

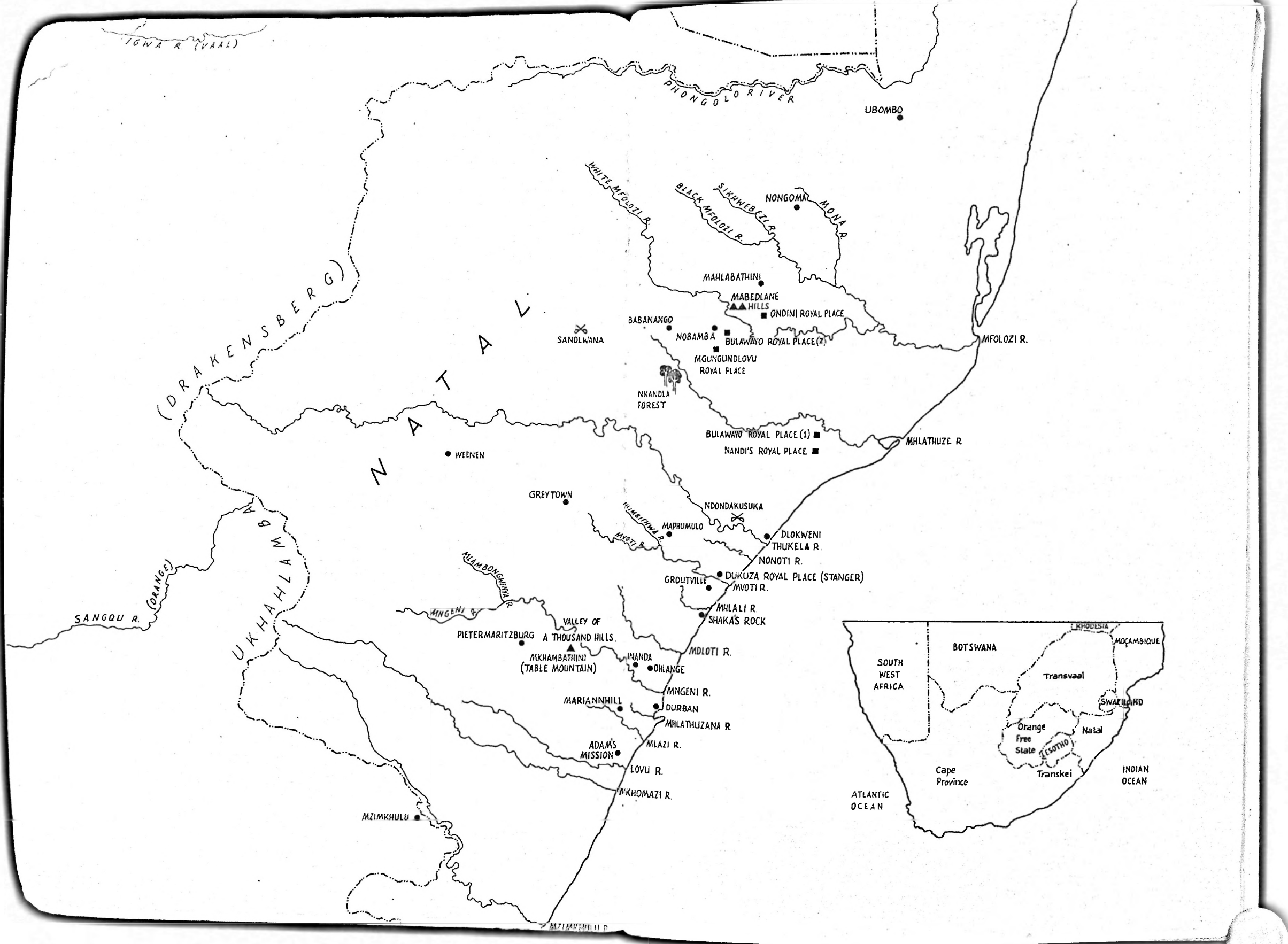
zulu horizons

Rendered into English verse by Florence Louie Friedman



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B. w. Vilakazi



ZULU
HORIZONS

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B. W. VILAKAZI, M.A., D.LITT. 1906-1947

Benedict

Wallet

Vilakazi

zulu horizons

Rendered into English verse by

FLORENCE LOUIE FRIEDMAN

from the literal translations of

D. McK. MALCOLM

and

J. MANDLENKOSI SIKAKANA

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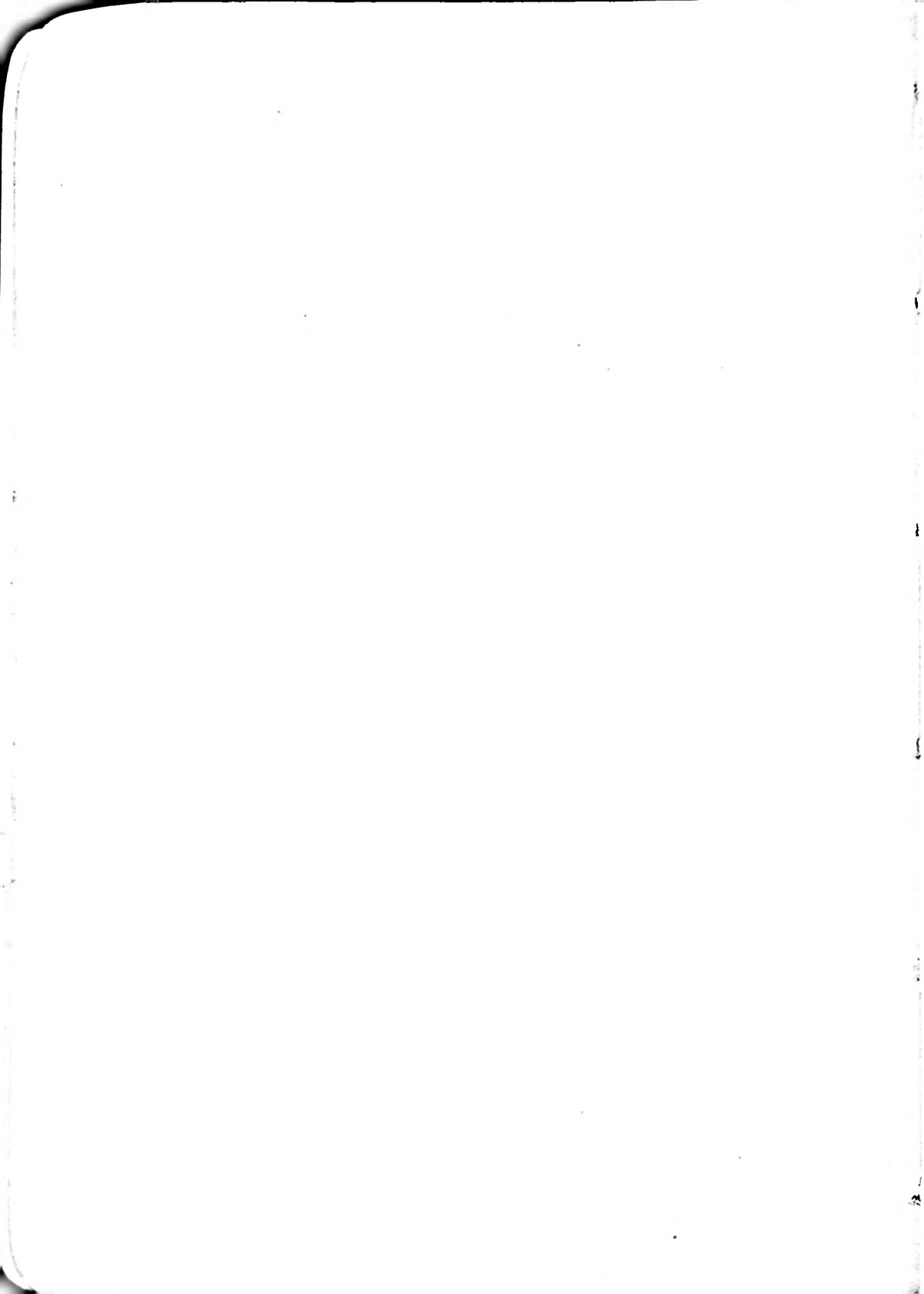
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To the memory of
Daniel McKinnon Malcolm



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Foreword

It is with sincere pleasure that I acknowledge, most gratefully, my debt to Mr J.M. Sikakana who, by courtesy of Professor Desmond T. Cole (Head of the Department of African Languages in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg) made several excursions into Zululand for the purpose of doing research into the background of Zulu legend, tradition and history, a knowledge of which is essential to a true appreciation of Vilakazi's poetry. Mr Sikakana also visited several members of the Vilakazi family, for many incidents of their history are alluded to in the poems, and these discussions clarified much that previously had been obscure.

It should be clearly understood that Vilakazi's poetry falls into two distinct categories: the praise poems and the lyrics. The former — preserved only by word of mouth until approximately fifty years ago — are essentially tribal in character; the latter were for Vilakazi deeply influenced by the great English Romantic poets — particularly Wordsworth and Shelley — and thus belong much more to the tradition of the nineteenth century than to that of the twentieth. But despite this influence, the majority have an unmistakable Zulu flavour.

It should be borne in mind that Vilakazi was, intellectually, a split personality, engaged in a constant tug-o'-war between the tribal African and the Catholic Doctor of English Literature. Usually, the tribal African won, because — as in so many cases — the pull of the heart was stronger than the pull of the brain.

Thanks to Mr Sikakana's painstaking researches and unflinching helpfulness when knotty problems — and they were many — arose, I have been enabled, I hope, to re-create in English verse, as close an approximation as possible, to the outer form and inner content of the original Zulu poems.

I have only this to add, that I am extremely grateful to Mr Ernest Ullmann for his most expressive and pleasing illustrations and to Dr Thelma Gutsche for her unflinching interest in, and enthusiasm for, this work.

FLORENCE LOUIE FRIEDMAN



Introduction

As the biographical sketch shows, Dr Vilakazi was born at Groutville in 1906. This being a station of the American Board of Missions his parents had come under missionary influence, but his grandparents were probably pagan and illiterate and conforming to the traditional beliefs of the Zulus. They venerated the ancestral spirits through the medium of which they were able to approach Nkulunkulu, the Supreme Being. Dr Vilakazi was therefore but one generation removed from a belief in the magical, which, while it explained the inexplicable, required that sacrifice should be made to the ancestors.

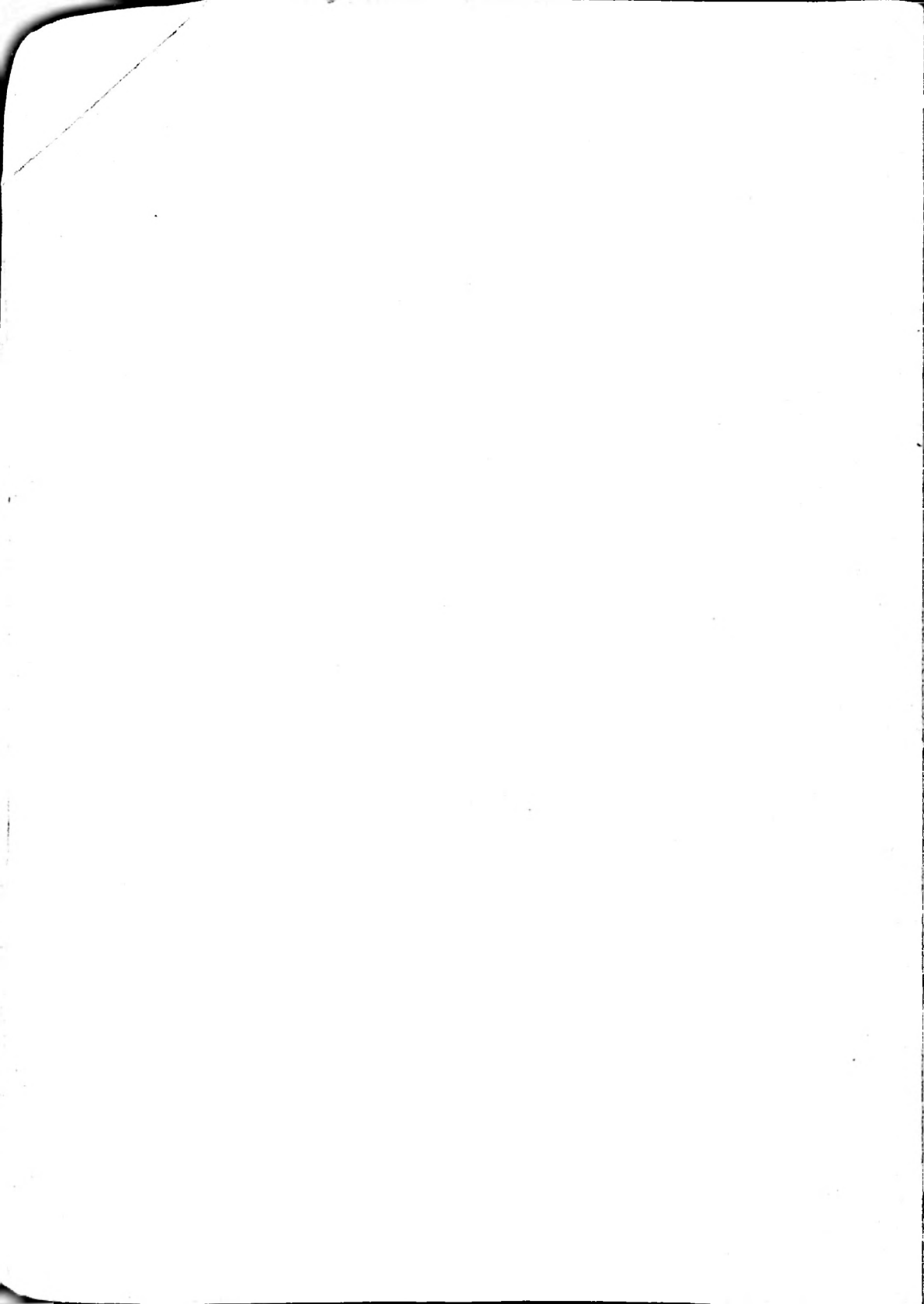
Dr Vilakazi was thus able to appreciate both the old and the new in his heritage, and when his poems are read it will be seen that he has succeeded in making a satisfactory synthesis of both backgrounds.

Lacking any literary inheritance, it is natural for the Zulu to sing. All his history is contained for him in the national songs of his race. If he is happy he bursts into joyous song. If he is anxious or distressed he comforts himself with song. If he is hunting he hums an appropriate air. If he is lonely and far from home his nostalgic thoughts issue in song. He beguiles the tedium of manual labour with a work-song and very soon the work is going with a swing suited to the rhythm of the words. The words may consist of only one or two verses repeated over and over again, the voices rising gradually to a crescendo and then sinking low after a pause for a new beginning. It is from the tones of the voices as they rise and fall that comfort and healing come.

If therefore a person desires to get at the heart of the Zulu character let him study his songs in all the varying circumstances under which they have been composed and they will reveal the Zulu as he is.

Zulu written literature is only in its infancy, and although in the last thirty years the Zulu novel has gradually taken shape, so that today we have such stories as *Mntanami! Mntanami!* "My Child! My Child!" by C.L.S. Nyembezi, and *Uvalo Lwezinhlozi* "The Fear of a Frown" by Jordan Ngubane, it is in poetry that the Zulu expresses himself best.

There are quite a number of Zulu poets, the works of some of whom have been published but the best of them all is undoubtedly Dr B.W. Vilakazi. It is therefore with a particular pleasure and pride that I write this introduction to an English translation of his poetry. I had made a translation for my own purposes as a lecturer in Zulu



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at the University of Natal with no thought of publication especially as my translation had no pretensions to poetry.

Having seen what a metamorphosis takes place when Mrs Friedman deals with one of Vilakazi's poems, I persuaded her to undertake the task of applying her treatment to all of them. The poetic quality of the work is therefore due entirely to Mrs Friedman's wizardry with the English language.

There were, of course, the difficulties of transforming a Zulu background with its entirely different concepts, modes of expression and cultural values to that of an outlook intelligible to English readers. Where it has not been possible to do this with the accuracy that might be expected, the deficiency has been met by Introductory Notes to each poem and at the end of the book, Explanatory Notes dealing with names and obscure passages.

It was when Vilakazi was studying for his B.A. degree that he became aware of the English poets of the Romantic period and was fired with the ambition of doing for Zulu literature what they had done for English. His early works show their influence upon him. Such pieces as *Ukhamba LukaSonkomose* "Sonkomose's Bowl", *Inqomfi* "The Lark", and *We Moya!* "Hail Wind!" belong to this category.

At first he strove to model his poetry on the English style but found that rhyme did not suit the Zulu language, and after some experimental pieces he decided that he would base his style on the traditional blank verse of the Zulu praise poems (*Izibongo*). The first edition of his national songs contained four pieces which were omitted when the second edition was published. They were of an experimental nature and were replaced by other poems. It is the second edition that is being used for this translation.

The first volume of his poems is therefore of unequal quality. Those in which he used the traditional Zulu mode are most successful. *Inkelenkele YakwaXhosa* "The Xhosa Calamity — 1856", *UShaka KaSenzangakhona* "Shaka, Son of Senzangakhona" and *Phezulu Kivethuma LikaShaka* "The Grave of Shaka" are examples. *UNokufa* "Death" is one of the best of Vilakazi's earlier works but it suffers from a lack of logical arrangement and rather meanders. He is preoccupied with the subject of death and writes several elegies, in which some of his most poignant lines occur.

The most beautiful of his poems in this first volume is the one describing the Victoria Falls. Vilakazi felt that one of his missions in life was to teach the Zulu people an appreciation of the beauties of nature. It is something which receives scant attention under tribal conditions and whenever he can appropriately do so, he draws the Zulu's attention to it. It is another result of his study of the Romantic period in English verse.

