

THE ACCIDENTAL GROWTH OF BOOK HISTORY: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF PRINT CULTURE AND BOOK HISTORY STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The study of book history is in its infancy in South Africa, with a small group of scholars working in the area and little sense of a shared body of literature, which could be used as foundational texts for those wishing to conduct research in this field. This article describes an attempt to map the terrain of book and print culture studies in South Africa to date. Although it is only in recent years that writings have come to be grouped under a broader heading of book history (whether at conferences or in special issues of journals), work has been done in this field since the early twentieth century. This is similar to the situation in other countries, where the ‘accidental’ growth of book history has meant that a great deal of work has been done on a wide variety of relevant topics. The article describes key strands in the literature, including print history, publishing history, the overlap with literary history, and studies of readership and reception.

KEYWORDS

book history, literary history, literature review, print culture, print history, publishing history, readership studies, South Africa

1. INTRODUCTION

Book history is a fast-growing area of study, world-wide. In South Africa, this field is in its infancy, with only a handful of scholars working in the area. Moreover, there is little sense of a shared body of literature, which could be used as foundational texts for those wishing to conduct research in this field. As Francis Galloway (2004:111) points out, ‘South African printing and publishing history has hitherto only been addressed in a fragmented way, and in scattered sources. There is no consolidated source (a “history of the book in South Africa”) on this pivotal cultural industry.’ With this reality of

isolation and scarcity as background, this article describes an attempt to map the terrain of book and print culture studies in South Africa to date – including those that have not labelled themselves as book history, but whose scope falls within a broad definition of the subject.¹

To conduct a literature review of studies in this area, a broad definition of book history was employed: ‘book history as a field seeks to trace the histories and social consequences of the production, distribution and consumption of print’ (Hofmeyr & Kriel 2006:10). This field of study has its origins in the *Annales* school of French historians, who conceptualised a sub-section of their subject as *l’histoire du livre*, or the history of the book. They studied printing, publishing and the circulation of books for insights into how people have lived, thought and interacted at various periods. Two key texts also influenced the development of the field: Febvre and Martin’s *The coming of the book* (published in English translation in 1979) and Eisenstein’s *The printing press as an agent of change* (1979). Since then, the field has become increasingly popular, with a society dedicated to the history of authorship, reading and publishing (SHARP), and journals such as *Publishing History* and *Book History* being established. The focus of book history, as it is conceived today, is on the role of printed objects and print culture in cultural and social history. There is an emphasis on books (and other forms of texts) as material, physical objects, and on their circulation, consumption, and use. DF McKenzie, a key scholar, notes the utility of ‘a field that could take account of both the physical nature and production history of books and their broader social meaning and significance’ (Hofmeyr & Kriel 2006:6).

The aim of this article is to create a firmer foundation for advancing the field of book history and publishing studies in South Africa. The article explores the research that has been done, in a disparate and fragmentary manner, and attempts to synthesise these into a more coherent body of knowledge. As will be shown in the sections that follow, although it is only in recent years that writings have come to be grouped under a broader heading of book history, work has been done in this general field since the early twentieth century. This is similar to the situation in other countries, as Barnard (1995:69) points out: ‘The accidental growth of bibliography and book history in Britain has meant that there has been a great deal of work done by individuals on all kinds of topics since at least the mid-nineteenth century. Rich and valuable as this work often is, it was never articulated as part of any larger programme.’ In South Africa, too, much work on a variety of topics could be grouped together to create a clearer picture of the history of the book in this country.

2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this study was that of a literature review, beginning with a search of major bibliographical portals such as the Index to South African Periodicals (ISAP), Scopus, Google Scholar and Book History Online (BHO) for sources relating to South Africa and to publishing in a broad sense. This netted a large number of sources focused on current trends in publishing, as well as a few historical sources. Then, starting with the bibliographies of a few key articles from special issues of local journals, a snowball technique was used to locate further relevant sources. Personal communication with a number of scholars, both local and international, added further sources. While the focus was on published works, where an unpublished source such as a dissertation was found to be highly relevant, it was also included. A number of the works reviewed, even the majority, may not describe themselves as ‘book history’, but were included for their relevance – with inclusion based on criteria such as a historical focus, a concern with books as material objects, or attention to the publishing and/or reception context of texts. The bibliography thus compiled cannot claim to be a truly comprehensive overview, especially given the wide array of disciplines with a stake or interest in this field, but it is certainly the most complete to date.

The review should also help us to gain a clearer picture of how book history as a field of study has developed in South Africa. What immediately emerges as a finding is that the literature is fragmented in the extreme: indeed, to gain a sense of what has been written in South African book history, one must read journals, chapters, reports and books from disciplines as diverse as literary studies, readership studies, information science (including bibliography as a sub-discipline of librarianship), history, journalism and wider media studies, education, religious studies, and linguistics, as well as ‘Africana’. These studies often show little awareness of work done in other disciplines. At the same time, South Africa’s linguistic diversity adds to this fragmentation.

