ranks "among the early and pioneering works by Black writers to signal a shift from the ethos of indigenous mission literature to the ethos of the anticolonialism and cultural resistance that came to constitute the hallmarks of sub-Saharan African writing in the following decades" (p. 108). Its aim is seen to be "to debunk the prevailing Europeanized—and often stereotypical—narratives not only about Africa, but also about the historical Chaka" (p. 149). Mengara examines how it depicts King Chaka and African culture and analyzes the stylistic techniques that Mofolo employs to disguise his nationalism. His analysis is based on the translation by Daniel P. Kunene.

The first chapter helps readers understand who King Chaka truly was, the role that he played in the upheavals of the *difaqane*/*Mfecane*, and how Mofolo's King Chaka is different from the historical Chaka. Mengara highlights Chaka's birth, his childhood, his life as a soldier, his reign, and his death, constructing him as a state-builder who developed military skills from the time he served as a soldier in the armies of King Jobe and King Dingiswayo. He absolves him of the blame of the *difaqane*/*mfecane* disasters. He observes that Mofolo's King Chaka is different from the historical Chaka in that he is born in illegitimacy and sin and is helped to rise to kingship and made to fall into animality by a diviner known as Isanusi. *Chaka* constructs King Chaka as "a sympathetic figure, a victim whom unfortunate circumstances—mostly the conniving of his father's wives—turned into a monster, but a monster whose mythic trajectory…allegorically mirrors the mythic trajectory of Jesus Christ..." (p. 42).

The purpose behind the foregoing duality of King Chaka is discussed in Chapter Two. This is in addition to accounting for the sixteen years between completion of the original Chaka manuscript in 1909 and the novel's publication in 1925 and accounting too for the omission of two chapters that were in the 1909 manuscript. The chapter also compares the novel's depiction of King Chaka to the depiction in Léopold Sédar Senghor's 1956 poem, "Chaka," placing emphasis on the extent to which the texts use history and the intents behind their messianization of the king. The next traces Mofolo's ideological journey between 1907 and 1925. It argues for a growing nationalistic intent marked by a gradual nationalistic assertiveness in *Moeti oa Bochabela*, *Pitseng*, and *Chaka*. It also discusses how Mofolo's Christian education influenced his political ideology and literary ethos.

Chapter Four explores the various ways in which the novel Jesus-fies King Chaka. It offers an in-depth analysis of the ways in which the protagonist is modelled after Jesus Christ, how the traits of King Chaka, the stages of his life, the major events in his life, and his deeds parallel those of Christ. The chapter further shows how the novel, in Jjesus-fying King Chaka, makes African and European values equivalent.

Mengara argues that the novel has a nationalist agenda. In Chapter Five, nationalism is argued to manifest not only in the construction of King Chaka as a messianic figure and African nationalist but also in the construction of an idealized and romantic African precolonial period, in the positive and vivid description of the landscape, and in the elevation of African traditional

institutions and customs and African systems of thought and belief. The stylistic techniques that Mofolo employs to disguise his anticolonialism are analyzed. These include obfuscation, Assertion-Retraction-Assertion, authorial intrusion, oral tradition, irony and insinuation, biblical allusion and innuendo, repetition, and contrast. Also discussed in the chapter is how Prophetess Anna 'Mantsopa Makhetha, Zulu religious separatism, the Zulu Rebellion of 1906, and the Natives Land Act of 1913 that sharply restricted African land holding influenced Mofolo's views on missionary teachings and doctrines and on racial tensions in Lesotho, South Africa, and southern African at large.

Colonial Discourse and the Jesus-fication of King demonstrates a high level of scholarly rigor, engaging extensively with a diverse array of academic sources and citing numerous authoritative voices across the fields of literature and history. Its arguments are well developed and respond thoughtfully to current scholarly discussions. The book allows Mofolo to be appreciated as "a true African nationalist" rather than "an acculturated African writer singing the praise of the so-called 'civilizing mission'" (p. 10), and *Chaka* to be appreciated as implicit and veiled anticolonial discourse on the disruptiveness of colonialism. The book serves as a valuable resource for both students and scholars in the fields of African literature and African history.

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