When we turn to the second volume we find a more mature and confident poet. From the first piece we get the cue to Vilakazi's source of inspiration. In a vision he imagines himself waiting outside the palisades of Dukuza, the large grass palace built by Shaka on the present site of the town of Stanger. It is customary for Zulu royalty to keep visitors waiting for long periods outside, but his singing of the praises of the Zulu kings eventually brings Mnkabayi, Shaka's aunt, to the gates to admit him and she lays upon him the task of singing the sagas of the victorious battles in Zulu history.

From that time on he regarded himself as the poet appointed by the ancestral spirits to speak for his nation. We find further reference to the same idea in that short poem entitled "Tell Me!" in which he expresses his sense of being lost when he finds himself in the great city of Johannesburg and, bewildered as a Zulu bride in the strange home of her husband, he hears the Zulus saying: "Be our voice!"

There are two poems in this volume that stand out: *Mamina* and *Ezinkomponi* "The Gold Mines". In the first, Vilakazi seeks to capture *Mamina* "The Spirit of Poetry". Long and earnestly he pursues her. Often he communes with her. But always she eludes him. One gets the impression, as one reads this poem, of being a listener to a telephone conversation. Only by implication does the poet let us hear what she is saying to him and this adds to the intrigue with which we follow the continually changing situations.

In the second poem we have a stark picture of what life in the compound of a gold mine means to an African labourer. From the comparative peace and dignity of his life in his rural homeland he comes to the roar and machine-like routine of manual labour. No green of the rolling hills to rest the eyes upon, only the whirling dust of the mine dumps. No matter how hygienically fed and housed he may be he feels that he has left his manhood behind him and he has become a 'boy' to his master. Inevitably he thinks of the glorious past of the Zulu nation and compares it with its present poverty and depression.

To sum up: Vilakazi stands supreme amongst Zulu poets. His lofty idealism, his loyalty to the traditions of his forefathers, his anxiety to find the most appropriate form of expression, his appreciation of the beauties of nature, his flights of fancy even into the outer space of the Milky Way, the brilliant manner in which he represents Zulu thought and culture, and his sensitive sharing in the present growing pains of his nation, all combine to make the study of his poetry a matter of the deepest interest.

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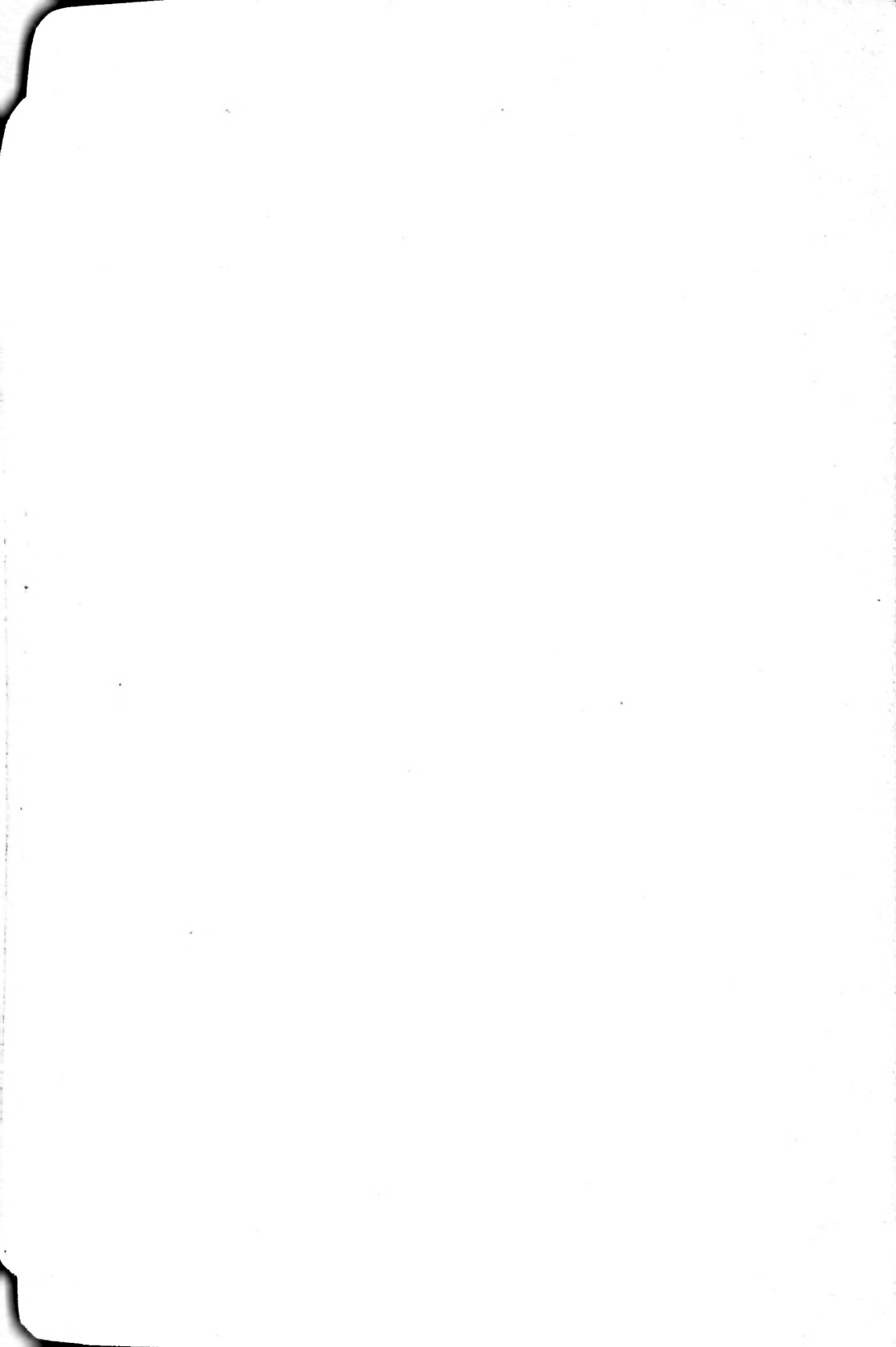
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Benedict Wallet Vilakazi

A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Benedict Wallet Vilakazi was born on 6 January 1906, at Groutville Mission Station near Stanger in the beautiful province of Natal in South Africa. His parents were members of the Zulu tribe, a nation of warriors, and both were devout Christians. They had six children, two boys and four girls, and family ties were strong.

The poet grew up in the neighbourhood of the mission station. It was then quite common for Zulu children to go to school and in 1912, the child who was destined to achieve so much for himself and for his people, entered the primary school at Groutville. He remained there until he reached Standard 4 when he went to Mariannhill, the Roman Catholic Monastery outside Durban, to continue his schooling. Like many young African men and women of his day, Vilakazi took a teacher-training course after reaching Standard 6.

As a student at Mariannhill, Vilakazi acted as secretary to Father Bernard Huss. It was probably this association more than any other factor that influenced Vilakazi ever more strongly to seek distant educational horizons. But in spite of the interest, encouragement and advice of Father Huss, the young Vilakazi gave little proof of his gifts and ambitions either at Mariannhill College or as a young teacher and it was only when he attended the Catholic Seminary at Ixopo in Natal and came under the influence of enthusiastic priests that these became noticeable. For it was there that he devoted much of his spare time to study. This was unusual among African teachers at that time and very few felt the urge to improve their educational qualifications, especially by the arduous means of spare-time work. Vilakazi, however, persisted and succeeded in matriculating, after which he commenced, in 1932, a university course. In 1934, he attained a Bachelor of Arts degree.

Vilakazi had a very sensitive nature. He had lived with African graduates who despised anyone who did not have a university degree. The young Vilakazi was deeply hurt by their scorn and his determination to climb to the top rungs of the educational ladder, was probably motivated to some extent by a desire to rebuke those who had tried to belittle him. He achieved his first university degree by private study but there were those who ridiculed and disparaged what they contemptuously called 'candle-light' degrees. Their attitude inspired him to further effort and it was partly his determination to silence his detractors that drove him to seek the highest academic honours.



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He had chosen Zulu as one of his major subjects and had obtained a distinction in the final examination. It gained him a bursary from the University of South Africa to study for a Master of Arts degree in African Studies. Here Vilakazi met a difficulty. At that time, higher education for Africans was provided by the University College of Fort Hare at the Cape but it did not offer a senior course in African Studies. He did not know where to turn.

Vilakazi was already known to academic authorities and the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg was in process of publishing, in Zulu, his first book of poems. Coincidentally it was looking for an African assistant in its Department of Bantu Studies. Vilakazi seemed a suitable candidate for the post and his eligibility was supported by Mr (later Dr) D. McK. Malcolm, then Chief Inspector of Native Education in Natal, who had always encouraged him and who recommended him for appointment. "I consider Vilakazi a very suitable man for your purpose", he wrote. "He is certainly keen on the study of Zulu and has already done quite a lot of writing one way and another. He has distinct ability." And so in 1935 Vilakazi was appointed as a language assistant to the Department of Bantu Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

He became the first African in South Africa to teach at a university for White students and new vistas opened out before him. His good fortune was increased by finding a sympathetic colleague in Professor C.M. Doke who was Head of the Department of Bantu Studies.

In addition to lecturing, Vilakazi continued his own studies and, in 1936, he was capped for the B.A. Honours degree in Bantu Studies. In 1938 he was awarded the Master of Arts degree by the University of the Witwatersrand. At that time his life was full and rewarding, despite the fact that it was pervaded by tragedy for, as well as suffering many family bereavements, his academic and creative work was sadly affected by the antagonism of certain groups among his own people.

Vilakazi represented a new phase of cultural achievement among the Zulu people. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Zulu literature was non-existent. Its evolution is closely associated with the missionaries who were interested in the translation of the Scriptures, in the preparation of catechisms and the compilation of grammar books and dictionaries. Lacking education, the Zulus themselves could hardly be expected to make any important contribution to their literature and by the end of the nineteenth century, there was not a single piece of creative writing by a Zulu. Even when the twentieth century was well advanced, there was little or no significant contribution by Zulus to their cultural aspirations.

When Vilakazi entered the literary field, there were no books of published plays or poems written by a Zulu. Only one short novel

had appeared in print. But from 1930 onwards, the Zulus evinced considerable interest in writing and two writers in particular — Vilakazi and R.R.R. Dhlomo — dominated the literary scene between 1930 and 1940.

The urge to create had engrossed Vilakazi as much as the urge to study. As well as poetry he wrote prose, including three novels, *Noma Nini!*,¹ "Even when!", *UDingiswayo KaJobe*,² "Dingiswayo, son of Jobe", *Nje Nempela!*,³ "Indeed!", all with an historical background. Some of his verse had been published in the Zulu newspaper *Ilanga LaseNatal* and in the *Native Teachers' Journal*. By the time he joined the University of the Witwatersrand, his poetry was already well known and, as its first book in The Bantu Treasury Series, the University had published in Zulu a collection of his poems, with the title *Inkondlo KaZulu*,⁴ "Zulu Songs". Poetry was Vilakazi's greatest preoccupation and he chose as the subject of his thesis for a higher degree, "The Conception and Development of Poetry in Zulu".⁵ His thought was always permeated by his love of the Zulu people, their way of life and the long and glorious history that lay behind it.

Vilakazi's appointment as a language assistant at the University of the Witwatersrand caused opposition among a section of the Africans in the Transvaal. The effect of this was to make him avoid associating with Africans of his own type and he thus became a controversial figure amongst his own people, for although the educated Africans respected him for his academic achievements and for his contribution to Zulu literature, they regarded him as cold, aloof, haughty — a man who was not easily approachable. They found him abrupt in his manner and sometimes deliberately rude. On the other hand, the uneducated African regarded him as a pleasant and easily approachable man.

He conceived himself to be the spokesman of his people and in his second book of poems *Amal'ezulu*,⁶ "Zulu Horizons", he identifies himself with the struggles, fears, aspirations, sacrifices and unconquerable spirit of his people. He was gravely concerned lest the Zulu heritage be lost to the younger generations. In his poems he refers over and over again to the need for preserving those things which are sacred and precious to the Zulu nation.

Yet, even while Vilakazi was pouring his love of his people and his faith in their future into his poems, there were those who accused

¹ Mariannah Mission Press, Natal, 1935.

² London, Sheldon Press, 1939.

³ Mariannah Mission Press, Natal, 1944.

⁴ Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1935.

⁵ Portion of the thesis was published in *Bantu Studies* 12 (2) 1938, pp.105-34.

⁶ Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1945.

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He became the first African in South Africa to teach at a university for White students and new vistas opened out before him. His good fortune was increased by finding a sympathetic colleague in Professor C.M. Doke who was Head of the Department of Bantu Studies.

In addition to lecturing, Vilakazi continued his own studies and, in 1936, he was capped for the B.A. Honours degree in Bantu Studies. In 1938 he was awarded the Master of Arts degree by the University of the Witwatersrand. At that time his life was full and rewarding, despite the fact that it was pervaded by tragedy for, as well as suffering many family bereavements, his academic and creative work was sadly affected by the antagonism of certain groups among his own people.

Vilakazi represented a new phase of cultural achievement among the Zulu people. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Zulu literature was non-existent. Its evolution is closely associated with the missionaries who were interested in the translation of the Scriptures, in the preparation of catechisms and the compilation of grammar books and dictionaries. Lacking education, the Zulus themselves could hardly be expected to make any important contribution to their literature and by the end of the nineteenth century, there was not a single piece of creative writing by a Zulu. Even when the twentieth century was well advanced, there was little or no significant contribution by Zulus to their cultural aspirations.

When Vilakazi entered the literary field, there were no books of published plays or poems written by a Zulu. Only one short novel

had appeared in print. But from 1930 onwards, the Zulus evinced considerable interest in writing and two writers in particular — Vilakazi and R.R.R. Dhlomo — dominated the literary scene between 1930 and 1940.

The urge to create had engrossed Vilakazi as much as the urge to study. As well as poetry he wrote prose, including three novels, *Noma Nini!*,¹ "Even when!", *UDingiswayo KaJobe*,² "Dingiswayo, son of Jobe", *Nje Nempela!*,³ "Indeed!", all with an historical background. Some of his verse had been published in the Zulu newspaper *Ilanga LaseNatal* and in the *Native Teachers' Journal*. By the time he joined the University of the Witwatersrand, his poetry was already well known and, as its first book in The Bantu Treasury Series, the University had published in Zulu a collection of his poems, with the title *Inkondlo KaZulu*,⁴ "Zulu Songs". Poetry was Vilakazi's greatest preoccupation and he chose as the subject of his thesis for a higher degree, "The Conception and Development of Poetry in Zulu".⁵ His thought was always permeated by his love of the Zulu people, their way of life and the long and glorious history that lay behind it.

Vilakazi's appointment as a language assistant at the University of the Witwatersrand caused opposition among a section of the Africans in the Transvaal. The effect of this was to make him avoid associating with Africans of his own type and he thus became a controversial figure amongst his own people, for although the educated Africans respected him for his academic achievements and for his contribution to Zulu literature, they regarded him as cold, aloof, haughty — a man who was not easily approachable. They found him abrupt in his manner and sometimes deliberately rude. On the other hand, the uneducated African regarded him as a pleasant and easily approachable man.

He conceived himself to be the spokesman of his people and in his second book of poems *Amal'ezulu*,⁶ "Zulu Horizons", he identifies himself with the struggles, fears, aspirations, sacrifices and unconquerable spirit of his people. He was gravely concerned lest the Zulu heritage be lost to the younger generations. In his poems he refers over and over again to the need for preserving those things which are sacred and precious to the Zulu nation.

Yet, even while Vilakazi was pouring his love of his people and his faith in their future into his poems, there were those who accused

¹ Mariannahill Mission Press, Natal, 1935.

² London, Sheldon Press, 1939.

³ Mariannahill Mission Press, Natal, 1944.

⁴ Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1935.

⁵ Portion of the thesis was published in *Bantu Studies* 12 (2) 1938, pp.105-34.

⁶ Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1945.

him of being insufficiently conscious of their sufferings and disabilities. He did not take an active part in politics. It was his firm belief that he could not serve two masters and that he could not participate in politics and still perform his academic work satisfactorily. During the eight years ensuing on his obtaining the Master of Arts degree, he addressed himself conscientiously to his duties as lecturer, his literary work and his studies for a doctorate.

In collaboration with Professor C.M. Doke, he assisted in the compilation of the *Zulu-English Dictionary*.⁷ He broadened his knowledge of Western culture, particularly in the field of classical music where his favourites were Handel, Bach, Schubert, Mozart and Strauss. He reflected in his verse the two opposing currents which such activities aroused among his compatriots — on the one hand, it was felt that the impact of Western culture on Bantu culture produced practices and habits among the Africans which were regarded by some as offensive, while it was felt by others that all things belonging to their own culture should be despised as inferior.

On 16 March 1946, Vilakazi's academic studies were rewarded by the award of a Doctorate of Literature degree by the University of the Witwatersrand for his thesis, 'The Oral and Written Literature in Nguni'. The first African of southern Africa to achieve this academic distinction, he was capped by the then Chancellor of the University, Mr Jan H. Hofmeyr.

By then, his early absorption with the concept of Death had become a preoccupation. One of his earliest poems had been an elegy on his sister Siziwe, and in later works he had paid passionate tribute to his father, his wife and his only brother. It has even been suggested that this preoccupation with Death was itself an indication that he would not live long. It infuses much of his work.

On 26 October 1947, Benedict Wallet Vilakazi died at the age of forty-one. His mother survived five of her six children. She had the sad and bitter experience of seeing them die when they reached the age when much was expected of them. When Vilakazi died, he was undoubtedly the most outstanding figure in Zulu literature. His writings have had considerable influence on Zulu authors, particularly writers of poetry. Although continuing to be a controversial figure among Africans, none could deny his deep love of his people and their way of life, nor his significant contribution to their contemporary culture.

C.L.S. NYEMBEZI, B.A. HONS, M.A. (WITWATERSRAND)
Sometime Professor of Bantu Languages
University College of Fort Hare

⁷ Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1948.