Of course, diversity and interdisciplinarity raise their own problems and challenges, and these had to be addressed and overcome: some of these include the lack of a shared vocabulary, few common methodologies, and little integrated research that synthesises prior findings. Moreover, scholars seem to work in isolation, and often ignorance, of each other, and only a handful identify themselves and their work as falling within the ambit of book history. As a result there is no coherent framework for South African book history studies, building on previous research in the area. Isabel Hofmeyr and Lize Kriel (2006), in their introduction to a special issue of the *SAHJ*, provide a brief overview of different areas of scholarship that could be considered as contributing to an understanding of the history of the book in South Africa. One area they highlight is the field of book development, which is widely written on in the context of Africa more generally. Their main concern with local book-oriented scholarship is that it is not backward-looking (and is even ahistorical), and that it is focused on policy – ‘designing

national policies to promote publishing and reading' (Hofmeyr & Kriel 2006:10). A large number of studies on current issues and trends in publishing and on book development were identified during this survey, but these have not been included in this literature review precisely because they show little awareness of historical matters. Book history can thus not as yet be said to have a cohesive body of literature in South Africa.

3. BOOK HISTORY IN SOUTH AFRICA: AN OVERVIEW

The research collected on the history of the book and print culture in South Africa tells a fascinating story, and offers an alternative lens through which to view the country's history. There are studies of printing as a colonial activity, sponsored (albeit reluctantly) by the colonial authorities at the Cape. There are stories of mission presses and their key role in promoting and standardising the use of African languages, especially isiXhosa. And there are narratives of the black elite not as passive consumers of Western publications, but rather using literacy and print for their own ends, in establishing newspapers for instance. Such studies also offer new ways of viewing the impact of apartheid in South Africa, for instance by looking at censorship or the power of the trade unions (one of the earliest of which was the South African Typographical Union), in creating preferential employment for white workers. The story of the development and growth of local publishers, and their role in promoting the then new language known as Afrikaans, is also fairly well developed. But there are clearly gaps, and at the same time the stories told do not form a cohesive narrative.

An exploratory research project on 'The Book in Africa' brought together some of the key scholars in this field in the early 2000s, but proved too unwieldy and broad in scope to continue. There have been several special issues of journals since 2001 (the key ones being *Current Writing*, *English Studies in Africa*, *South African Historical Journal*, *Innovation*, *Stilet*, and *English in Africa*, as well as the international journals *Research and Documentation in Africa*, and *Africa*) and thus a number of broad-strokes overviews of the field and work that situates itself deliberately as 'book historical'. The series of Bibliophilia conferences, especially the more recent meetings such as 'From Papyrus to Print-Out: The Book in Africa' (2005), brought together scholars, practitioners and interested laymen, and contributed towards building some momentum. Partly as a result, three dedicated conferences have been held focusing on this field, in 2001 and 2007, and a number of panels have been organised at annual society conferences as well. At Rhodes University and later at North-West University, several workshops were organised under the auspices of John Gouws. There have been few book-length monographic studies to date, although those of Isabel Hofmeyr (2004), Andrew van der Vlies (2007) and Peter McDonald (2009) are deserving of special mention. All of these initiatives have contributed to a growing awareness of book history as a field in South Africa.

The terms ‘print culture’, ‘textual culture’ or even ‘written culture’ have not yet found widespread currency in the South African literature, nor has ‘textual studies’ (a few exceptions will be noted). One is far more likely to encounter ‘the text’ as such or ‘reading practices’ than a wider awareness of the social and material context of publications. This reflects the disciplinary and methodological orientations of the articles surveyed in this article. Some of the main groupings that emerged in compiling the bibliography, and which are used to signpost this article, include the areas of print history (relating specifically to the introduction and spread of printing technology), as well as the related area of censorship and freedom of the press; publishing history, which relates to the establishment of publishing houses and the selection of works for publication; literary history, but only when this deals overtly with the ‘sociology’ of the reception and publishing history of particular books or authors; and studies of readership, literacy and orality, the wider context of readership and the circulation of books. These areas also refer to different aspects of Robert Darnton’s ‘communications circuit’, which provides a theoretical framework for the study of book history internationally (Darnton 1982).

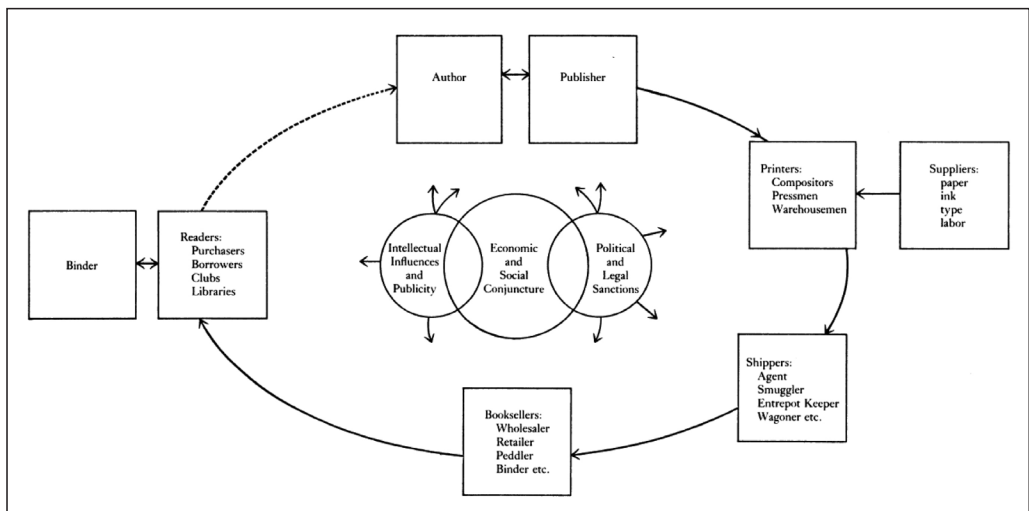


Figure 1: The Communication Circuit

4. PRINT HISTORY

Indigenous printing in South Africa dates back only to the 1790s. Although there is some debate on the subject, it is widely accepted that the first printed document was Johan Ritter’s *Almanach voor ’t jaar 1796*. This took place shortly after the British occupation of the Cape, as previous requests for printing presses to be imported had been denied by the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Ironically, the VOC approved

Ritter's appointment as a printer in 1795 (and he had moved to South Africa in the 1780s already) just before the Cape surrendered to the British (see Lloyd 1914:33). An exceptionally rich and well researched study by Anna Smith (1971) provides an overview of the spread of printing and print culture through South Africa, from the early Cape printers to the development of newspapers on the Witwatersrand following the discovery of gold. Descriptions of mobile printing presses being carried across a very large country, on ox-wagons, are fascinating while being rooted in the realities of existence in a settler-state, and add interest and depth to this area of study.

Smith's work on early printing endeavours is supplemented by Nienaber's (1943) short history of 'Hollands-Afrikaans' printing (and further work by Nienaber in this field), biographies of the newspaper and print pioneers Douglas Fairbairn and Thomas Pringle (Meiring 1968; Doyle 1972), and the bibliographical studies of Mendelssohn (1997 and others), Fransie Rossouw (1987) and Elna Buys (1988). The Settler's Press in the Grahamstown area has been studied in some depth (Gordon-Brown 1979), with reference to the printing of a wide variety of materials, including books, pamphlets, directories, almanacs and newspapers. There are also print histories written in the early twentieth century, such as Lloyd's *Birth of printing in South Africa* from 1914, and several studies from the 1930s (Laidler 1935; McMurtrie 1932; Morrison 1934), but these are largely descriptive, sometimes contradictory, and difficult to access. They are, however, well summarised in Smith's study.

The first printing in South Africa was often of newspapers, and there is thus a close link between the history of printing and the development of the newspaper media.² As Smith (1971:83) notes, 'In South Africa throughout the nineteenth century almost every newspaper printer was also the jobbing printer for the area in which he was established, and the history of printing is therefore very closely bound up with the history of the press'. The first 'newspaper' in South Africa – the precursor to the government gazette – was established in 1800. It was followed by the *South African Commercial Advertiser* (privately printed by George Greig, assisted by Thomas Pringle and John Fairbairn) which was published from 1824 (Smith 1971:33). Reflecting the very close relationship between the press and freedom of the press, this newspaper was censored after just 17 issues, but resumed printing a few months later. Another important pioneer newspaper was the *South African Chronicle and Mercantile Advertiser* printed by Bridekirk (also established in 1824). The first newspapers for a black readership were published by the mission presses as early as the next decade, with *Umshumayeli Wendaba* appearing from 1837. All of these have received scholarly attention, to a greater or lesser extent. Indeed, a great deal of work has been done in the area of media history.

The area of press history also reveals close links to the concept of press freedom, as 'the history of printing in any country is bound up with the liberty of the press' (Smith 1971:127). In South African scholarship, there is a clear and specific strand on censorship, probably due to the repressive history of the country. So, for instance, there are studies on early struggles for press freedom (see, for instance, Gunter 1930), but not

all of it is scholarly. Cope (1980:1) provides the background to a study of magazines by ‘going back a lot further, in fact an entire century to the year 1824’ to ‘Thomas Pringle’s historic clash with authority when he launched the *South African Journal*’. Cope notes that, after two issues the journal closed down rather than ‘compromise our birthright as British subjects by editing any publication under censorship’. But, even though the latter is a direct quote from Pringle, there is no reference to follow up. This is a fairly common feature of texts written by practitioners, or those involved in industry rather than academia.

More rigorous work in this field has been done by literary scholars such as Peter McDonald (2009), Margriet De Lange (1997) and Christopher Merrett (1986, 1994), as well as by scholar Archie Dick (see, for instance, his work on book burning, 2004, as well as 2007, 2008). McDonald’s *The literature police*, a book-length study of the effects of censorship on literary production, is a significant contribution to developing South Africa’s history of the book. Rachel Matteau (2007) has done an interesting study of the circulation of banned books in the apartheid era, as has Andrew van der Vlies (2007). What is particularly interesting in such studies is small details of social history – for instance, that the *Government Gazette*’s listing of banned books served as a form of ‘catalogue’ for certain groups of readers.

In addition, and unsurprisingly in a country where trade unions are still very powerful politically, there are a number of studies that draw the links between printing and the labour movement, and the trade union influence on the printing and publishing industries. These studies typically refer to the South African Typographical Union (Downes 1951), or the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 (Hadland 2005), and provide an unusual perspective on the country’s history of separate development and job reservation (such as Ewert 1990; White 1992).