UBhambatha KaMakhwatha*

BHAMBATHA,¹ GRANDSON OF MAKHWATHA²

*Husbands and wives,
Young men and young women!
Thunder has rumbled and died away, my people;
Lightning through time has struck at the acacia,³
Lightning through time has struck the sons of woman;
Now it has struck Makhwatha's gifted grandson
Whose strength was unimpaired, who was not old,
Whose fame was young — but he is not forgotten.*

*Old men and women,
Youths and girls and babies!
Our pioneer has left us,
Our morning star has fallen,
Our finder of paths has disappeared —
He, who inspired us all to yearn for learning.
Alas! with no farewells he has departed —
He whose name was cherished by his people.*

*Listen, my own black brothers and my sisters!
You should express your horror at this death!
The chosen of our race —
So tragically few —
Are dying, dying and leaving us bereft.
They die before a doctor can attend them,
They die while doctors, black and white, are baffled:
What kind of fatal illness thus afflicts them
And leaves their sorrowing people to lament?*

*Where is Bhambatha now, Makhwatha's grandson?
And where the poet of praises — Magolwane?⁴
Alas, they have vanished from this world of pain!
Shall they inspire, like Muses, younger poets?
Thus did you speak, O poet of Dingane:⁵
"Man shall live and Man shall die,
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Their names shall echo through the empty sites."*

Weep, weep, and weep again, you black-skinned Zulus
Whose upward path is strewn with shattered hopes!
Weep for the heroes of our country, Africa,
Not only for today's, but all its yesterdays'.
Weep and lament, you people who are black!
Yes, you whose purification ceremonies
Have cleansed our years on earth throughout the ages.
Well may you weep, O women of my race! —
You whose children feed the insatiable earth!
Bhambatha, Makhwatha's grandson, followed many
Destroyed by Death too long before their time.

O Death, how mighty is your power! —
And mightier yet, alas, your cruelty!
Your ways, O Death are stealthy as a thief's!
You put to shame, O Death, your rival sleep! —
For are you not that sleep which is eternal?
O, are you still unsated by our anguish?
Have we not had enough, O Death, enough?
Has not our mourning satisfied you yet?

Your loss, O great Mshefane,⁶
Struck the Zulu people like a blow,
For well, amongst the white men, did you serve them! —
You who blazed new trails and led the way
For men of learning, doctors, lawyers, teachers.
O, you who opened wide the padlocked gates
Of universities and schools of learning
For those whose aspirations craved degrees
Which led to honours, rare among our people:—
Those lectureships once given to white men only.

Alas, that earth should never be improved
By feeding on men, illustrious as you,
By choosing first the eminent and valued,
Leaving behind the foolish and the worthless.

*Yet sleep, O son of Africa!
Sleep, O grandson of Makhivatha!
Sleep and rest in peace!
Yes, sleep, although the time was far too short
That you could wear the scarlet gown
Which only men of great distinction flaunt!
Sleep on, although the time was short indeed
When you the cap of velvet could display —
That cap which brings to mind the black-tailed finch
Who loves the burnt black grasses of the veld!
Sleep on, although the time, alas, was brief
When you could wear the hoods you earned through learning —
The hoods that prove their wearers won degrees!
Sleep on, O you who won what we must long for!*

*O may your sleep be peaceful, man of wisdom,
Who gained a doctorate in literature!
Despite your name,⁷ sleep on, O Vilakazi —
Our writer fit to use the mighty pen!
Rest now in peace, great hero of the Zulus!
Warrior stand at ease! Lay down your arms!
Your name will live through time on lips unborn,
For countless generations shall extol it.*

*A Lament on the Death of Benedict Wallet Vilakazi by J. M. Sikakana from his book, *Ikhwezi LikaZulu*, "Zulu Venus" (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1966), pp. 79-82. English rendering by F. L. Friedman.

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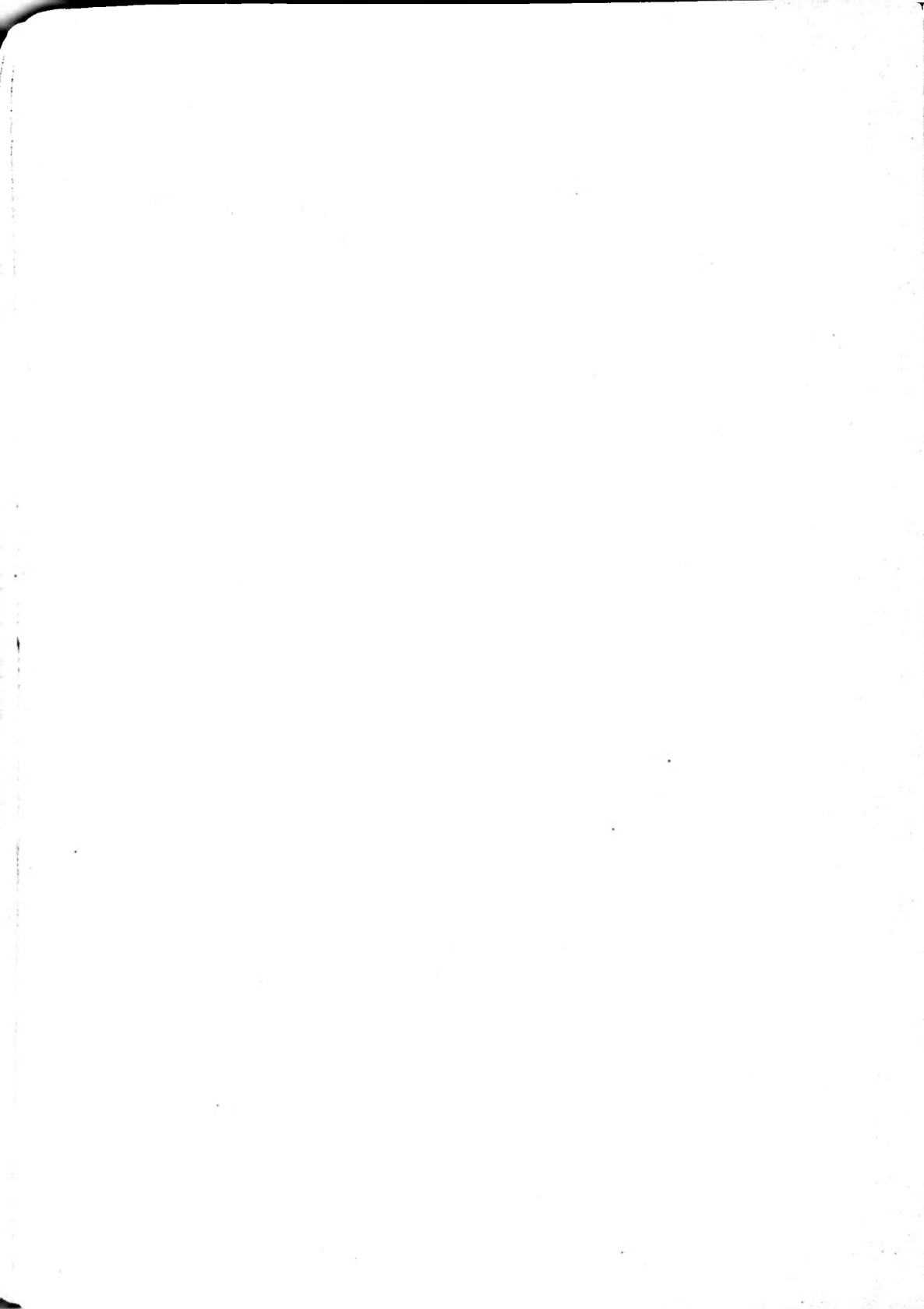
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BOOK ONE

Zulu Songs
Inkondlo kaZulu



Easter

This meditation on the meaning and significance of Easter expresses the poet's musings on the fact that the infant Jesus Himself was in Africa when His parents, escaping from the wrath of Herod, fled into Egypt. Vilakazi's recollections of Christ's sufferings at the hands of His persecutors, are echoed in his thoughts by the sufferings of his own people at the hands of the white man.

NgePhasika

EASTER

This moon I see pale-glowing,
A broken bow appearing low
Above the shoulder of the western sky,
Recalls prodigious happenings:
For this, O Lord,
We give You thanks!

Again we muse upon Your wanderings
Through Egypt in our land of Africa
Where, in this continent of black-skinned tribes,
No slaves or hirelings tended You:
By this, O Lord,
We are amazed!

Yours was the power to seize from us
Our wealth of silver, gold and precious stones
That sparkle now on robes and crowns,
Proudly displayed by heads of Church and State;
But You were blind to earthly riches:
For this, O Lord,
We give You thanks!

Your bed was but a mat upon the floor,
Your chair a wooden stool among the humble;
The sick and sinful were Your special care;
And yet, in spite of this, my white-skinned brother

Repulses me, exploits me and forsakes me:
Because of this, O Lord,
Where shall I hide?

The moon is high, the Milky Way shines clear:
The moon is You, the Milky Way's pure stars
Your tears, O Lord, and mine!
Ah You, who wandered homeless on the earth,
Shine and dispel its darkness,
That even we, O Lord,
May yet rejoice!

Once more I hear them coming to betray You:
My blood congeals, my body shudders,
For I know earthly treachery as well –
Because I was created black!
I did not choose this colour – Yours the choice –
And, being Yours, O Lord,
I give You thanks!

Once more I see You crucified;
And watching the nail, immune to shame,
Piercing the living flesh, transfixing it
Against the wood, insensible to pain –
I feel the blood is draining from my heart:
Because of this, O Lord,
Forsake me not!

Because I am black, recall to me
The manner and the measure of Your life –
O You who in truth have made us heed
The vital need of saying "No!"
In deed and thought!
For this, O Lord,
I give You thanks!

Inkelenkele YakwaXhoza

THE XHOSA CALAMITY - 1856

This poem tells of the calamity which befell the Xhosa people, when they heeded the advice of Nongqawuze (Nonquassi) who spread the story that she had communed with the ancestral spirits and received instructions which had to be obeyed. Therefore, she called upon her people to destroy all their grain and livestock, in expectation of miraculous crops and herds to come.

The Xhosa people carried out her instructions but the rebirth of the nation did not come nor was the white man swept into the sea and the people perished as a result.

The alarm was sounded far and wide
Throughout the lands of Kreli¹ and Sandile:²
They harkened to Mhlakaza's daughter³
Who prophesied, for she had seen
Ancestral spirits never glimpsed by them -
Forever invisible to their seeking eyes.

Then came the chosen day
When even a woman, senile
And wrinkled as her sisters, even she
Would feel as youthful as a girl,
Remembering the past, when strong young men
Had called to her: "O come, and let us love!"

A bent old man appeared, his loin-cloth crooked,
Leaning with all his weight upon a stick;
The muscles of his legs were taut and strained;
With hippo fat his head he had anointed
To give his grey and thinning hair a shine:
He stood there silent, twirling his grey moustache.

A voice was heard, murmuring words of love -
It said: "Now how shall you reply to me,
Miss So-and-So, when I confess to you
I love you truly, daughter of Sandile!
Shall you take no notice of my words?"
How pleasant then, lightheartedly to tease
And please by sharpening each other's wits!

The elders of the clan were finely dressed,
Yes, even the bent and stiff like old Mthontela:⁴
They decked themselves with feather-tufts and head-rings,
Long, gaudy feathers too, and genet tails.
They chattered idly; some were heard to mutter:
"We too were young and frisked like two-year-olds!"

Alas! How soon the huts and cattle-folds
Were desolate because of prophecies
Attributed to Xhosa spirits
Whose visions had seemed like Joseph's dream in Egypt –
But theirs were dreams that led to grief and ruin
For children of such fathers as Mlanjeni.⁵

Above were hovering hideous, greedy vultures –
Those scavengers of the air that, having gorged,
Were soon too surfeited to sleep;
Then jackals, dogs, wild cats, when sated too,
Secreted rags of flesh they could not eat.
Alas! Nongqawuze, how foully you won your fame!

The day had dawned like countless yesterdays
And winds blew gently on the cursed mountain,
Unruffled by the spirit of Mhlakaza,
By Nongqawuze and her cruel deceit –
But suddenly the roaring of the sea
Made them alert: O, could that thunder mean
Relief? All was uncertainty;
But even then no voice was heard
Wailing in apprehension and despair.

Tsili,⁶ the bold and fearless one,
Inspired them with his courage,
Singing the song in praise
Of warriors and heroes:
Of Ndlambe⁷ and Makana⁸ and of Linda⁹
Whose silent voices timelessly resound
In burial places of our ancestors
Who, lost to us eternally,
Sleep forever on their mats
Of cloud and sea and corn.

Then suddenly a woman's voice was heard
In welcome it seemed, of warriors and heroes:
But these, alas, lived only in her heart,
Causing it to beat convulsively
And rack her breast, because she seemed to see
Her valiant ancestors return once more:
Those dead intrepid heroes who had fallen
During the first fierce battle they had fought
To save their native land.

The sun was climbing to its zenith
And seemed to smile in callous mockery,
Its pitiless rays aware
Of all that soon must happen:
Alas, that it gave no warning!
Then, as its brightness drained towards the west,
A voice was heard enquiring:
"Ah! Shall a miracle come to pass?" –
And some complained of hunger, thirst and fear,
And those who had boasted, suddenly were silent,
Then one who was bolder, spoke out loud and clear:
"Show me Nongqawuze's hiding-place
And I shall prove the power of my spear!"
But all the elders cried in protest, "No!
Control yourself, O son of So-and-So!
You scare away the spirits who will come
Now that the sun is setting."
Whambang! – it sank, but still no spirits came.
Then twilight soon was hustled away by night,
Lit by a moon as mocking as the sun.

What could it mean, that rising dust
Where all the anxious, peering people prayed
For strength to be renewed, and courage reborn?
Was it a sign? Were warriors approaching,
Or flocks and herds, or wedding parties? –
They waited throughout that endless day.
Tensely I listened and heard a cry –
It came from a helpless, hungry child:
Listening still, I heard a sob –
It came from a girl, her life unlived,
And still I listened: I heard a wailing –
It came from a lone bereft old woman!
O tragic lament re-echoing to the stars!

Ah, pity the helpless victims of the worms
Ready to suck, inevitably, the blood
Of all the doomed, awaiting their terrible fate,
Whose cries re-echoed through the land that day! –
Then, as the night's vast sombre shroud
Enfolded all in darkness,
The assagais of hunger struck
Those weakened by the weight of years
And piled them up in heaps of death.
None but the cowards had saved themselves:
They, in their terror, had crept away
When night, at last, had swallowed the sun.
Thus, today, upon the heights
Of Amabele¹⁰ and Nqamakwe¹¹
Are scattered the bones of all those long-lost dupes
Who never were buried beneath the soil
Of this, their fathers' ancestral land:
Frozen by snow, parched by the sun,
Time in its passing, leaves them to rot.

We, their descendants, living today,
When passing Malinda's¹² burial-place,
Marvel at our forebears' folly,
Knowing such fraud could never delude us:
And yet we fear to pass that place,
In case the bones of Tsili, coming to life,
Should rattle and fling themselves before
Our startled faces, their hands outstretched,
Their hollow eyes like sombre caverns.
O how we fear to hear what words
Might issue from those fleshless mouths!

For, even today, safe in our huts,
Peering through the slatted windows,
We glimpse a shape through darkness fleeing –
Nongqawuze's forever unpacified spirit,
Fleeing away from earth as swiftly
As though a flame had soared and vanished.
In terror we go to our diviners
And watch them throw the bones and shells,
Then fold their trembling hands in sorrow,
Muttering that Nongqawuze still
Must suffer for her cruel deception.

Long, long ago I heard this tale
And mused upon the bleaching bones
Of heroes from whose seed came forth
Such leaders as Bokwe¹³ and Jabavu.¹⁴
From all the ruin of the spears
They rose, set forth, acquired learning;
Throughout the world they went their way,
A very hurricane whose force
Cleanses everything it touches,
And skimming the waves of old and new,
Removes the debris and the scum.

Ah! Speak and tell me; where is Tshiwo¹⁵
And other chiefs, like Hanahana,
Xiniha, Menziwa¹⁶ and Hahabe,¹⁷
Manxa, Nukwa¹⁸ and Nqabisile?
Where do they sleep, the maids of Xhosa,
Suthu,¹⁹ Joli, Nomalizo?
Speak and tell me where are Hintsa,²⁰
The Xhosa chiefs, the Xhosa women –
Adorned with vulture and ostrich feathers –
Who danced at Qonce and at Monti?²¹
All are as leaves that, withered forever,
Are blown by storm-winds hither and thither;
All are as dreams, and every name
Stabs like a spear with piercing magic.

Nongqawuze, treacherous prophetess! –
Where are the maids of yesterday
And those of yesterdays long past?
Where are the herds of calves and lambs,
The new, the old, the good, the weak?
Yes, where, because of you, are these? –
Wasted by winds, scattered by storms,
Dissolved like cloud, dispelled like mist!
Nongqawuze, false prophetess, yours is the guilt!

Sonkomose's Beer-pot

In these verses, inspired by the beer-pot from which his great-grandfather had drunk, Vilakazi voices his thoughts on the past history of his family and his tribe, some of whom followed Mzilikazi and settled in the land that is now Rhodesia.

Ukhamba LukaSonkomose

SONKOMOSE'S BEER-POT

My ancestor! I never knew you
And yet I can commune with you!
And even though I cannot see you,
This I perceive: the strong broad shoulders
Of those who claim descent from you –
Those who have given me this insight.

Here, before me, is a beer-pot
From which, in the past, I know you drank,
O son of the Mzwangedwa tribe¹
Who, on your long and lonely journey,
Never remembered to reveal
The secret it contains!

This beer-pot, smoothed with pumice-stone,
Belonging to my ancestor,
When no more it served its purpose
Became an ornament,
And treasured by mothers of the tribe,
Was ringed with bright blue beads.