Book printing and publishing, in turn, has to date received less attention, although some significant work has been done in this field. While providing details of early printing initiatives, Smith (1971:27) notes that, ‘Until the discovery of gold, and the consequent influx of people, the demand for products of the printing press was extremely small and was largely satisfied by importing from Holland and Britain’ and that ‘book-printing as such had to wait for the twentieth century’ (Smith 1971:131). The early print quality was reportedly not very good, and paper supplies were highly problematic until the establishment of manufacturer Sappi, although *The South African Chronicle* (15 December 1824) noted that Cape printing was superior to that of India or New South Wales (Smith 1971:45).

An interesting aspect that emerges from print history is that language was a problem from early on. Printing was established at a time when governance of the Cape was oscillating between Dutch and British rule. Much printing, especially of newspapers and ephemera, was bilingual (English and Dutch) from an early period. The local publishing

industry now grapples with eleven official languages, and it is clear that the issue of language has only become more important and more problematic over time.

5. PUBLISHING HISTORY

It must be acknowledged that there are a number of publisher histories in existence, but in this field quantity unfortunately trumps quality. There have been several studies of publishers and of their publishing history in South Africa, but the first problem with many is that they are tributes (a *huldeblyk*, to use a descriptive Afrikaans word, celebrating anniversaries, in particular), memoirs or journalistic overviews, rather than analytical and scholarly studies. Examples include the ‘Liber Americum’ produced for A.A. Balkema (*Liber amicorum ...* 1984), a tribute to Hettie Scholtz of Queillerie (De Jager 1995), and Human’s memoir of establishing Human & Rousseau (Human 2006). The second problem is that these studies have largely been undertaken in an isolated manner, without paying attention to the wider context of publishing internationally or nationally, and without taking the wider academic context into account (e.g. building upon other publishing studies or studies in other disciplines). They have also not been situated within an over-arching theoretical framework, such as book history offers.

Some of the key texts in this area are the following. Eric Rosenthal (1970) wrote one of the first historical overviews of publishing in South Africa, but although it was published in an academic journal and the author was a well-known historian, the article is not very scholarly (it has no references, to mention one concern). ASC Hooper (1996) provides a similar, and very concise, overview of the history of publishing in South Africa. Nicholas Evans and Monica Seeber (2000) have published the closest we have to a comprehensive survey of trends in South African publishing, with *The politics of publishing in South Africa*, a landmark text. More recently, Galloway (2002, 2004) has concentrated on producing baseline statistical data for book publishing from the 1990s to date.³ But these studies are focused more on the present and the future than on the past, although they lay the groundwork for potential studies in the future of the recent past. Important bibliographic work, which could equally lay the basis of good publishing histories, has been done by Mendelssohn (1979, 1991, 1997), Rossouw (1987) and the *South African National Bibliography* produced by the National Library of South Africa (eg NLSA 1985, 1997 and now available online).

Such bibliographies lay the basis for more analytical studies of book history in South Africa. A number of publishing histories have already been developed in this regard. From the studies available, we can identify a clear focus on the missionary presses established in South Africa in the colonial period, especially by historians and to some extent by literary scholars examining African-language texts. These studies are largely based on careful archival research, and are an important contribution to the history of the book in South Africa (although a wider, systematic, and comparative study of the mission presses would add considerably to our body of knowledge, and has not yet

been undertaken). Mission printing in South Africa dates back to just after the first government printing, with the printing in 1801 of a spelling table by the London Mission Society at Graaff Reinet (Smith 1971:53).

A great deal of attention is rightly paid to the important role of Lovedale Press in South African publishing, and especially its role in publishing black authors and in promoting local languages. The missionaries at Chumie, near Lovedale, first published in isiXhosa in 1823 (Opland 1990:135). Opland and Peires are dominant in this field, having published widely on isiXhosa-language publishing, and the development of isiXhosa fiction in the missionary press environment: 'The fact is that the mass of the vernacular literature published in the past emanated, and still to-day emanates, from missionary presses, and naturally such literature has sought to fulfil the aims of missionary societies' (Peires 1980:155). While these are historians writing, Mpe (1999:209), a writer and scholar of literature, adds the perspective that '...while African-language publishing had developed and flourished under the care of various missionary houses before Apartheid was institutionalised in 1948, afterwards political and educational changes seriously constrained what missionaries could do'. The overt link between publishing and the promotion of certain titles for certain audiences has also been made in this area: 'One of the certain and expanding markets for book consumption was that of schools, and publication requirements for vernacular literature came to be shaped increasingly around the demands of schools for text books and readers' (Lenta 2006:52).

A scholar investigating mission presses can usually rely on good archival resources, as well as secondary studies, such as texts written by Shepherd (1945, 1971), who was director of the Press from 1932 to 1958, during its heyday. Thus, there is also a growing body of literature on Shepherd's influence on Lovedale's publishing philosophy and on isiXhosa publishing: 'Shepherd was to exercise enormous influence in the development and spread of African writing in South Africa, and under him the Lovedale Press was to become one of the key purveyors of the ideas which contributed to the growth of an African consciousness' (White 1992:69).