I think of you as being like the hills
That bear your name, O Sonkomose!² –
Those hills Mkhwethu³ now possesses
Where all your herds of cattle grazed
When, sworn by the name of Nkombose,⁴
You were proclaimed "Surrounder of the Hills".⁵

Today I fear the scheming rascals
Who, though their lips have touched this pot,
Failed to praise Mkhwethu thus:
“The roaring beast who made his presence known
When, on Mzilikazi’s⁶ lands, he grazed
On grasses stained with blood.”

Behold our richly coloured beer
Which you, O Qwabe,⁷ drank with so much relish
It must have been as nectar of the bees
Which even the faithful of the Lord
Praise with delight in secrecy:
O amber-gold Princess,
United to this beer-pot
And all it signifies!



Hail Wind!

Vilakazi's adoration of the beauties of nature is manifested throughout his work. This poem is a particularly happy and light-hearted expression of his sensitive response to natural beauty, a characteristic rare among the tribal peoples of southern Africa, and one which the poet was anxious to develop in the hearts and minds of his people.

We Moya!

HAIL WIND!

I tell myself to listen
To whispers of the wind
As, ruffling quilts of grass,
It wanders as it wills.

I wish that I could see
This wildly puffing creature
Rushing through the forest,
Rustling glittering leaves.

I wish good luck would help me
To grab you, wind, and hold you
And make you so confused
That I could trip you up:

Then I would go indoors
And listen while you grumble
To leaves and stems and grasses.

Come wind, from where you spring,
And lead me to your source
That I may build a hut there
And watch you all the time.

Come, for the sun has risen
And pleasant is the hill-crest
Where you are no less strong
Than huts of the Ngangas.¹

Come, let us both be merry
And revel in the impulse
That, vital and insistent,
Will triumph over sloth.

I hear your murmuring
Which, soothing me to sleep,
Lends me your own enjoyment.

Sometimes my heart is lonely
And, seeking companionship,
Discovers that all my friends
Have vanished like the rushes.

Then, going out of doors,
I feel your presence near me
As sounds that are eternal
Fill my eager ears.

How strange this lullaby
Drifting down the ridges
Whose origin is timeless!

O wind, you bring the rain
And waft a scent of melons
Growing among the pumpkins,
The mealie-shoots and berries.

Hail wind! O let your breath
Bring life to my lifeless heart
Until I share your dying!

Inqomfi

THE LARK

I, listening to your melodious strains,
Long vainly that mine, yet to be sung, should be
As sweet, like nectar's dew upon the fields.
Ah, bird who haunts the burnt black grass, unseen
Sing on, while silent as a thief I hear
Those sorrowful notes, linking your spirit to mine!

O, bird of the waving grass, sing as you rise
To float on air as though upon the waters:
Weave an invisible rope, then, tethered to earth,
Bear messages to kings! Pure in the ether
Your voice shall charm all listening ears;
Winged messenger whose home is in the grass!

Wisely you hide your mottled eggs
Beneath soft grassy tufts
Where no iguana pries or mamba lurks,
Then sing above them songs defying danger,
That predatory hawks may not come near
During your flights in search of tasty locusts.

What meaning has that never-fading colour,
That splash of vivid crimson on your throat?
Who pierced your breast with lethal arrows
Like those the Bushmen aim from screening rocks?
Is it in truth a symbol of the flames
That scorch all those defiant of your omens?

Whenever you fly before a traveller,
The elders say that all his plans will prosper;
But let him beware, should you with flapping wings,
Above him hover in warning like the buzzard's
When storm-clouds gather: an evil omen this,
For you, miraculous bird, can prophesy.

And yet I do not envy you! On guard,
We sleep like hares, one eye unclosed; we toil
And, for the future scheme and save because,

Inevitably as sleep, Death steals upon us
And, not to be fled, may find us unprepared;
For, to be human, means that we are conscious.

* * *

Ah! Fly away and vanish from my sight,
Lest I, bewitched by you, should strive
To join you in the ether!
Yet know, however far apart we are,
There lingers in my heart
An echo of your spirit.

Sweet timeless spirit tantalizing
Outcasts lost, and seeking for a refuge,
Who, when they rest, reflect,
And drowsing, idly dream
Of human rights denied to them
Which you, alas, are helpless to bestow.

Look at the setting sun!
You also, like a harbinger, must vanish
Before the intrepid hunters
Who, unaware of danger,
Never nod or fall asleep
But hunt eternally.

Enough! Your harp-like strains must cease!
The hunting-horn is sounding
A warning to creatures such as you.
Ah, never forget the hunters
Who, callous and unbeguiled,
Sound notes that drown your own!

And yet, so long as rivers sing
And winding paths lead homeward,
Teach me, I pray, a timeless song
In praise of going home,
That I may learn what you already know,
And sing until I die.

I listen, and the sounding world itself –
The roaring seas, the winds, the waves –
Seem to be listening too, attentively,
Enthralled to hear your strange lament;

For, even should the moon in beauty scatter
Her rainbow-coloured beams upon the earth,
You still would be supreme, melodious bird!

Sweet source of wonder! Are you in truth a bird?
Which other singer can compare with you?
I think of Schubert and of Chopin,
Of Cele¹ and Caluza² too,
And you alone they cannot rival:
Their art is studied, yours spontaneous.

Your plaintive notes remind me of a maid
Who sighs in sleep because she has no lover
And soothes her loneliness with secret dreams
To mask with seeming happiness her sorrow –
Yet how can you, unequalled songster, share
Such fantasies engendered by such torment?

Your song outvies a loved and loving girl's
Whose beauty charms both rich and poor alike.
Whence comes this strange melodious flow?
Are ocean's surging waves its inspiration
Or hills and mountains, plains and fallow fields?

Dear symbol of an all-pervading love,
Denied not even to the season's rock-plants –
A love not ever lessened by your sorrow;
Both sleep and change of mood leave you untouched
By dread of morrows or the flight of time –
Daylight and darkness are to you the same.

Impophoma YeVictoria

THE VICTORIA FALLS

Flow on forever, great waterfall!
Your terrible grandeur surpassing all,
You crash, wild, unrestrainable,
To clouded depths unfathomable.
God has fashioned a crown for you
Of ribbons coloured by the rainbow
While timelessly the waters beat
In leaping spray about your feet.
He granted you the thunder's tone
Thus to commune with Him alone,
As high on Sibungu's rock¹ your roar
Drowns human voices evermore.

How could there ever exist a being
Who, like a cricket chirruping
On earth where millepedes crawl, would dare
To vie with you, Great Thunderer?
What nagging ambition and thirst for renown
Could lend him a voice to echo your own?
The sea herself as she advances
Withdraws her waves like rows of dancers
And, rather than be compared with you,
Lies prostrate as a drunkard, who –
Exhausted at times by toil and heat –
Inertly sprawls in numbed defeat.

Yes, even the sea in weariness
Curbs her waves as on they press
And, like a shepherd whose flocks may stray
Freely throughout the night and day,
Gathers them in: but you never try
To curb your cascades and mirror the sky
In tranquil waters: why thus do you flow,
Eternally filling the chasms below
With thundering smoke, O Victoria Falls? –
Seeming to chase each hurrying hour,
Your haste is unequalled and dauntless your power.

How often has the morning star,
Since first it lit the skies, afar
Heard your hyena's growl resound
While all the galaxies clustering round,
Await, like sentinels overhead,
That day God's angels heralded
When earth shall crumble and be restored –
A bright new world in the sight of the Lord
Whose eyes are piercing as a spear:
Then all who listen, intent to hear
Your thundering voice, shall cry: "Flow on,
O you ever going who never are gone!"

The branches of overhanging trees
Bow to your flood in the passing breeze,
Enriching the sap within their veins
From fountains of foam and sparkling rains
Tossed by the northern winds that blow
Through turbulent channels and gorges below.
And see how the birds in circles veer
And hover before they venture near
Your leaping waters and drifting mist
Till, feeling their feathers cleansed and kissed,
They too, in the rush of your torrent rejoice
And fear no longer your thunderous voice.

How joyous to touch where the river winds
A fringe of the glittering girdle that binds
Victoria's waist with streamers of rain
Pursuing each other forever in vain
As, striking the rocks and floating away,
They scatter in clouds of perpetual spray
Where arch after arch in loveliness glows,
Where sunbeams and froth form shimmering rainbows –
A Milky Way whose silvery light
Scatters with stars the day and the night.

I, whose voice would echo your own
Untiring roar, must seem like a clown
Who earns but a smile, a laugh, a jibe,
For trying ambitiously thus to describe –
With only my pen assisting me –
Your awesome beauty and majesty,
To waken in those who never as yet

Have seen you, a longing they cannot forget.
You offer a haven where all in darkness –
The lost and forlorn, the homeless and hopeless –
Find wonder doubled to make them rejoice:
The sight of your beauty, the sound of your voice.

Their eyes, soon filled with calm delight,
At rest they set their pipes alight,
Inhale the smoke, tap tins of snuff
And feel no hour is long enough,
Till all, as they watch you and hear your deep
Rich honeyed tones, are lulled to sleep,
As though a nurse with loving care
Should stroke their brows and smooth their hair
Then ruffle it only to smooth it again:
Thus do the homeless at last attain
A refuge beneath your precipice
Where wings of foam conceal the abyss:
So thunder forever to summon the nations
Of Africa's yet-to-be-born generations!

Come, Monster of Steel!

To Vilakazi, the white man's train is a symbol of the migration of his people from their homes to the towns where they must labour for the white man. He is haunted particularly by thoughts of the wealth to be extracted by his fellows from the gold mines for the benefit of "foreign breeds", who are in a position to exploit the back-breaking toil of South Africa's native tribes.

Woza Nonjinjikazi!

COME, MONSTER OF STEEL!

Come, you monster made of steel,
You prancing dancer of the roads
Who races on your double tracks
Clamped with iron braces!

You curve and climb, descend and wind
Across the uplands and the plains.
Yet you who snatched our fathers' fathers
Away from home and family,
Are deaf to prayers for news of them;
Ignoring questions, all you do
Is tear on faster and faster still.

You brought the huge machines that burrow
Deep beneath our mother earth:
Thus today we see the mine-dumps
White as sands of dunes and shores
Beside the estuaries and seas.
Now see me sitting here as well,
In the station's waiting-room,
Like so many others you swallowed alive!
My eyes are drawn towards the east
Where columns formed of blinding dust
And chalk-white drifting smoke
Are rising towards the sky.

This place is pleasant; how good to watch
The setting sun – a ball of crimson flame
That vanishes till it lights another day!
Now among the drifting clouds
It blazes like a ring of steel
Amidst great fiery coals:
Now as it sinks, it forms a halo
Brighter far than African gold
Hidden beneath our fathers' feet.

O, go away, you timeless sun
That never once revealed to us,
Whose skins are black,
That hidden store of gold
Which now we see bestowing wealth
On peoples everywhere on earth,
While we, the sons of Africa,
Can only stare, our thick lips gaping!
Come kindly dusk and usher in the night! –
Already I hear the shrilling pipes
Sounding like the water-kelpies¹
Vanishing in the flow of the Thukela.²

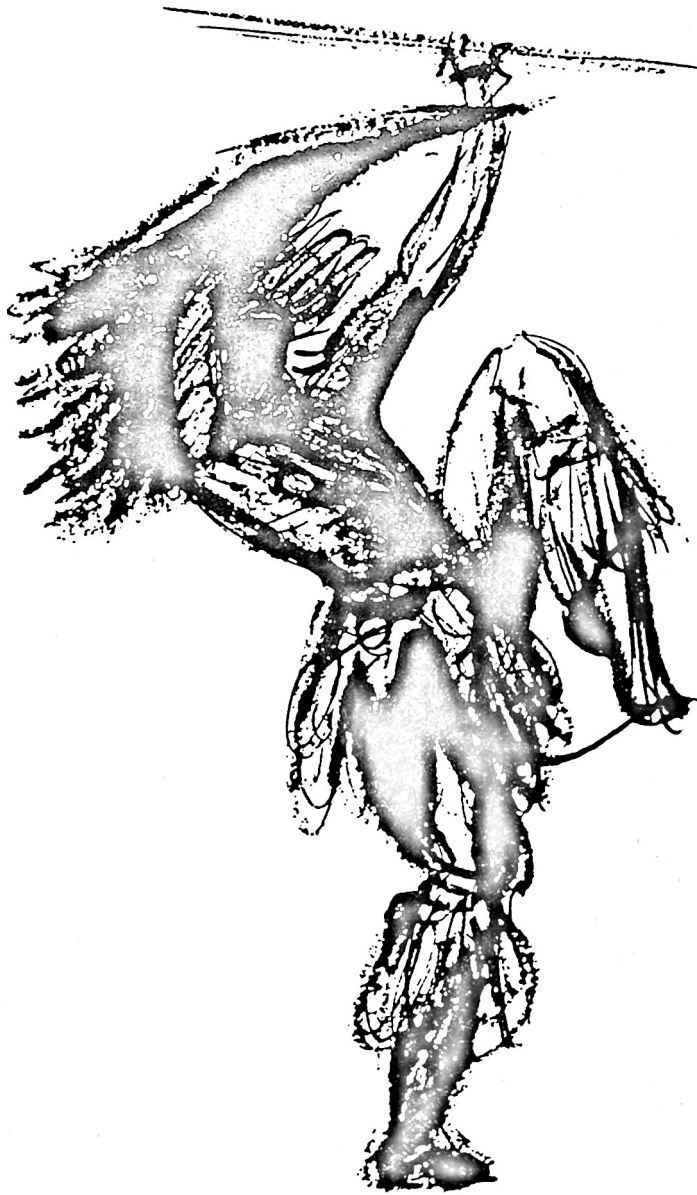
I hear the Vendas and the Tshopis³
Loudly singing songs of love,
Bringing to mind the carefree lovers
Who low like grazing milch-cows –
Those whose colour is black and white,
Who stray across the African plains.
I listen as the earth resounds
To stamping feet that simulate a dance,
Reminding me of Mameyiguda⁴
On Durban's open spaces.
I hear so many strange new chants
Unlike the Mfolozis'⁵ clans!

O, go away, you steely monster!
Why must you arrive so soon
When I, at the moment, am lost in thought
And wish that I could hide myself
At home among the mealie-stalks,
Covered with cobs, surrounded by pumpkins;
For there I should never be disturbed
By bustling crowds of chattering people
Passing noisily on their way:
I see them at dawn, I see them at dusk –
At sunrise and sunset they pass me by.

Khalani MaZulu!

WEEP, YOU ZULUS!

Battalions of Zulus, awaken!
Come, gather your weapons and listen to me!
Awaken, you Suthu¹ detachments!
And yours, Mandlakazi,² awake!
What manner of sleep has benumbed you?
Can you not hear that the Zulus
Are seething as though they were maggots,
Complaining of famine throughout the land?
Disease has thinned their ranks,
The sun has brought them fever.
O, have you all forgotten



The slaughter of one by another –
The ruin and carnage of Ndongakusuka³
Where death, in triumph, left the future barren?
See now how sons of the white man
Are sucking dry the milch-cows
Which surely are the birthright
Of Senzangakhona's⁴ descendants
Until the time of Cctshwayo.⁵

Have you forgotten the price we paid –
The haunting spectre of Ndongakusuka?
Even today we sweat as in horror
We think of the agonized weeping
Of mothers bewailing the heroes
Whose bones lie unburied forever.
And now, who amongst you can tell us
Where died Mbuyazi.⁶ Who now can distinguish
His bones from the bones of another?
We wake in the dead of night,
Hearing them yell as they stabbed one another
With blood-dripping spears;
Hearing those knobkerries clanging on shields
As one shouted loud to another:
“Take that! Ah, you've missed me, whoever you are!”
O how can we ever forget such a warning?
Let all who may see that field of destruction
Remember the story it tells.

Not long was the time that elapsed
After that terrible carnage,
When rashly, Cctshwayo gave battle,
Misled by Sihayo,⁷ his headman.
Sandlwana⁸ he chose for the combat:
His blood burning fiercely in anger,
He struck with his spear at the white man;
It missed him and fell to the earth,
And piercing the ground it remained there,
Held fast by that merciless scabbard.
And yet many seers had pondered and spoken:
“O you who would check the advance of the Zulus
And hope to become their most powerful king,
Their arms shall destroy you –
Yes, you shall be slain!” –

Sandlwana became the arena
Where Zulus had dreamt they would conquer
The "feeble white trash":
Alas for the Zulus! – All, all were destroyed!

The great Bird⁹ had perished where rotted
The bones of the children of Qwabe:¹⁰
But then rose his son, Dinuzulu,¹¹
Who lived at the place, Sikhwebezi,¹²
The home of the first Suthu clan.
But later he chose Mahhashini¹³
To be his new home and headquarters,
Built high on a hill at Nongoma.¹⁴
And even today we are told,
Though many have not ever been there,
That here Madlokovu had lived –¹⁵
He who when called to Pretoria
Agreed to the white man's peace terms
As, tasting the wines of wisdom –
Culled from the vines of Sobantu –¹⁶
He drank deep draughts of knowledge.
Then, signing the proffered treaty –
His nib in ink and quill-tip at his shoulder –
He, having proved to ancestral spirits,
His wisdom and longing for peace,
Then tended the wounds of the Zulus.

Years passed – thirty-seven* in number –
While Solomon,¹⁷ son of the great Dinuzulu,
Dreamed of uniting the nation
And showing his people the paths
Where spears should at last be forgotten,
Replaced by the armour of knowledge.
He dreamed of a school,¹⁸ and he built one
Where those highly-born should become
The pillars of African progress.
Then, after defeating his critics –
The journalists writing in Durban –¹⁹
He, silently laughing, returned
To Zululand, home, Mahhashini,
The mountain that sheltered the Lion²⁰
From threat of the thundering heavens.
O when has the world ever known

A ruler so great in achievement
Who lived till the sum of his years
Should prove they alone could defeat him?