Other studies of mission presses include those of Bradlow (1987) on the Kuruman Press run by Robert Moffat, Zurcher (1972) on the Morija Printing Works, and Mokoena (2009) and Khumalo (2003, 2004) on the press at Ekukhanyeni. An early study in this area examines the Suid-Afrikaanse Bybelvereniging (the South African Bible Association, which became N.G. Kerk-Uitgewers en -Boekhandel) (Oberholster 1958), while Schutte (1969) attempted a broader overview of mission presses in the nineteenth century. A number of studies go beyond publishing concerns to examine the role of the mission press in the making of 'reading publics' (to use Mokoena's phrase 2009: 602; see also De Kock 1996). Such studies also look at the writing and reading profiles of the missions and of missionaries (see, for instance, Hofmeyr 2006; Groenewald 2004, 2011; Kriel 2007, 2009). A number of other scholars, notably historians but also religious studies scholars, have produced further work on mission presses and their influence, but not all of the mission presses have yet been studied.

Interestingly for this literature review, Hofmeyr (2005:99) bemoans a split in publishing studies: ‘The two arms [of publishing studies] – secular and religious – are often treated discretely, the former the domain of historians of the book and publishing..., the latter the domain of scholarship on nineteenth-century Christianity, mission and philanthropy’. It is true that the secular side of publishing has not been as well studied as the religious in South Africa (although there is little on Christian publishers as opposed to mission presses). There is a group of studies focusing on Afrikaans publishing houses, such as an important multi-volume study of Nasionale Pers and the imprints that now fall under its umbrella, such as Tafelberg and Human & Rousseau (including titles by Muller 1990; Muller & Beukes 1990; Beukes 1992; Beukes & Steyn 1992). Venter’s study (2006) of the material production of Afrikaans fiction has created production and publisher profiles which could be a fertile source for future studies in this area. The first volume of a planned series on the history of Juta, South Africa’s oldest continuously operating publishing house (since 1853), has also appeared, but it is unfortunately more journalistic than scholarly (De Kock 2007). There are also brief case studies available of a number of small Afrikaans publishers, such as Homeros and Kwela (Cochrane 2004), and Taurus (Venter 2007). But important local publishers such as Maskew Miller, Van Schaik, A.A. Balkema, HAUM and others have not been studied in depth; for these, we have only tributes (e.g. *Liber amicorum* ... 1984; Botha 1991), in-house anniversary celebrations (*70: Van Schaik* ... 1984), and brief mentions in larger bibliographical studies. The first study of the country’s university presses is currently underway (see Le Roux 2008).

In terms of the key area of oppositional publishing, which could throw new light on the history of the anti-apartheid struggle, very little scholarly attention has yet been paid to the likes of Ravan Press, David Philip Publishers or Skotaville. There are brief collections of reminiscences on Ravan Press (De Villiers 1997); some tributes to the late David Philip as well as some papers he published (Hacksley 2007; Philip 1991, 2000; these were not historically focused, but have become of some historical value since). Perhaps the most comprehensive study to date is that of Isabel Essery (2004), who has examined the impact of politics on indigenous independent publishers in South Africa from 1970 to 2004, looking largely at David Philip. Stadler (1975) reviews some of the books published by SPRO-CAS and by Ravan Press. There has as yet not been a single in-depth study of a black publishing house.

A problem highlighted by the literature so far is the ‘presentist concerns’ (Hofmeyr & Kriel 2006:11) of many of the publishing studies available, ie they are not historical, but rather focus on current issues and how publishers can develop in the future – ‘With regard to publishing, there is little work that is historical in nature’ (Hofmeyr & Kriel 2006:11). A number of examples already mentioned in this study bear out this assertion. For example, a number of studies deal with publishing in the past ten years, or since 1994 at the earliest, while others focus on book development issues, progress with literacy and African-language publishing, and business challenges facing local publishers. It is

true that, in the absence of reliable publishing statistics, book historians in the future may struggle to trace the development of publishing in the twenty-first century.⁴ At the same time, a number of studies that were focused on ‘the current period’ when they were written are now of historical value. But the broad concern remains justified: that so little of the energy put into publishing or textual studies is being channelled to drawing up a fuller historical picture.

Another significant problem in this area appears to be the location and preservation of publishers’ archives, which have been scattered by mergers and acquisitions, poor record-keeping practices, scant regard for their importance to scholars, and natural disasters such as fires. Distance can also be an obstacle: some archives, such as Balkema’s, are located overseas, in the Netherlands. Perhaps the dearth of good studies of publishing history can be attributed, at least in part, to this difficulty in locating archival material.⁵

6. LITERARY HISTORY

Much of the scholarship on publishing focuses on what may be considered literary texts, rather than other forms of publication. A great deal of book history has also emerged from the field of literary sociology or literary history. In South Africa, we may encounter literary histories with a book history slant (eg Van der Waal 2008), as well as publishing histories of certain individual authors and titles, but more often such studies tend to focus on textual analysis. The focus in local literary studies has been for a number of years on the *text* rather than the *book*, looking at themes, genres, and authors. Publishing, it emerges from such studies, is something *authors* do. Such eminent authors and scholars such as André P Brink and JM Coetzee have both written widely about authorship, publishing and censorship, and especially ‘censorship and the author’ (Brink 1980) or ‘the freedom of the *writer* to publish’ (Coetzee 1990: 64, my emphasis). Coetzee showed an early awareness of developments in the field of book history by quoting seminal scholars such as Eisenstein, and Febvre and Martin, but did not appear to use these sources to introduce a book history slant to his writings on literature.