In truth, O mighty ruler,²¹
O great and mysterious enigma! –
You built in Dukuza²² a monument
To honour the mightiest warrior
Who ever had reigned there, great Shaka –
He who divided Mdima from Mgovu!²³
And yet, even now, we are waiting
To read the hidden inscription
Upon that memorial stone:
For when, at the birth of this year²⁴
That splendid memorial was placed,
The sea, doing homage, had risen and bowed
Before the great statue that you had commanded.
The earth in its depths shook and rumbled
And all those who heard it were silent;
And many in fear tried to flee,
Forgetting to pray to ancestral spirits.
Ah, Peacemaker,²⁵ woe, my terror increases! –
What yet may this year have in store for the Zulus?

For now, yet again, in visions our sages
Are seeing the fierce Suthu regiments
Aiming their spears at the armed Mandlakazi.
The hill called Sandlwana, seems bowing
And gaping as though to let forth
A king – one of those who are sleeping
Beneath the brown grass of Nkandla.²⁶
Some think they are seeing Monase –²⁷
Who, looking towards Mahhashini,
Is weeping as wept the Qulusis²⁸ – when she
Had learnt that the Zulus' Inkatha –²⁹
Whose promise was peace and advancement –
Would not even last through the year!
The great Maphumuzana had died
Yet, nobody knew it: some said that the wires,
Bearing the tragic tidings,
Had failed in conveying the message;
Some muttered the day was a Sunday.
Alas, that the hour had come,
Bringing the cloud that, appearing but once,

Foreshadows the death of a king –³⁰
Of rulers no less than the ruled!

Even now as I speak, the heavens
Are rumbling with warnings of storm
While winds rip the branches of trees
At Nkandla as well as Nongoma.
I tremble, and heavy my dread
When suddenly rain showers down
Then ceases as swiftly, its sighing
Replaced by the echoes of sobbing
As all Mahhashini laments:
“Alas, you insatiable earth!
You cannot grow fat on our kings
Whom you, through the years, have devoured,
And snatching the pick of the Zulus
Have left us both kingless and hopeless! –
For now, O, to whom may we turn?”
O, tell us the answer, you son of Ndabuko,³¹
For you were a father to him! –
John Dube,³² O, come with Bhulose³³
To answer this question we ask:
“Who now is the heir to the throne?”

Weep, weep all you orphans,
In grief without comfort!
Weep, children of Zululand, loudly and long
In hopeless and ceaseless lamenting,
Your voices made shrill by your tears!
Cry out till the heavens shall hear you!
Cry out through the days and the nights! –
Yes, weep that your tears may yet mingle
With those that your ancestors shed,
Sprinkling like dew-drops the grasses at dawn!
Forever lament, O you lost ones –
Wherever, alas, you may be –
Whose numbers can never be counted!
Weep, weep for the death of a king!
Weep for the doom of a nation!

*In the original, Vilakazi gives “thirty-seven” as the number of years that Solomon was the *Ingonyama* of the Zulus. In fact, Solomon succeeded his father, Dinuzulu, in 1913 and he died in 1933, thus completing a total of twenty years on the Zulu throne.

Morning Meditation

This not very coherent meditation is yet another poetic expression of the tragic truth of mortality, the unequal struggle of life and the equalizing power of death.

Umcabango Wasekuseni

MORNING MEDITATION

O wretched generation,
Downtrodden and defeated
By fate in a fickle world!
Yet see, though you walk in shadow,
Bright flowers are mingled with darkness –
A gentle reminder that earth
Follows a course ordained!
All things shall pass:
No night endures forever,
No day will fail to dawn.
See how the coconut tree,
Despite its final grandeur,
Was, by the mighty Creator
Encompassed by a seed,
Spherical and minute.
Weeds as well He creates
And edible plants of the veld,
To spread in rank profusion.

Never be unmindful
Of destiny's designs:
Shadow may refresh you
And give you strength to fight,
The moment God shall choose
And will in time reveal:
"Your power, renewed, shall triumph
Over the past's defeats
And over the raging seas."
The destiny of Man,
From birth till death,
Is ruled by God;

Yes, He ordains
The fate of all His creatures.
From birth a man is doomed
To reach his goal in travail
Along a course predestined
Which never can be changed.
Each mortal in his turn
Will play his part, then yield
His place to yet another –
One who may journey further
On pathways yet unknown
Through strange and awesome lands.

How often I have seen
The ruin of mighty rulers,
Of happy and prosperous men,
Of those who rejoiced in riches,
Of sons who inherited all: –
How frequent and final their fall!
How often I have gazed
At gravestones in the churchyard
And mused on how the earth will cover all:
The men and women,
Youths and maids –
The earth makes no distinction:
Over them all blows the wind,
Over them all there is silence
Except for the birds of the day-time,
Except for the owls of the night.
O, how many missionaries have preached
On Jesus, His life and teachings,
And told us that darkness surrounding the living,
Concealing the evil we do,
Veils also our fears and forebodings
When virtue is conquered by sin.
For sins are the harvest of weeds,
The monkey-ropes, ugly and twisted,
That spread in undisciplined rankness.
The sun can be cruel at its zenith,
But mighty trees cast shadows
That change the savage rays
Into the warmth and light of gentle sunbeams.

I Shall Believe . . .

These verses were written by Vilakazi to commemorate the death of his father who died in his care at Groutville in 1933. In them he expresses his tortured belief that his father is as immutable as the laws of nature themselves, that he can no more die than the sun can cease to rise and the rivers to flow.

Sengiyokholwa-ke

I SHALL BELIEVE . . .

I shall believe that you have died
When bird-calls brightening the air,
When night-dark skies festooned with stars,
When haze of dawn and mist of dusk
Whose fading glow is pale as moonbeams –
Have vanished forever from the earth.

I shall believe that you have died
When rooted mountains and rushing streams,
The winds that blow from north and south,
The winter's frost and glittering dew-drops
Scattering pearls upon the grass –
Have vanished forever from the earth.

To me your fall was like a star's
Or like the strelitzia's, drooping, dying
In sandy borders beside the sea:
As though in a dream I saw you covered
And knew that your body would soon be cold.

For I had seen when stars were paling,
Your confidence ebb, your courage wane:
And yet in spite of all I saw,
That seeing to me was less than nothing.

I shall believe that you have died
When sun and moon shall leave the sky
And, falling to earth, merge dust with dust,
And what seemed timeless has gone forever.

Sing That I May Hear!

This poem is believed to have been written at the time of Vilakazi's conversion to Catholicism. It is a prayer to the Holy Spirit for comfort and reassurance in the discovery of his 'new love'.

Cula Ngizwe!

SING THAT I MAY HEAR!

Sing that I may hear, O blessed Spirit,
And nodding my head, be lulled to sleep
While gazing at the greenly shimmering trees!
Reveal to me the mysteries of beauty
And hidden omens
Of wakening love and love that withers,
Of peace, the very twin of sleep,
Caressing me as I lie upon the floor!
In truth my heart will rest content,
Throbbing no more with fears
That darken all my thoughts.
O, bless me with the peace of evening,
Broken only by the termites
Gnawing behind the wooden walls.

Sing that I may hear, O Paraclete
Sheltered by the shadowy branches!
O, bring my soul the comfort of your voice! –
Let me, at rest, beneath your spell –
Lying outstretched, my head upon my arms –
Be overcome by sleep!
For then I should forget the nagging thoughts
Of life's eternal pain and loneliness,
Of being apart from all the world.
I hear with deep delight your wordless song
Which always, when the moon is new,
You whisper almost silently
That none may learn its meaning,
Apart from the Familiar Spirit¹–
Apart from our own Nomkhulwana.²

Sing that I may hear, O Flower!
Sing your honeyed songs of love,
Of waters and the drops of rain
Falling benignly on the earth!
Open my eyes to see the lips
Of petals softly whispering
The secrets of a new-born love
As dazzling as the galaxies
Guarding through night the morning star
Waiting to usher in the dawn!
Ah, see, as that radiance slowly pales,
It leaves a sparkling legacy
Of dewy pearls upon the earth
To quench the thirst of sunbeams
Sucking them up, gilding the grass,
Kissing the flowers awake!

Sing to me your wordless song
O Spirit, O blessed Paraclete! –
Soothe me to sleep among the flowers
Whose colours are countless,
Whose names are unknown!



If Death Should Steal Upon Me

These verses were strongly influenced by Paul Dunbar's poem, "A Death Song". They reveal Vilakazi's deep love of the young children of his nation, many of whom were his pupils.

Ma Ngificwa Ukufa

IF DEATH SHOULD STEAL UPON ME

Bury me beneath the grass
Beside the weeping willow trees
Whose delicate boughs would shed upon me
Leaves of yellowing green,
That I, from my bed of earth, may hear
The grasses whispering above me:
"Sleep, beloved one, sleep in peace!"

Bury me beside the pools
Whose waters spread serenely still,
Where flights of tiny twittering birds
Are always singing merrily
A welcome to the dawn of spring,
As fluttering to the water's edge,
They drink, protected from the sun!

Let me lie beside the paths
Where daily, children walk to school,
When I no more may help them bear
The burdens of their youth!
For surely, sounds that children make
Bring solace to the souls
Of those who sleep forever.

O let my final resting-place
Be safe from those who brawl and scheme,
That heedless men may never move
The earth that covers me
And thus disturb my lasting sleep!
So if, O reader of these lines,

You help to bury me, let me lie
Where grass above my grave shall whisper:
"Sleep, beloved one, sleep in peace!"

I Hear a Singing . . .

This short poem expresses Vilakazi's ever-increasing emotional response to the praise-songs of his own people – an inspiration that is an interesting contrast to the prevalent influence of the English poets.

Ngizw' ingoma

I HEAR A SINGING . . .

When first I heard our tribal songs
They seemed to me of little worth;
But now their message echoes in my heart.
Secrets and timeless passions haunt a lilt
Inspired by Zululand's sons and their traditions.
These songs recall a past so swiftly fading
That now I fear its meaning may elude me
Although I weep with longing to preserve it.
The songs that you, O children of Ngungunyana,¹
O Vendas of Thobela,² have perfected –
Sung through the years by fathers of our fathers
Whose huts were large and strongly built,
Whose pipes were horns of ox or buffalo,
Whose women chattered underneath the trees –
Torment my soul with eagerness to match them.

The Muse of Learning

In these simple lines, Vilakazi appeals to the poetic Muse to inspire him with the ability to sing of the past glories of the Zulu nation and thus to re-awaken in the souls of his people, a pride in their heritage.

Ithongo Lokwazi

THE MUSE OF LEARNING

Exalted is your power, O glorious Muse!
My own black people taught me this in lands
Where all revere you: peoples of the Bombo,¹
And others of Magudu² and Zimbabwe,³
Where smoke like darkness spreads.
I see from Table Mountain at the Cape
To Thaba Bosiu in far Basutoland⁴
The wandering descendants of Ndaba,⁵
Countless as grains of sand or drops of ocean:
Some here, some there, O, ever migrating Zulus,
Deprived of primal laws and ancient customs!
But you, O Muse, know well their history.

Dear Muse! Impart to me today
Your knowledge of my people's heritage,
That I, endowed with power to record it,
May pass it on to Zulus yet unborn!
No fame I covet! – Glory is yours alone,
For what is Man that he should merit honour!
So let me drink this nectar from your vessels
And calabashes never impaired or tarnished!
O, hear me, I implore you, Muse of Ndaba!

UShaka KaSenzangakhona

SHAKA, SON OF SENZANGAKHONA

*"A group of women of Nomgabi,
Gossiping in a sheltered place,
Said, 'Shaka will never rule or be our king!' –
Yet even then his hour of triumph was near!"*

Listen to me you ignorant people! –
You to whom I speak in vain
Until I waste to thinness of a rake!
For now I know my true vocation:
To sing in praise of Shaka – mighty Cub
Of Phunga¹ and of Xaba – who was borne
Upon the shoulders of the sun
And suckled by the tender moon herself;
For was it not his destiny to blaze
A trail for Zulus into Pondoland?

Listen to me you uninstructed people!
I, weary of your folly and indifference,
Am overwhelmed by clamorous thoughts
And longings of my spirit!
Give me the skin to wrap around my loins!
Give me too my feathered head-dress!
Give me as well my assagai! –
For I am about to sing my song of praise
Of spears that stabbed the very flanks
Of waves upon the seashore.

Yes, ask yourselves how I could sing
Of waters stabbed by lightning's spears,
If I had not been born a faithful Zulu,
Sharing with all the Zulu clans
The customs of a common heritage
Bequeathed to us in years long past by Jama,²
Enduring till Shaka ruined both rich and poor
By ravaging the forests, flocks and herds and rushes? –
O Shaka, what then was left for all your people?

You, Shaka, were the spiritual father
Of brave and powerful men today –

You who scented treachery
And, facing your enemies with spears,
Stabbed your victims ruthlessly:
Zwide³ fell – his downfall caused
Because he aspired to rise above you, Shaka:
And later, men like Matiwane⁴
Quarrelled and fought among themselves.

You built your Great Royal Place at Dlayangubo,
You raised strong armies overnight,
You chose the women for the Royal Place
And countless were the girls you brought there
To gratify your never-sated lust;
For was your mother⁵ not a marvel
Whose beauty of mind and body were unrivalled? –
Her hair alone could cast on men a spell:
Thus many concubines had hair like hers
That even you, O Shaka, could admire.

Exceptional and numerous were the maids
Who served at your Great Royal Place – your private pleasure
And were to you but human ornaments –
Maidens who sent your armies forth with praises.
Innumerable were the warriors you chose;
Your tireless task to strengthen and increase
The numbers of your regiments:
And these it was who built your home and fortress –
Dukuza, where in life you dwelt,
Dukuza, where in death you sleep, great Zulu!

That was the time when often could be seen –
Where the Mfolozi River twists
And glides, a watery snake, amidst the forests –
A mass, like thickly moving cloud
Upon the foam-white sands;
For there it was your warriors drilled,
There, dancing, they displayed themselves
And wildly whirling round and round
With vigour and enthusiasm,
Spun, until they fell, exhausted.

Close by, young women also could be seen,
Unmoving, almost mesmerized,
Wearing the briefest of Zulu skirts,

Waiting eagerly to begin
A passionate love affair
With one whom all desired:
For you, O mighty Cub, who leapt
Above men's heads and severed them,
Had so much knowledge of a woman's heart
And cast such spells, that magic charms were needless.

Thus, as the maidens watched, they wept –
Their tears reflecting dazzling stars,
Fleeing from dawn and trailing a wake
That draws the gaze which cannot overtake them
Or follow for long their brilliant flight.
With honeyed scents they dabbed their skins,
Wore bangles never wrought by human hands,
As, through their tears, they gazed at you –
O Shaka, unparalleled cynosure!

But, if the maidens failed to please you
And youthful warriors solaced them,
Then, Shaka, you sent the armies forth,
Like great encircling horns,
Like foaming breakers crashing on the shore,
Like waters breaking and dividing,
Spreading in ever widening arcs,
Till waves of men in waves of ocean
Pranced and stabbed and courted death.

Thus did our fathers' fathers perish,
Dying for you with matchless courage –
For you, O short-horned Bull of Zululand!
Yet we, their descendants, mute and helpless,
Live today on bygone legends,
Telling each other tales of heroes
Who once were swallowed by the whales
Or perished, homeless, all their cattle
Grazing upon Mavela's⁸ blood-stained grass –
Heroes who joined in dying, Malandela.

Now, through the years, young men in growing numbers,
Recount these tales to all who wish to hear them:
Tales of a razed Great Place, and how Khumalo
Travelled across the mountain ranges
Leading towards the west where sinks the sun

And where, so it was said, the Boers had settled:
He sought and found and stole their cattle
But had no time to slaughter them
For all were recovered. Then, marching north,
Where Bulawayo stands today,
He stayed, believing there he would be safe.

Soshangane⁷ chose a different route
And going north to Gasaland,
Settled among the Portuguese
Where many tribes lived unmolested,
Free from the terrors of the night,
Free from the threat of warriors advancing,
Free from the clashing of the shields
That mingled with the war-cries, groans, and shrieks
Of those who wildly stabbed each other,
Maddened by their lust for killing.

Old Nxaba⁸ also sought a refuge
And climbed across the mountain ranges;
But, in the country of the Sothos,
Mshweshwe⁹ harassed, despoiled and drew
Those who defied him to Thaba Bosiu,¹⁰
And there proclaiming different laws and customs,
Accepted by the Kgatla and the Pedi,¹¹
He taught the tribes to venerate him
Because he proved himself a man of peace.

Even Ndlambe and Sandile
Heard the tales they told about you, Shaka,
And terrified, blocked the fords across the rivers
Because they feared your likely interference
With Xhosa customs honoured throughout the years
Which Jama's true descendants had established.
Faku,¹² the chief, resolved to disappear
As soon as he knew the ever-triumphant Zulus
Had crossed the Drakensberg, unhindered
By the bitter deathly cold.

You looted the deserted homesteads,
Ransacked all the villages,
And when, at last, your eyes turned homeward,
You filled the many cattle-folds
With droves of oxen, cows and calves

Whose numbers were a cause for wonder.
You conquered and plundered Basutoland
While those who saw you scratched their heads
And felt, their mouths agape with horror,
That they were lost, and you invincible.

Yet even then, men plotted to destroy you,
To put an end to you, your power and triumph,
Once and for all: these schemers were kin to you –
Your own two brothers, Mhlangana and Dingane:
They left the hunting-party at Cezana¹³
The while the army headed for Nodwengu;¹⁴
Their flight was like the blackbird's,
Their stabbing like the cruel euphorbia's,
And no one could dissuade them from their purpose.