Sarah Nuttall (2002:283) notes, in this regard, that ‘South African literature and the literary archive has been badly served by the mixture of belles-lettristic and New Critical formative pedagogical influences that paid little attention to the materiality and context of texts’. Indeed, there is an uneasy positioning of some studies in this field, an awareness that they fall between a literary close reading and a broader analysis of the material and publishing context of a text. Andrew van der Vlies has produced a significant work South Africa’s ‘textual culture’ (2007), as well as studies of the publishing history of specific literary texts, with studies focusing on JM Coetzee, Alan Paton, the canon, and global reception; indeed, ‘the economies of textual production, literariness and “meaning”’ (2006:21). Weighing in on the text vs context debate, he argues: ‘It is an attention to the material and metaphorical afterlives often overlooked by scholarship which forgets that the study of literature involves, or ought to involve, the

study of meaning-making in multiple, shifting, and always material contexts' (Van der Vlies 2006:32). He goes on to argue that 'Both cases (of Paton) emphasise the value of broadly 'book historical' study to *literary* studies (conceived as the study of meaning, and the making of meaning), as well as suggest convergences with broadly *historical* research into South African identities and identifications, and their placement in global contexts' (Van der Vlies 2006:21).

The area of literary history is contested in South Africa, filled with controversy, debate and disagreement (especially about linguistic issues and who has the authority to speak on whose behalf). This has led to the production of quite a number of works of literary history in South Africa, notably those by Smit, Van Wyk and Wade (1996), Chapman (2003) and Heywood (2005) in English, and Kannemeyer (1988, 1993) and Van Coller (1998 and several other volumes) in Afrikaans, as well as Ntuli and Swanepoel (1993) in African languages. However, these tend to deal more with books as texts than with books as objects, and their focus is on authorship rather than publication, production or readership. Van Coller (2008) has more recently produced interesting work in an attempt to integrate the concepts of readership and reception theory into his history of Afrikaans fiction, depending on a conceptualisation of systems and field theory that sees South African literary publishing as a series of inter-connected circuits or sub-fields (divided on linguistic grounds, mainly). This is his contribution to an ongoing debate about the links between literary history and book history: 'A bone of contention is whether a literary history should be concerned primarily with the authors of works, and with forming them into "chronologically and causally linked bio-bibliographical collections". Should literary history not rather be concerned with the reception of texts in a historical context, in order to identify principles of evolutionary literary development?' (Van Coller 2008:61).

As Van Coller suggests, a number of literary studies, within a more overtly book history-oriented paradigm, have begun to focus on the reception and publishing history of individual texts and authors. Perhaps the most influential of these studies is Hofmeyr's (2004) ground-breaking transnational study of *The portable Bunyan*. There are also good case studies of Heinemann's African Writers Series (such as Mpe 1999); of Alan Paton (Barnard 2004; Van der Vlies 2006); of JM Coetzee (Zimble 2004; Barnett 1999; Flanery 2004); and of Herman Charles Bosman (Lenta 2003; MacKenzie 2000), as well as of individual titles such as *Hill of fools* (Wright 2004). In Afrikaans, Irma du Plessis (2008) has explicitly situated her study of youth series published by J.L. van Schaik within a book history frame of reference, while Maritha Snyman (2004a, 2004b) has constructed authors' profiles for Afrikaans children's fiction. A promising area of study in terms of Afrikaans-language texts examines the use of Ajami (Arabic characters) in the development of the language (see, especially, Haron 2001, 2008; Davids 2010; Adhikari 2006; as well as early work by Van Selms 1953). We find that publishing histories of African-language titles are often closely bound up with studies of the mission presses,

as they were very active in developing this field (see for instance Maake 1993; Satyo 1995; Makalima 1987; Opland 1990, 2003, 2007, among others).

Issues relating to scholarly editing and editorial version have also emerged, although there is certainly scope for a great deal more reflective work in this regard. Such studies include an investigation of the versions of Sol Plaatje's novel *Mhudi* (Couzens & Gray 1978); Lady Anne Barnard's diaries (Lenta 1997); and the poets Livingstone (Meihuizen 2008) and Roy Campbell (Van der Vlies 2003, 2005). In particular, the scholar John Gouws, bringing book history, scholarly editing and library history together, played an important role in developing a centre for 'book and text studies' (2004: 119) in Grahamstown and now in Potchefstroom.

While literature in general may have been analysed at length, distinct gaps remain in what could be studied. For instance, there has been very little produced so far on children's book publishing history written in English. A history of Afrikaans children's and youth literature (Wybenga & Snyman 2005) contains elements of book history, and scholars such as Snyman, Du Plessis, Van der Walt and others have also produced work in this field. But, as Margaret Labuschagne (2009:3) points out, 'To date, works on the history of South African children's literature written in English focus either on bibliography, themes, or even aspects such as character. However, there is no evidence of a book or other writing giving the history of the publishing of English children's books in South Africa.' Elwyn Jenkins (2009) is one of the few scholars looking at English-language children's books from a historical perspective. The area of African languages publishing has been still more neglected, although a study of children's Bibles in local languages (Du Toit & Beard 2007) is a recent contribution.