But far away, in Durban Bay,
Was Farcwell,¹⁵ gazing from his ship
Towards the north and Delagoa Bay
Where soon he sailed: then lowering his gangway,
He journeyed on to the Zambezi,
There to confront the Portuguese.
The name upon their lips was yours, O Shaka!
They uttered it with no less awe and wonder
Than when they spoke of Caesar and of Charlemagne.

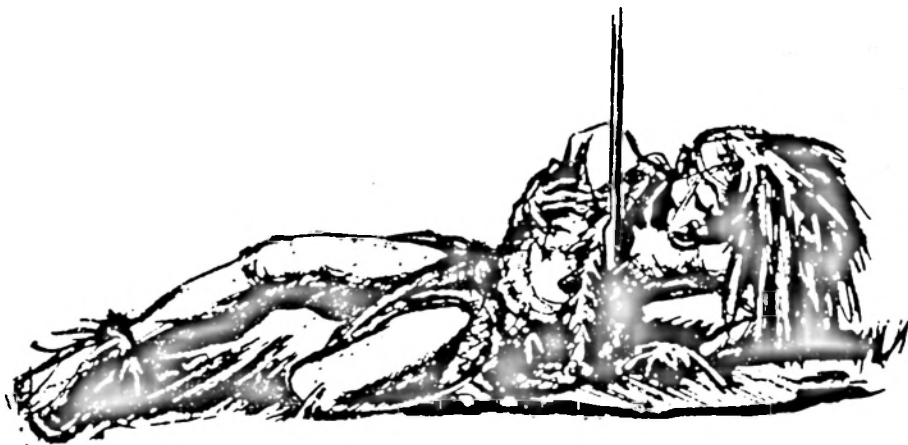
I too have used it,
Writing on familiar themes
Dwelt upon by men grey-haired or bald,
All baffled by your mystery
As heavy as the burdens of the Wombes¹⁶
Who, bearing them upon their shoulders,
Would set them down, then take them up again.
Such is your timeless enigma, great Shaka! –
O you who, like the scorching sun,
Left all behind you parched and desolate.

O you, who once contended with the forests –
That hiding-place for buffaloes! –
O you, who once uncarthed the bones of warriors
And gave them fitting burial! –
For had you not subdued the spirits
Of weak and cowardly Mhlongos,¹⁷
Who, when they denied you water,

Won a Pyrrhic victory,
Believing you had not the time
To be a python and gobble them up.

Thus, when we speak of you today,
We swear by you with utmost faith.
Still you inspire us in our councils
And guide the hands of those who guide us,
Left by you in Zululand.
Yes, all who are not deaf, shall learn
That you, like Nemesis,
Bound to triumph
Have won for yourself eternal fame.

Ah, let us come together Zulus
And dance, unfettered, in his honour! –
For we shall never fail him or allow him
To be defamed by any foreign breeds.
So let us dance or use our eager pens
In praise of all the victories
Of him they spoke of as “The Hoe”¹⁸ –
Of Shaka, the mightiest Hoe of all!
Let us tell how tribes once reeled and fell,
Their blood congealed with shock and terror!



Yes, we who write shall use our pens,
And those who dance be unrestrained,
That both may give us strength and inspiration
And both, O comrades, offer him their praises.
Yet, let us not consort by day! –
Let us gather at the hour
When night obliterates the sun
And darkness is our shield!
O, let us never shun the dark
Or gaze with terror at the night!

Great son of Nungwane,¹⁹ we shall see you,
Wild as any savage dog,
With great round eyes and wearing Phunga's plumes:
Thus you will pass us by, ignoring all,
Miraculous as any charm
Witch-doctors carry to impress us
And we who know it and have the skill,
Shall write this tale
That everyone may hear it.

I seem to see you in the distance
Going across the River Mona²⁰
To warn the people of Msweli²¹
Not to be lured and trapped by snares
Set by Mhlangana and Dingane –
Those evil men inciting one another.
O you, who saw the coming of the swallows,²²
Give us powerful charms to shield our children –
Senzangakhona's true descendants –
Who, guarded by you, shall never fail or fall.

You, Shaka, would be amazed indeed
If you today should live once more
And see the turmoil and the strain,
The anguish, struggle and exhaustion
That seem to be the aftermath
Of civilization and Christianity.
Yet Caesar himself would be astonished
And others like him, if they, reborn,
Should find themselves in England now –
Yes, all would die of stupefaction.

O Zulu who lies at Kuqobokeni,²³
Who swallowed the tribes upon your borders
Where cruel marauders, trained by you,
Caused ceaseless strife and suffering.
You were the unpredictable,
The tyrant whose fury brought destruction
To babes newborn and those within the womb.
The moment you appeared, there rose
Wails from the huts and cries of terror
From those who knew the bloodlust of your spears.

You watched the waves and, imitating them,
Planned your attacks on startled enemies.
You introduced the new short-handled spear:
And soon your victims wandered through the land,
Seeking in anguish for a refuge
And ways to escape your pitiless regiments.
You scaled the highest mountain ranges
To vanquish those who lived beyond them;
And ever intent on subjugation,
With greed unsated, devoured them all.

You, like a buffalo, led your charging herd,
And all the land soon overflowed
With those who fled from you in horror.
Then young and old became like vultures,
Fleeing in terror; with heavy hearts
They left their huts and sites deserted,
Destroying first their cattle-folds,
While you, great threatening buffalo, menaced all,
Waiting beside the fords to trap them.

O Bull who bellowed when they stabbed you,
Who never fleeing, welcomed danger;
You who were ominous as night
And, like the duiker, hid your wounds
And staunched them
In case their bleeding might betray you –
Your name, reviled throughout the earth,
Will live while men can speak and write
And strive to solve your mystery! –
Yet who, mighty Shaka, shall fathom your heart?

The Historic Home of Grout

Vilakazi was born at Groutville. This little Natal settlement was founded in 1836 by the American missionary Aldan Grout. Shaka's Great Royal Place of Dukuza, now known as Stanger, was only five miles away. It was said that Shaka often reviewed his cattle as he sat on the crest of a hill above Groutville which to this day is known as Shaka's Rock. As always, it is a vanished glory that Vilakazi recalls.

Ngomz' omdaladala KaGrout

THE HISTORIC HOME OF GROUT

O Groutville, historic home of Grout!
Dear village where the sun once rose
On people living unmolested,
Ruling themselves and planning in council!
How changed are the present and ourselves!
We plan apart, use chairs and tread on carpets –
Such things our forbears never even dreamed of!
Now, as we hear the stories of the past
And learn how once we prospered
When men of dignity and power lived here
And fathered handsome stalwart sons, we know
Those days have gone forever, O home of Grout!

Then there were trumpeting elephants, O Groutville,
That grazed from the Makhabenis'¹ to the Ndlovus':²
Then, in the forest, many a leopard lurked
Within the thickets, waiting for his prey,
And any man who ventured there was mauled.
Today great tracts of land, bordered by reeds,
Edge fields of sugar-cane that reach the river
Where mud has now replaced your flow, Mvoti:³
Both sugar-cane and reeds along your banks,
Follow, as though a bridal retinue,
Your progress to the sea.

No longer have you pools, O River Mvoti,
Where women and nubile maids disport themselves,

Then walk beside you with a stately gait;
No longer does water lap the giant rock
From which so many a daring youth
Would dive, and agile as a fish
Or water snake, swim with energetic zest,
And heedless of the currents and the depths,
Would splash and cleave your waters joyously.
How different is today from yesterday! –
Now we must scratch in mud and sand
For water that no longer gives refreshment,
And those who cry, “Alas we are growing old!”
Should add, “You too, Mvoti, the years have changed!”
And yet, how can the past conceal its secrets
When here we may look upon the burial-stone
Of Shaka, the ever fearless and unvanquished?
Can any other villages proclaim
A faith in the protection of great spirits,
Surpassing even those of Menzi’s son?⁴
You, Shaka, would climb so often to the site
Upon the crest of the Mandelu hills
On which, in later years, a school was built! –
You, Shaka, descending, would greet the eager throngs
Of youths who gathered always to salute you!

How often, having crossed the River Mvoti,
Here, where it skirts the hills of Zenzeleni,⁵–
After you climbed the heights of Mnyundwini,⁵
Beneath the tawny cliffs of Manzasengwa⁵–
You knelt to drink the flowing water,
Propped upon your spear’s strong shaft
Where bowing willows spread their waving branches.
The spoor of antelope merging there
With those of kudu and of bush-buck,
Gave promise of plentiful game within the forest,
And you, O powerful Cub of Senzangakhona –
Laughed and rejoiced because all this was yours!
At times, when too much beer inflamed your veins,
Young Zulus rushed to give you their support
And holding fast your arms on either side,
Would help you climb the hill, until you reached
The rock where mighty spirits of the Nxabas,⁶
Buried beneath that earth, had prophesied
That here, when your days were over, you would rest:

And still, as in life, you gaze at cattle belonging
 To those bereaved and all their mourning children,
 The while your eyes, as always, mighty Zulu,
 Bring no less terror to us than to our fathers!
 Sadly you look at Ntaba and at Mqwebu,⁷
 Then turn to gaze at Nkobongo near Mhlali⁸
 Where no lament is heard and all is silence!
 Then, as you stare at Govu and Mkhwethu⁹
 Where sleeps Bantukabezwa¹⁰ with the dead,
 Profaned by Noqhomela's¹¹ ploughs and wagons,
 You still are silent, noble son of Ndaba! –
 Had you not warned, when stabbed by false Mbopha¹² –
 The ally of Dingane and Mhlangana –
 That thus it would be when Zulus should be kingless?

Today there are those who gossip at Mvoti,
 Stating with the persistence of a gad-fly,
 That still you are here, that close to us you sleep –
 Where now the fields are hidden by the grass,
 And where alas, our leaders have placed no stone
 To serve you as a pillow, mighty king!
 No stone for one Mbuyazi of Durban¹³ had honoured,
 For one who had welcomed Febana,¹⁴ when England's king
 Sent British ships to anchor in Durban Bay –
 Those of Dumase, Wohllo and Phobana.¹⁵
 Now prattlers say you sleep beneath the syringa
 Where scattered stones were carried from Dukuza.
 Is there another Christian settlement
 Protected by so vigilant a spirit?
 O we should bow our heads in abject shame
 Because we are so thankless, blind and stupid
 While wonders are occurring all around us! –
 For Christians have survived the years of struggle
 Where still your praisers sing, O stoneless Mvoti!
 Yet, where is Mhlophe¹⁶ now to honour Shaka? –
 Has Durban's charms enticed them to Berea?
 Alas, if they desert this generation,
 Then ignorance must triumph over wisdom;
 How shall dreams of vanished glory serve us
 If, in this time of true enlightenment,
 We see no more than darkness and despair?
 Now, on your land, descendant of Mjokwane,

Are grazing cattle of the Nobamba¹⁷ clan
And, like a carpet, spread the many houses
That none could ever have dreamed would be possessed
By tribes the white man knows as 'westernized' –
Yet here, where once the Great Royal Place had stood,
Are all these dwellings clustering like egrets! –
How could a man foresee this transformation?

Yet we, surrounded by these proofs of progress,
Accept, with little questioning, the changes
Which you predicted to your councillors
When you were resting in the cattle-fold
And both your ambitious brothers came to slay you,
Because, they said, your rule was tyranny.
But not for long did cruel Dingane reign:
Few were the years he spent at Mgungundlovu,¹⁸
For were his heart and hands not stained forever
With blood of the brother he had vilely murdered?
How soon those hands were clutching his head, as he
In terror sought for refuge with Sobhuza!¹⁹

Thus rulers take their predecessors' place
And history repeats its timeless story.
Today, we eat our food with spoons,
Dipping them into dishes that the white men
Who worked with Grout, bequeathed us.
Yes, they it was who built our schools and churches
Which now we all frequent so eagerly
To worship and acquire the knowledge and wisdom
That we have learnt to know as 'education'.
Yet, even today, our bald and grey-haired elders
Boast that they as well were teachers
Upon the hills of Hangu and Manombe.²⁰
Vaingloriously they criticize, recalling
The 'Royal readers' read in schools of long ago,
Forgetting the men who worked with great John Dube,
And Mthimkhulus²¹ from Mshanemampewana,
Who, when considering problems, always solved them.
The men of Makobosi²² too, they ignore –
Those who so many times had crossed the ocean,
Leaving like migratory swallows in the winter
Then, from afar, returning in the spring:
How strongly they spread their wings and cleaved the air!

And now, when they come back to us, they find
That all of us can count and read and write.

How frequently these wonders bring to mind
Words that outlast the passing of the years,
Recalling Caesar, Peter, and glorious Rome
Which "was not built" – they tell us – "in a day";
And you, O well loved village of Mvoti,
Are Rome to us! –

For is there another place, however old
That is, like you, the source and inspiration
Of every Christian settlement near and far? –
Small wonder then that it is said of you:

"O stoneless Mvoti, like tresses are your reeds
And waving grasses mingling with the maize!"

"O Lord!" – most tribes forever implore –
"Bless and protect our country, Africa!"

Yet here, when many people come together
Like broods of chickens clustering round a hen,
They always pray: "Our Father, bless this place,
This small retreat where still survive the orphans
Of Grout, who showed them long ago the ways
That we have learnt to know as 'civilization'.
Thus, should we follow pathways far from home,
We pray you, Lord, to be our staff and guide –
Then no one on this earth shall ever defeat us!"



The Grave of Shaka

This poem was written when a monument was erected to Shaka in the town of Stanger in Natal. It was here that he was assassinated in 1828 by his brothers Dingane and Mhlangana. Shaka's Great Royal Place at Dukuza covered the whole of the present site of Stanger. It was not until Mpande's great-grandson Solomon Dinuzulu, became the leader of the Zulu people, that this memorial was raised in 1932. This was a time of rejoicing for the Zulus which the poem reflects. It also stresses the highlights of Shaka's reign of twelve years, during which he subjugated all the tribes from Delagoa Bay in the north to Port St John's in the south.

Phezu Kwethuna LikaShaka

THE GRAVE OF SHAKA

O give me the power of eloquence,
That words I utter may be heard
Throughout the entire countryside,
That even the heedless may be made aware
How grave is the matter which I recount!
It was, I know, officially proclaimed,
Yet here, we have striven only to ignore it:
But futile is this vain pretence
For we are burdened by the knowledge
Of what was made apparent to all the world.

Come with your people yet again, O Zulu!¹—
Mightiest of all the Suthu kings!²—
That now, once more the world may see —
O never daunted scion of noble Menzi —
The valour of your forbears,
The fame the Qulusis have immortalized! —
We need those youths,
We need those maids,
We need that same old man,
We need that very mother!

Ring out the bells,
You Zulu leaders,
Starting at Stanger,
Continuing down the length of the Thukela,
To let your white oppressors know once more
That you, today, rejoice!
For now the nation is in truth uniting
Against that awful prophecy of doom
Which he had voiced when he was dying –
He who revered the ancestors at Nkandla –
Yes he whom none had helped to cross the river,
But led instead towards the valley of death,
Because they believed his rule to be despotic.

Even the women had derided him
During the time of the Nyuswa³ wrangle,
Asking if he, a henchman of Mavela,⁴
Could solve the problem and end the protracted crisis,
When conflict was so bitter and enduring
That even Sihayo had failed to heal the breach –
Sihayo, who once had made his presence felt
When – even though the meadows and fields were marshy –
He burnt the grass and crops and all was scorched.
Therefore, today, where can we find a refuge?
Whose wing will shield us from disaster now?
Forever we place our trust in you, O Shaka,
The while we proudly boast: “We still are Zulus!” –
To make this truth be recognized
By all our peoples in the north.

Even the Mthethwas⁵ you subdued,
Forbidding them their tribal songs
Because you said they had not earned the right
To chant: “These cattle have a history,
For they recall the prowess and achievements
Of one who was the hero of Mjokwanc.”⁶
Not these alone you quelled,
For witch-doctors too became your prey:
And all were crushed, both famous and infamous
Tracked down and hunted like the beasts,
Destroyed in the ruins of Mabedlana⁷
Where kloofs and mountains echoed with the sound
Of shrieks and groans and whimpers of despair;

While ibises, screeching loudly in their terror,
Made for the hidden shelter of their holes.

We who had then not seen the light of day,
And still unborn, were disembodied spirits,
Know that today you haunt our consciences
Because we do not face our obligations
But meekly accept our present fate;
For many races are afraid:
Black of white and white of black;
Even the Indians, newly apprehensive,
Are struggling to preserve their dwindling rights.
But are we able, here and now,
To take in public affairs our rightful part?
O, would that our present were worthy of your past!

Your name shall endure, great Shaka,
Guarded eternally in the hearts
Of every generation:
That of today and those of all its morrows.
So many things we love and value
Bring us thoughts of you,
As wandering through Zululand,
We look on much our hearts hold dear:
The lowing calves,
Their mothers mooing in reply
When yet another day is spent;
The women trudging homeward,
Carrying bundles of faggots on their heads;
Young mothers hurrying home
To hungry babies waiting in the huts;
And, on the banks of the Mfolozi,
Young men and old,
Relaxing in the time-long pleasure
Of smoking pipes as long and strong
As buffalo horns
Found where the Mbozamo and Nonoti⁸
Join, among trees, the flow of the Thukela.
The dagga that they smoke to soothe their hearts,
Was planted first for you, O mighty Shaka,
In kloofs of the Great Royal Place of old
Where once Dukuza spread.

Now those bushes are cleared away:
Your tombstone, Shaka, has replaced them –
O mountain sheltering the Lion's spirit
From storms that rend the heavens!
O spirit of him who drank from deep dark pools
As though he were a honeysucker
Which, had it drunk from shallower waters,
Would, with muddy scum and trailing weeds,
Have smeared its tufted head
And daubed its trailing wings!