7. READERSHIPS AND RECEPTION

Literary texts, and other texts to a lesser extent, are often brought into a book history frame through the lens of readership. A number of strands could be discerned in this important sub-theme, including literacy and reading; the role of orality; and circulation and reception. These overlap to a large extent. In a context of generally good literacy rates but low functional literacy, there are a number of scholars working on aspects of literacy in South Africa. Such studies are usually future-looking, aiming to promote the spread of literacy, and thus have little historical dimension. Some of the more relevant studies which we can highlight are those on 'multiliteracies', 'popular literacy' (Trimbur, 2009), and 'everyday literacy', such as letter writing and diaries (e.g. Lenta 1997; Harries 2007).

Orality is another important strand, and of particular importance to a country such as South Africa. This review did not delve into this area in detail, as it was considered more tangential than central to the topic of book history. The most relevant theme that may be highlighted is the interplay between orality and print; an obvious example is

the reading of printed works to a wider audience. Mastin Prinsloo (2008; Prinsloo & Breier 1996) has done excellent work on the interplay between literate and oral cultures in South Africa. Prinsloo's work on literacy and documents in South Africa deserves to be highlighted because it is so clearly and carefully theorised. He has shown how 'print literacy' was not simply transplanted into the African context, and did not erase the oral culture that had gone before, but was 'translated, interpreted, recontextualized, and re-embedded in a range of ways by local people' (Prinsloo 2008:99). Deborah Seddon's recent work on orature considers how the print medium may be an important medium for the preservation, education and dissemination of South African orature; she describes a 'flexible, workable relationship between oral culture and the print medium' in South Africa (2008:138), recalling the theoretical concept of print as a 'technology of preservation' (Lenta 2006:48). Patrick Harries' work (2001) also offers innovative insights into the interaction between print and orality, focusing on the missionary context.

A fruitful strand of study in this regard is the development of 'textual circuits' (Hofmeyr 2006), or the use of newspapers, especially by black people, as a public, political medium to facilitate intellectual exchange. Another relevant area is the use of oral histories as a source for social history (Coplan 1987; Kaschula 1995, 2002; Opland 1983, 1995, 1998). Isabel Hofmeyr has done important work in this area, in particular with her 1993 publication, *We spend our years as a tale that is told*. Oral histories, and particularly their use in tracing reading patterns, are an important methodology for book history internationally. Evidence of reading may be hard to find, and hence the use of oral history to supplement other sources, but as Dick (2004:32) points out, 'The impact of ... reading initiatives is difficult to assess'. Yet readership studies continue to grow. The literature review brought out studies of reading societies, such as the National Home Reading Union, Groenberg Reading and Debating Society, and of reading groups (Dick 2005; Dickie 1994; Glorie 1999). There are also numerous studies of the reading habits of ordinary South Africans, especially black people, apart from the South African Book Development Council's report on this issue (Charlewood 2000; French 1989; Leach, Verbeek & Stilwell 1994; Mashishi 2000; Myambo 2000; Nuttall 1994; Snyman & Penzhorn 2011). Myrna Machet adds an important dimension by studying the reading practices of young people, with her pilot project on the reading interests and information use of South African children and young adults (2002). Such studies of *reading*, rather than *readership*, tend to be snapshots of a particular moment in time rather than historically focused (Hofmeyr 2004, also points to this distinction).

Karin Barber (2001, 2006) has produced a number of significant studies on audiences and reception, and her theoretical work is often cited as seminal by scholars in this field. In her work, there is a recurring theme of reading and writing as important in creating networks and social movements, as well as the use of texts for social history: 'the profusion of innovative individual writing and enterprising efforts in local, small scale print publication by non-elites in the colonial period; the propensity to collect and

archive such texts; and the significance attached to reading, especially as a mode of collective and individual betterment' (Barber 2001:3).

In addition to reception, dissemination is a key area of interest. This is often studied in relation to libraries, as there is only limited documentation of the circulation of books. A large number of library histories have been written (these are too numerous to cite in detail here; see Aschenborn 1971 and Gouws 2007 for just two examples), and the state archives have actively catalogued inventories of publications, such as, say, colonial publications in Natal. Christopher Merrett (1986) has written widely on the role of libraries in a context of censorship and Kalley (2000) on libraries and apartheid, while Reuben Musiker (1982) has contributed a great deal to the study of bibliography and to the history and role of university libraries (see also Immelman 1955, 1982). Other studies examine important book collectors and collections, such as Sir George Grey (Kerr 2006). Shamil Jeppie's ground-breaking work on the library at Timbuktu takes us into a new realm, as he examines the history of libraries, collection, writing and scholarship in a much wider African context (see Jeppie & Diagne 2008).

Yet, apart from libraries, other areas of circulation and dissemination remain almost entirely untouched in South African studies. To name a few, Matteau (2007) has written an article on the circulation of banned books through underground networks, Machet (1993) has investigated bookselling 'with specific reference to the black market', and Dick (2005) has worked on distribution through the Books for Troops scheme. Hofmeyr (2008) considers texts and their circulation within a wider historical and geographical context. She also examines the south-south circulation of texts, especially in the Indian Ocean Rim area:

... the transverse axes of the Indian Ocean have to be factored into this bigger picture if we are to arrive at an understanding of book history that is truly transnational and not simply imperial. We need a picture of the world that examines the articulation of different transnational systems. We need to understand book history at the intersection of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean. (Hofmeyr 2008:13).

This wider focus on the trans-national circulation of books has opened up a broad area for new study.