Now, as I look upon this stone
Of pure white marble,
I sometimes see it as a shield,
Sometimes as a snowy robe
To cover your bleached and brittle bones,
Our sole remaining heritage,
Your one preserved bequest
To us, the Zulu people.
Yes, here I see again the shield
You used in battle with your foes.
I seem to see you with your fathers,
When in intervals of peace,
You leapt through forests, fields and thickets,
Hurrying onward, ever onward,
Eager to stab the sea itself
And all its threatening waves.

Today I feel my strength renewed
When I with happiness recall
That Nandi⁹ once
Had plucked sweet edible herbs for you
From fields untilled,
Planted now with sugar-cane;
From fields which still devoid of crops,
Are filled with noxious weeds and black-jacks.
Those goodly plants enriched the milk
You sucked with greedy pleasure from the breasts
Of one who was the beauty of Langeni.¹⁰
Yet, even now, can plants be found
That once had fed your blood and bones, O Shaka!
For they have nourished me as well,

When she – the daughter of Nkontshela¹¹ –
Gathered such food for me
Where it has sprouted from the roots
Of those same plants which once were picked
By her, your mother, Nandi.
Why then should I not have a cause for pride?

Rise from beneath this tomb, great Shaka! –
And tell us of those magic plants
That filled your warriors with vigour
And cured the weaklings of their fears,
Enabling them to cross the seas
Without the aid of ships –
For they, like you, subjugate the waters.
Ah! had you, even then, the faith
That Simon Peter knew
When, setting forth upon the flood,
He followed Him – the Lamb of God?
In truth I have much cause for pride,
For I as well was born and bred
Upon the very ground where you
In youth had dwelt.
Here, today, I plead my cases,
Judged above your very bones
Where, near Dukuza, now they lie,
And once your Great Royal Place had stood.
A grey old man of the Qwabe tribe,
Once spoke in court to warn us, saying:
“Listen, Mphezani, plead ‘Not guilty!’ –
For that is wisdom in white men’s courts.”

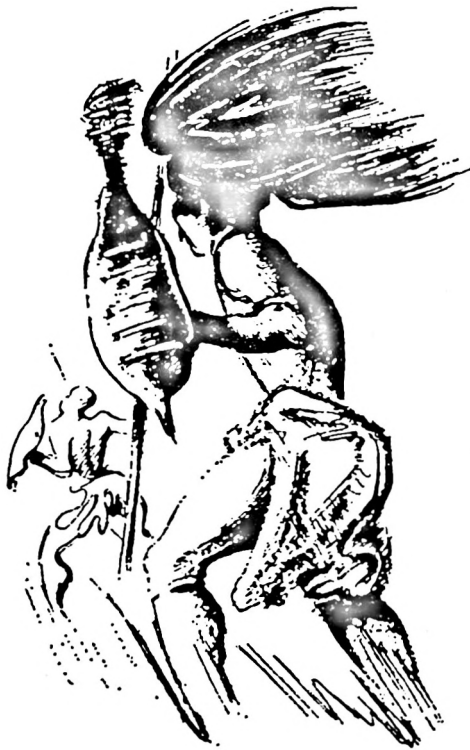
North of your tomb, I seem to see
A pool, now still, and green with algae,
Wherein you once had caused to drown
The young, the ageing and the old,
Whose terrible fate it was to face you
And gaze with terror at your eyes
When you were pitiless with rage
Because of those who let themselves be slain.
Reflecting thus, and gazing mutely
Upon the place where you are buried –
Here, in this white man’s wilderness,

Where all we once had known is changed –
Who now, I ask, will guard these sacred bones?

Yes, even though a fence is built
Around the stone above your grave
Where words are inscribed in black on white,
The men who tended it, have gone
To seek a world called 'civilized',
And greedy for pleasure, discover its pain.
And yet, eternally, the spirits
Of those who sank at Madidiba¹²
Within the waters of that pool
Whose depths had brought oblivion,
Revere you and remember only
That death had come because they had betrayed you,
And failed to guard your peoples' heritage.
But when we too are claimed by death
And life is lost in lasting sleep,
They shall awake and bearing their shields,
Will rise once more to climb the Mbozamo hills,
And reaching the summit, upon your tomb
Will spend the night in reverent vigil.
Then, when the light of dawn appears
And all shall be revealed as ghosts,
Some, like Chanticleer, will crow
To greet the rising sun,
And many others, transformed to stars
Will shower with lambent light this earth
When day once more must vanish
Above Dukuza's cold white stone.

Today we live to know that dawn
Means rising to burn the sugar-cane,
And yet, we still can marvel at the sky
And dazzled by its radiance,
Watch Venus chasing Jupiter:
Venus, like you, resplendent Shaka,
Is the herald of the dawn
That brings to us the sun of knowledge
Whose rays transmit the purest light of all
To shine upon your burial-stone.
The swallows of your prophecy –

Those you had seen when dying – were black and white!
Now both, O Ndaba, have raised your monument
In lasting tribute to your bones.
Of this, when we have left the earth,
We, to the ancestors, shall boast,
Extolling what we left behind us
In honour of you, O Shaka, and Dukuza.



Aggrey of Africa

James Emman Kwegyir Aggrey was born in 1875 at Anamabu in the Gold Coast, now Ghana. He was a member of the Ashanti tribe. He received an elementary education before going to America where, after several years of study, he achieved a Doctorate in Philosophy.

Dr Aggrey became associated with the Phelps-Stokes Foundation in the U.S.A. which sent a delegation to report on the education of African native tribes. Aggrey was a member of that delegation which, under the leadership of Dr Thomas Jesse Jones, visited both South and East Africa. During this fact-finding mission, Aggrey addressed many meetings of Africans and aroused their deep interest in the advantages of education. Later he was appointed to the staff of the Achimota University in the Gold Coast, where he became Assistant Vice-Principal. He died in New York in 1927. The great impression he made on the African intellectuals of the twenties is reflected in this poem of tribute to his memory.

UAggrey WeAfrika

AGGREY OF AFRICA

O Bird of the African hills,
Herald of the dark-skinned peoples
Who, like drowsing owls,
You left behind in the west!
Great bird who soared above the surging
Waters of the ocean,
Who stored like rain the wisdom
You garnered beyond the seas!
You it was who plucked the feathers
Of birds who skimmed the valleys,
Because you were indeed aware
That you, no river bird,
Of all the larger birds were king!

Yet you were captured by the shafts of spears –
Bird hatched in distant fields

Whose crops were not of cotton!
This truth and all it meant
Was recognized by those
Who gave you their protection:
They said, "Come let us see this land -
That far-away place, your ancestral home!"
And thus it was that you returned
And said to us
That we as well were eagles
Who needed but to spread our wings,
In order to fly in freedom to the east.
At first I turned away from you,
But soon you proved my ignorance,
Revealed my nakedness; then, as you discoursed,
I gleaned the knowledge I so sadly lacked.
Too soon, alas, you left us! I remained,
Seeing with different eyes, my native land.
I saw how some arose and, standing firm,
Packed up their bags and went away to study.
Thus, if we could but raise you from the dead,
How truly astonished you would be today
To see how we, your once neglected children,
Have in our midst so many famous men
Who, through degrees and honours, win respect,
Whose wisdom is the outcome of their knowledge,
Whose moral values are the fruit of learning.

All this has been achieved
During a single decade.
Yet now, alas, we call upon the bones
Of those ancestral spirits who, like you,
Inspired the sons of Africa,
To join their hands and come back home again.
For that which we desire to win is wisdom,
Denied to us because you died too soon!
We long to pass it on to our successors -
To all the generations yet unborn.
Yet much has been accomplished even now:
Look on Lovedale,¹
Then turn to see Morija² and Kilnerton,³
And, if your gaze strays northward,
See, in the far Transvaal
Wilberforce College,⁴ and southward, in Natal,

Amanzimtoti,⁵
And finally, Ohlange⁶—
The last achieved by native tribes alone,
Who share the heritage of being black.
At all these schools of learning,
Our youthful men and women,
With eagerness pursue their quest for knowledge.
Thus today, should you return,
We would acknowledge and welcome you for being
The hero and the pioneer you were!

Yes, all these youthful men and women
Have been inspired by you, O Aggrey! —
And this we say — and may your successors hear —
That they should be aware of all our strivings:
“Blessèd be the breasts
That suckled you and blessèd be Ashanti! —
For was it not your cradle?”
In truth, we are grateful to that girl
You met and loved at Raleigh:
Astrologers had prophesied
That you, at sight of her, would say:
“I swear I shall not leave you maiden,
Your voice to me is honeyed music;
Ah, come with me to Africa.”
At first it seemed that you, Aggrey, had failed,
Because the maiden shook her skirts
And turned her thoughts away from you.
But first you coaxed her, then you conquered!
O Maiden, let us shake your hand, for you
Tended this Bird of our beloved country,
Whose call was heard throughout the world
Until its heart responded to that cry.

Soon, many, like scouts, appeared before us
To seek that lair whence issued such a roar
They thought a lion must be sheltered there.
Even Moton⁷ crossed the seas;
But, from the Rand,⁸ Paul Kruger's people⁹
Derided and belittled you,
Seeing what seemed to them to be a jackal,
Small and black with sharp white teeth
Like many more in Africa.
But you ignored this cruel contempt,

Regarding black, the colour that we share –
Given to us in our mothers' wombs –
As having been blest by God, the Father of all.
Courageously you faced the crowds
Who looked upon you as a brazen braggart
Because you claimed that "Black is beautiful!" –
This colour which I, and others of my kind,
Longed to disguise, and envying the white man,
Acquired cosmetic creams to bleach our skins!
And when our whitened faces peeped like baboons'
From out the leafy branches of the trees,
They seemed, each one, to be without a body.
But you – amid disturbing incidents,
Denunciations of enemies and critics
Who strove, untiring, to decry you –
Laughed good-naturedly, because you clearly saw
Unmoved, unangered, their baseless foolishness.

O what remains for me to say of you? –
We can but praise you and proclaim
That you, the very soul of wisdom,
Brought your gifts to Africa!
So shelter us beneath those wings
That once you spread above us,
That, looking on high, we may perceive you
And teach our children to revere you!
For here those eagles, tame, when first you found them,
Have grown in strength, and looking towards the east,
Are learning eagerly how to spread their wings:
Thus, even though their hunger is unappeased,
Their eyes as large as saucers, strain and stare
Eastwards towards the source of unquenched knowledge:
And always your voice, though tentative at first,
Gains, as we listen, clarity and strength
As though the ocean's tide were rising
And leaving all the porpoises far behind it.
Many others now must hear that echo,
And turn, with longing, their gaze towards the east.

UNokufa

DEATH

ndivemi sigukulwane sakwa

Hear me, descendant of Govu and Sonkomose!¹

Too well we know vindictiveness today,

Too much we know that may not be revealed! —

Yet what have we done to earn this retribution

And suffer this frustration? What have we done

To be the victims of this bitter hatred — *sengenina okupa*

That fills our hearts with grief and desperation? *gama achaka*

Yet, are we not here to answer calls for labour *enzondo*

And be exploited at our masters' will?

On which of all the winding roads,

Leading through country rich in milk

Denied to Makhwatha's orphaned people,²

Are we not trudging, destitute?

Yes, thus it is today; but well we know

The time will come when we shall rise

To claim our rightful heritage! — *shaba linyazi lokhutha*

Our children and their own shall sow the seed *okungokweni*

Which must and shall bear fruit in years to come —

The ripe, rewarding fruits of new-won freedom.

Our present weakness shall feed their future strength,

Until at last they, in their hearts and minds,

Attain maturity and independence:

So let us now with faith and diligence

Go forward for our children's sake!

My son, your grandfather,³ here when you were born,

Named you Ndoda,⁴ that you his eldest grandson,

Should bring to all your kindred lasting peace.

He named you also Menzi,⁵ for your forebears,

And prayed you should be free; as far removed

From tyranny as east from west.

Soon after you were born in hospital⁶

You won for yourself a special name

Derived from God's eternal gift to Man,

And thus were called Mbongeni,⁷ son of Mafu⁸

Whose living thoughts were never for himself,

Despite the hatred of his enemies

Who cursing him asserted with conviction:
"This child shall die in hospital
And never rejoice his father's eyes."

Behold! I saw Nontula⁹ in a dream,
Wearing a skirt of skins, bedecked with beads,
And she was walking with Fumuka's daughter
Mphandle,¹⁰ who also flaunted beads and skins.
I stood alone, as though bewitched,
Till Fani,¹¹ Mdleyana's¹² grandchild came in sight.
All pranced and swaggered when they saw me –
Menzi's descendant, grandson of Makhwatha¹³ –
Standing apart in fear that enemies
Were speaking my name with falsity and malice;
For all were hypocrites and wished me ill.
You are like these, O Death, you source of sorrow! –
Along life's path, retreating and advancing,
Deluding us: while rivers seek the sea,
Capriciously you scale the Drakensberg!¹⁴

How cowardly you are, O Death! –
Lurking concealed when armies join in battle
While, like Dingane and Mhlangana,
You stab your startled victims,
Slay the helpless,
Kill their kindred,
And thus fulfil a timeless curse.
How little did I know of you,
And even that little I learnt from idle chatter.
Thus I was taught, whenever you appear,
You leave behind a legacy of tears
And tolling funeral bells
And mourners digging graves
And hypocrites assuming masks of grief
When entering the homes of the bereaved.
My father¹⁵ thus enlightened me
The day he took me to the court
To hear him pleading in his own defence.
Then, reaching home again, his powers failed him,
His mind became confused and wandering:
Sometimes he seemed to be obsessed
With thoughts of his affairs when he should die

And what might come to pass despite his wishes;
Soon, suffering from delirium, seldom conscious
He came to believe his rambling words
Were certain prophecies.

Whenever I tried to visualize you, Death,
I saw you appear before me as a maid
Whose hands are drenched with tears
Of undeserved despair,
With blood that you have drained,
With sweat that soaks the ground
After the sun's huge thirst has been allayed
And stifling westerly winds appeased
When scorching the earth and singeing greening grasses.
I thought I saw you lurking in the darkness,
Accompanied by your daughters,
Mzondwase and Khalisile,¹⁶
Who held their heads within their hands
As, open-eyed and open-cared,
They listened to countless peoples who are black
Recounting tales while those who wished them ill
Were hiding in the shadows.
In silence and concealed, you looked and listened;
Then you appeared, and families were scattered
And many alas, were lost to us forever!
How did they die, those fearless sons of Mdelwa,¹⁷
Nyokana's nephew, who fought Felephi's¹⁸ children? –
O Death, where are they now? –
Reply to me, for you alone can answer!
Again I cry, alas! for have I not seen
The children of Sihlonono¹⁹
Dying in their prime?
Have I not watched, behind a screen of shrubs,
The daughters of our scattered tribes
Abandon the struggle to keep their maidenhood
And quench the lust of youths who were their kindred.
So now I ask you, Death –
You who caused to wither away
The parent trunk and branches of Makhwatha –
Will you not spare the children who survive him,
The man whose blood so lately appeased your thirst?
O cruel, eternal vampire! –
Akin to all who live on such a draught,

How ominous was that day, unsated Death,
When you approached us with a ladle,
Urging us to drink.

How could I bear my glimpse of you, O Death? –
You maid whose pitiless eyes
Gaze one way only,
You maid so fierce of aspect!
Yes, once I saw you, and unwittingly
Led you towards my father's house:
For you, with wings outspread,
Had suddenly approached us
Among the throngs in Durban,
But when to the spirits you heard me pray, you paused!
Blindly I hurried through the darkness
And brought my stricken father safely home.
But soon, too soon, I saw you again, O Death,
And close beside you was your handmaid, pain.
I watched you both approach my father:
Pain gripped his foot
And paralysed his waist
And touched his greying hair
That shrivelled as she reached towards the brain
And left his mind demented.
Then, standing aside, in pride of your achievement,
I saw you, Death, rejoicing in the work
For which you visit earth.
Thus, as I looked once more upon your victim,
I watched, with Ngongoni,²⁰ as the end came near:
Your hands, cruel Death, now touched him,
Seeming to ease the bonds that fettered speech
And stifled hunger,
Even though you knew that nevermore
Could any food revive him.
And then the priests, aware of this, my father,
Gave you the holy sacrament
And folded tenderly your lifeless hands,
Binding them with a rosary,
Placing a cross within their feeble grasp:
Thus, blessed with cross and rosary, you died.
Now you will clasp that rosary forever,
Patiently waiting until you meet again
All those you summoned home before you died,

All those who heartlessly refused to come,
While planning perhaps, how they with friends and cronies,
Might soon rejoice in your bequests.
But they one day, shall learn that you
Will rise as surely as I laid you down.