8. AREAS FOR FUTURE STUDY

The literature review presented so far covers a number of significant areas of book history, some of them in some depth. But there are other areas which are touched upon only sketchily, if at all. As Van der Vlies (2004:11) has noted, in introducing a special issue of *English Studies in Africa*, 'collectively [the articles in this special issue] cover a restricted area of South and Southern African textual cultures. They do not engage with orality, for example, nor with the publishing, textual, and cultural histories of writing in languages other than English – these fields also demand exploration. There

is a phenomenal wealth of book historical sources to excavate and questions to pose in the South African context'. The area of printing or publishing in African languages, in particular, needs to be historicised and developed in greater detail.

Hofmeyr, too, has identified gaps before, as in her introduction with Archie Dick to the special issue of *Innovation*:

There are, however, yawning gaps that remain. There is, for example, little on South African publishing and printing. With regard to publishing, the richest work exists in relation to Afrikaans language publishing (Beukes & Steyn 1992; *Liber amicorum ...* 1984; 70; *Van Schaik ...* 1984; Botha 1991; De Jager 1995; Human 2006; Venter 2006). With regard to printing, research is likewise limited, despite the excellent foundation laid by Fransie Rossouw's *South African printers and publishers 1795-1925* (1987). This has, however, never been elaborated into any kind of broader history. There are patches that exist: the printing endeavours of the 1820 settlers (Doyle 1972; Meiring 1968); work on African language printing and publishing at Lovedale (Peires 1980); work on typographical unions, an important site of early white trade unionism (Downes 1951). (Hofmeyr & Dick 2007:10, 11).

This review shows that, in fact, the history of printing in South Africa is fairly well covered, although other gaps may still be identified. However, as pointed out above, it is certainly the case that we lack in-depth publishing histories, and there are in particular certain categories of publications which have received less attention to date, such as the non-literary, non-fiction texts of all kinds, such as the historical development of scholarly publishing, textbooks and schoolbooks. The role of newer Christian publishers, as opposed to mission presses, deserves renewed attention. There are also clear gaps in aspects of production apart from printing, such as design, typesetting and binding. Gaps may also be identified when it comes to studies of more ephemeral publications.

Perhaps the most startling finding of this review was the dearth of studies on dissemination and access: on the retailing and distribution of books. Patterns of the colonial book trade, for instance, have barely been explored – a single pamphlet of *Philobiblon* on 'Early Cape Book Dealers and Auctions' is all that could be found on early bookselling. More attention also needs to be paid to bookselling both under apartheid and since then, within a broader historical discourse. The wider context of book marketing (marketing campaigns for specific books, trends, books fairs, trade organisations, etc), distribution and access to books needs more study. This is indeed a fruitful field for future research.

A last gap in the literature may be identified in the area of theory and methodology, with very few reflexive studies being identified. A great deal of work is descriptive rather than critical or analytical, and there is often little attempt to draw upon a theoretical stance or rigorous methodology. Few of the studies surveyed are empirical studies, although Galloway's work should be noted in this regard, as well as some media histories. Hofmeyr (2005) is a pioneer in this area, overtly focusing on methodology, and calling for more integration and more transnational work. In addition, South African scholars

situated outside the country (such as Peter McDonald, Jarad Zimbler and Andrew van der Vlies) appear more apt to venture into this field than do locally-based scholars. One of the causes may be the lack of teaching and general awareness of book history within South Africa, as the subject is not currently taught formally at any university in South Africa.

9. CONCLUSION

In South Africa, a great deal of work has been undertaken that could in a broad sense be considered book historical, but it has been unsystematic and unsynthesised to date. Perhaps the lack of a good overview to date has hindered the development of the field, especially its theoretical and conceptual progress. It is clear that, so far, much research has been conducted in isolation and therefore the studies that exist do not build on each other. For any discipline, ‘A basic requirement for the research student is that they should understand the history of the subject they intend to study’ (Hart 1998:27). This review is a first step in the direction of providing a structured background for students in this field, and also provides several areas of future study for scholars in the field.

At the same time, it is apparent that since 2000 momentum has been growing in this field, as evidenced by the number of special issues of journals and the growing number of scholars working in the field. Perhaps it cannot be said that the review reveals a distinctively South African thread running through the studies surveyed, but there are certainly issues that receive a stronger emphasis in this context, and that may thus be of interest to a wider audience. Such issues include the interplay between modes of orality and print; printing and publishing in a settler colony context; and censorship and freedom of the press. The close links between mission publishing and the development and standardisation of the local African languages is also a distinctive area of scholarship.

In a sense, and as this literature review shows, book history could be said to have bubbled up ‘from below’ in South Africa. It is not simply a concept or a way of working that has been imported from outside or imposed from above, but may be traced through various studies that were conducted in a very local context from the early twentieth century. These studies can now be grouped together to add to the momentum of this field in South Africa.

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NOTES

- 1 My thanks to the anonymous reviewers of this article, whose suggestions and comments assisted me greatly. I would welcome further suggestions, especially of any sources inadvertently overlooked, as well as correspondence with interested scholars.
- 2 The field of newspaper or media history will not be explicitly covered in this survey, but a great deal of studies have been conducted in this area.
- 3 This is crucial work for future book historians.
- 4 The PASA industry surveys, carried out by the University of Pretoria since 2002, are a clear attempt to rectify this problem.
- 5 Studies of preservation and archives, as a wider issue, were not included in this review