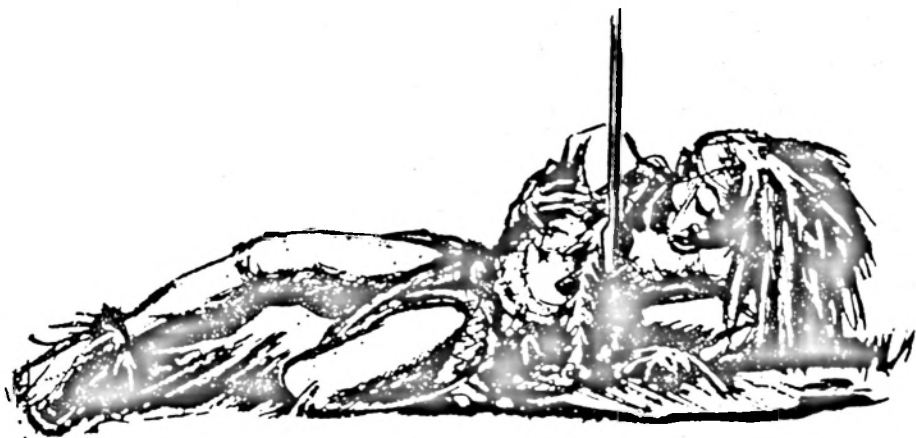
Thus you, O Death, have taught me to accept you
And know I must submit to your decree.
Constantly now, you haunt my heart and soul
Whenever I think of those akin to me
Who went in search of joys to distant places,
And later returned to fraternize
With men who planned to harm us.
Aware of this, I stood apart,
Believing with a heavy heart
That all were enemies.
They spoke about Makhwatha, son of Govu,
And mocked him saying: "Strange was such a hero!" –
And these were the men he trusted all his life.
Thus did they meet, agreeing to disown
Some who were tied to them by blood
But who, they declared, were mocked and shunned
by fortune.
Can happiness survive when thus infected? –
Such men, O Death, are all in league with you!
Witch-doctors gathered, pondered, divined, agreed,
And laughed till they were hoarse with their derision
When human pillars of my father's house
Were shaken till the house itself had fallen,
As we became your victims, treacherous Death! –
Like noxious weeds and black-jacks, we, uprooted,
Were cast aside, while evil reigned triumphant.
Yet now I see all this with different eyes
For often I hear a voice reviling me:
The voice of one whose blood I share, alas!
I hear him say: "Enough! I do not need you,
Nor wish to know members of your clan!"
Therefore now I am at peace
And brood no more upon your stings, O Death! –
For still I have the strength to work
And still I can watch the rising sun,
Through summer and winter, light the skies,

While nightly, my shelter is the roof
Of unextinguished stars
Whose light defeats the terrors of the dark
And thus reveals the power of the Lord
And all His holy minions.
O Death, I now no longer fear your coming!
My eyes have witnessed miracles,
My ears have heard strange prophecies
That I have seen fulfilled;
Therefore I am consoled when mortals weep
And victims of bereavement wring their hands
Wherever you have passed.

Yes, even though I knew your power, O Death!
And felt your presence near me,
I still can go in search of happiness
Whose day endures,
Whose golden sun is timeless,
Whose shadow brings refreshment.
At last my idle longings fade away
And all my dreaming is of peace.
Yes, now I can see how infants smile, serenely
Sucking the milk of life;
Now I can see how calves may freely gambol
And hungry lambs be fed
When placidly they gather round their mothers
Calmly chewing cuds within the fold;
While milch-cows mooing quietly,
Reply to lowing oxen,
And tranquilly watch the dark give way to dawn.

So what remains to say of you, O Death?
Not one among the Zulu poets,
Much as they have mused on you,
Can liken you to anything
Moulded or carved by human hands.
Even the English poet, Gray,
Who once confronted you among the tombs,
No more than other singers could express
The essence of your being:
How many have attempted this,
Yet every one has failed!

Yes, this I know: You Death, alone are deathless! –
Forever changeless through the changing aeons,
Unaltered since the chameleon,²¹ sent by God,
Delaying, was overtaken by the lizard
Who, panting for breath, straining his legs,
Made clear to every living creature:
“Life is a moment’s prologue, introducing
The never-ending tragedy of Death.”
You, since that fatal day, have overcome
The human race.
Eternal and eternally the same
You, the original thief inspire all others:
Depriving a child of siblings yet unborn,
Bereaving helpless children of their parents,
Causing a brother to spill his brother’s blood
And nations to spill each other’s;
For you arouse the lust to kill
And tear with greed and hate the human heart.



Thus Death, you triumph and life must be the loser.
Enough! Too long I have awaited you
Because I had believed that those you seized
Would come to life again
And teach us wisdom!
But now, as I see around me evil men
Rejoicing in your terrible achievements,
Gloating in greed, callous to others' pain,
Untouched by grief and blind to human chaos,
Crying, "We do not care!" – deaf to the cries
Of those who, overcome by darkness,
Hover like sightless birds above the roofs, –
I know such men's response to human anguish
Is but a vile reflection of your own.
Yes, who has ever profited, I ask,
From any of the grim bequests,
Timelessly won with your obscene assistance?
Now growing old, I weary even of this:
Watching the fall of greedy, ambitious men
Who, being in league with you, attained their goals.
O Death, I have looked enough upon your triumphs! –
Now triumph over me!

Isenanelo Eminyakeni Engamashumi-mahlanu

IN CELEBRATION OF FIFTY YEARS

Men in authority say to me
That I should tell this story
And lowing like a cow
Look homeward once again –
For now the sun is sinking lower.
And so I visualize those girls and youths
Who walked together in the afternoons,
And starting from Mhlathuze,¹ went
To Mhlathuzane² to study there,
Leaving behind the joys of Zululand.
Now scholarly men have said that I should tell
The story of the ways they chose
That led them to their schools and colleges:
The story of the years they passed
Far from their homes and families.
So listen to me, you loving parents,
And hear me too, reluctant stranger
Who, when you came to Durban Bay,
Resolved to shun the Catholics
Because of your wish to act in freedom.

Thus today I sing the praises
Of sons and daughters
Who left their homes
To wander far and wide:
Who, knotting their bundles, went away,
Never again to return.
Thus did they leave their childhood homes,
The people tied to them by blood,
The soil that bore good fruit,
The summer's noonday warmth,
The winter's pallid moonlight –
All this they left behind them.
Some crossed the waters of the sea,
Some joined the battle of the spears,³
Causing many Boers to mourn
And many Englishmen to flee

When Masiphula⁴ and his men
Wielded their savage knobkerries
Amidst the clusters of the huts
Beside the hill, Sandlwana.
Yes, many came and many died!

Behold, within that hidden world
Whose only rulers are the spirits,
I seemed to see them meeting Jama
And Makhedama⁵ too,
And all conferring with the spirits
Of German missionaries⁶—
Those who had signed a covenant,
Decreeing that Zulus should be Christians,
That they as well should take the path
Of peoples who had thus fulfilled
The prophecy of Shaka.
The way they chose was arduous
And touched the heart of Father Francis,⁷
Who heeded at last their long entreaties:
When he was deaf, they raised their voices,
When he was silent, they persevered.
Then Father Francis, in a vision,
Saw rosy walls of future fame,
Which here and now recall to me
The Mgungundlovu of Zululand.

He visualized within those walls,
Bustling throngs of many tribes —
And all of them were black, their hair
As crinkled as the wool of sheep.
He heard them talking, and their language
Struck his ears with clicking sounds;
Their clothing was of skins alone
And they were armed with sticks and spears.
Yet, as he gazed within their eyes,
He saw the longing of their souls —
A yearning never yet appeased,
A craving for the flaming torch
Already burning bright afar,
Kept alight by famous men
Like Lindley, Grout and Adams.⁸

Thus inspired, he packed his bags,
Went to Durban, saw the Bluff,
And standing by the rippling bay,
He swore an oath to those on high
To serve through life the Zulu people.

Then – amidst the famous hills
Spreading almost to Table Mountain,⁹
Reaching outward in their thousands,
Ridge beyond ridge, towards the east –
Was built at last the mission school,
Those rosy walls of Father Francis' vision.
He, in that dream had seemed to see
Four young men¹⁰ in love with learning
Who, gaining stature with their knowledge,
Were honoured by the same degrees
Conferred in Rome upon himself.
Enticed by wonder, hope and awe,
He took the journey to Mhlathuzane
And there met Khofi,¹¹ son of Mnganga:
He took away from him his loin skin
And threw it far beyond his reach;
And later, when he met Mabhabha,¹¹
The son of Muthwa, so it was said,
He took away from him his weapons –
Thus did he make his first two converts.

Later on, came Pelepele¹²
Whose very glance could cast a spell;
He fed their thoughts and stirred their minds,
Causing his pupils to find yet others,
Inspiring the sons of Wesley and Gumedé¹³
To keep alight the flame of knowledge
And, helped by Savela,¹⁴ to spread its glow.
All these were members of the Mbhele tribe.
Hush, my son, he would not wish to hear me! –
Let us speak of this in whispers!
Know too, that it was Pelepele,
Helped by his Christian followers,
Who learnt much wisdom from the Bhacas.
I saw him at the time he brought
A fine proud man, the son of Khathi,¹⁵
Who, round of eye as any owl,

Standing always at the blackboard,
Taught us with zest that never flagged.

I praise you too, you assiduous monks
Whose zeal atoned for little knowledge,
Who helped the school till Huss¹⁶ arrived,
Brought from the country of the Xhosas
Where, having conquered many troubles,
He taught us ways to overcome our own:
Such were the men who helped the Zulus.
Later, when Bryant¹⁷ opened paths,
Encouraging others to follow him,
There came, like greyhounds on the scent,
New writers producing books of learning
Whose contents cause us, even now,
To argue at length with one another.
Men like Caluza followed in those footsteps
And pioneered still other paths of knowledge,
Writing poems, composing songs,
And, studying Africa's history –
Two races and their different ways of life –
They learnt to arouse in us the love
That all should cherish for their country.

How well they trained our present teachers:
Men like Ngcobo and Mayathula¹⁸
Who teach us at St Wendolin's;
And women like you, O maid of Hwanqa,¹⁹
Who, a spirit of spring itself,
Brings to our college a strength renewed;
For you, no matter where you go,
Become the subject of discussion,
Visiting, as a delegate,
Amanzimtoti and Inanda,
Attending many conferences.
Thinking of you, I think as well of Juba²⁰
Who lies today within her grave,
Sleeping forever at Mariannahill;
Siziwe²¹ too you bring to mind,
She who is buried at Mvoti
Beside Makhwatha's grey-haired son.²²
Alas, all these are laid to rest! –

All these who, in their time, were taught
By him who guides the college today.

You, maid of Hwanqa, fostered too,
The Catholic African Union
And nurtured it with good rich milk
Drawn from the cow 'UmAfrika'²³
Which fed with news the Zulu herds.
And now we look for greater triumphs,
Resulting from the influence
Of valiant men like Father Huss
Whose agricultural training long survives him,
Whose dying was a cause for tears,
Whose pupils, during fifteen years, had learnt
To love as much the teacher as his teaching:
His going left a void they filled with sorrow.
Yet still young lads may dance
And girls indulge in frolics,
Because the college opens wide its doors,
Its rosy walls resound with bells,
Its airs are fresh with breezes from the north.

The spirits of our ancestors
Recall to me the names
Of wise and friendly men:
The reticent Brother Felix²⁴ who had come
When young, and stayed till Father Time –
That grim old sculptor – bent and changed his shape
And crowned his head with silver;
May he be spared to us for many years
To be for us all our guardian angel!
We hail as well Mancinza²⁵ and the others
Who now enjoy the sunlight
And kindly shade bequeathed by Father Francis.
Like puppies yapping with delight,
Young Zulus line the banks of the Thukela
And Sothos descend the mountains of Lesotho,
Vying with one another to celebrate
The splendid work achieved in fifty years:
What joyous felicitations fill the air!

Young men convey congratulations:
The Kheswas²⁶ send them, Marti Zulu,²⁷

The Hallers from Khumalo
 Who, it is said, once crossed the waters
 With plans for building at Mzimkhulu,
 While others of their tribe, in Ladysmith,
 Had thoughts of building in the Ngwenya country.
 I hear the names of many others spoken:
 Guma²⁸ of Mvoti and Made²⁹ of Pholela;
 Masheshisa³⁰ and Cele³¹ who, in 'UmAfrika' –
 The Catholic Zulu journal – write their columns.
 Thus did I learn about Shelela
 And also Phingoshe's son, Msomi,
 Who, success beyond their reach,
 Blamed Mdadane and the college.
 But I can utter only praises
 To celebrate your growth and age,
 That all your children yet unborn,
 May sing them in the years to come!

Today the Provincial bids me write
 Of great achievements and of those who caused them,
 Of men like Phali, Ndokweni's son,
 Whose task it was to bring by horse-drawn cart
 Those who served the King of Kings.
 Many of these were chosen leaders –
 Men like Dube's son Fosholo,³²
 And Vuma,³³ son of Sikhunyana
 Magogoda³³ too and Magodola³³
 And Ndamana³³ of the Zungu clan:
 All had worked with Father Francis,
 All had fostered truth and knowledge.
 How many of these, our predecessors,
 Nurtured us with faith and wisdom! –
 Sons of Mantshonga and Father Ngidi,
 Fed the hungry with the bread of knowledge.

Alas that you, O ever insatiable earth,
 Do not grow larger with the dead you swallow –
 The countless numbers of our fathers' children! –
 Too long have you devoured them all! –
 On mountain heights,
 In valley depths,
 Lie buried now
 So many children of this college –

Your own, O hero of the Catholics!
Ah, Father Francis, everywhere
We hear your name
Acclaimed perpetually! –
That praise is like a waterfall
Or river flowing on forever,
Echoing through the passing years.
Alas, that your fame had spread so far
It reached too soon the jealous ears
Of one we all have cause to fear –
Rapacious, unsated, relentless Death:
He who overcomes the nations,
He who hides behind the mountains
Shrouded by heavy mist;
He who came and bellowed like a bull
Within these walls! –
We heard him and we shuddered.

But never shall we cease to offer homage;
Even though none today may hear or heed us,
Our voices shall not ever cease to echo
The memorable words he spoke to us –
The motto inspired by noble Father Francis:
“Ora et Labora!” – “Work and Pray!”
Perhaps some future day may bring
A being who, blessed with true discernment,
Will speak in praise of small beginnings
And, as a tribute to his work,
Ensure that it will be remembered
And keep alight the torch that he had lit.
Then shall our spirits be reborn
Within the hearts of all who understand
And tend that flame with faith and resolution,
Joyously following in the footsteps
Of Fathers Mbhele and Mnganga,
As, like the Jamas and Makhedamas,
They tread with joy the trails that he had blazed.

Then shall we all in truth return
And, like our own ancestral spirits,
Become the guardian angels of the college.
Therefore, young reader, hear my voice

In echoing winds that stir the leaves
And whisper in the night around the house! –
For thus do we come back again
And bring to you the blessèd dreams
That cause an infant's smile;
And is not such a smile divinely pure,
Brought by a glimpse of heaven whence it came,
Opening wide and wider yet?
Therefore, young reader, wake and rise! –
Take up your pen that you may write
The thoughts with which we now infuse you,
Inspired in us by noble spirits
Of men like Francis and Ngcayi,
That children yet unborn may read them
Fifty years from now.

BOOK TWO

Zulu Horizons
Amal'ezulu



Inspiration

This poem is inspired by memories of Dukuza, the Great Royal Place of Shaka which was situated where the town of Stanger now stands – and of Mnkabayi (daughter of Jama), one of the most remarkable women in Zulu history. Mnkabayi was Shaka's great-aunt and was held by him in such high esteem that he gave her command of one of his military sites in what is now the Vryheid district. She acted as administrator of the area. Mnkabayi was so competent that she greatly influenced Zulu national affairs. Ultimately Shaka's appalling cruelty caused her to believe that he should be destroyed, and some Zulus think that she encouraged his brothers, Dingane and Mhlangana, to kill him. After Shaka's death, they quarrelled over the succession, Mnkabayi favouring Dingane and scheming to eliminate Mhlangana.

Ugqozi

INSPIRATION

At the gates of Dukuza,
Great Royal Place of Ndaba's descendant,
I stood by the fence and saluted;
My greetings I offered till nightfall
And then the king's servant appeared.

He told me to wait:
Scents came to me, filling my nostrils,
My thoughts that were dark became clear;
And when Mnkabayi, in finery came,
I soared from the depths to the heights;
The gate-keeper opened the gates.

Tongue-tied I entered,
To stay in Dukuza's Great Royal Place;
O how I wished for my ancestors' gift
To sing out my praises, for sadness had vanished!
I felt like a king coming home,
And then as I slept, came a dream:

I was barred by its gates from Dukuza,
I sought Mnkabayi in vain;
I stared at those gates, but alas they were closed
And the Great Royal Place of Dukuza deserted.
No word could I utter for sorrow,
Dismay had deprived me of speech:
O how could I know that the Muse named me "poet"?

Thus now I can never be silent
Because in the depths of the night
Mnkabayi arouses me saying:
"Arise, O you son of Mancinza!¹
Your destiny bids you to waken
And sing to us legends of battle:
This charge, I command you, fulfil!"

The Poet

These verses are a tribute to the poetic gift. The Zulu word imbongi has been translated as "poet"; but this is inadequate because the imbongi, in addition to being the tribal poet laureate, is the chief's official praise-singer. He must therefore be familiar with tribal history and background and know too the idiosyncrasies and personal habits of the chief or king or hero whom he praises. The imbongi is also expected to have memorized the praises of several generations of tribal chiefs whose songs would have been taught to him by word of mouth by his predecessor.

Imbongi

THE POET

Whose voice is it that stirs the human heart,
The earth, its animals and growing things?
And whether it whispers of the past or present,
What does it matter?
Ah, whose is that voice which I, awake or sleeping,
Never fail to hear?

The poet of our ancestors it is,
Who sings the praises of the dead;
The poet of the here and now
Whose songs are of the present.
Always I hear that singing when the sun,
Dimming its crimson fires to flickering flames,
Brings shadows of fear and darkness
Until the bowl of night
Covers the earth with stars
Beneath whose gleams I cower in a corner.

O poet, you sang your songs when earth was young
And they in beauty flowered – unlike the earth!
Thus gaining in power, you proved yourself triumphant.
Although you mourned with impotent despair
For daily follies auguring bleak tomorrows:
Thus to ancestral spirits you lamented
Who comforted you with power of the word,
That magic medicines only give to others.

O how can I capture thoughts which haunt me now?
Are these my words or yours, O deathless Muse?
And do I voice the truth or fatuous nonsense?
Before you claimed my soul, the earth was dark,
Pathless, mysterious: then I, inspired by you,
Could open my ears to singers of the past,
And grasping the poet's staff, pursue his path.
O let my songs as well, blaze trails on earth!

The Poet's Prayer

(Inspired by Schubert's music)

In these verses Vilakazi prays that his people should be made aware of the deep significance of musical expression.

Umthandazo Wembongi

THE POET'S PRAYER

O hallowed Muse of Melody! –
You eagle soaring over earth
Whose wings are in the clouds –
With what have you imbued the human spirit,
That never failing to foster genius,
Inspires all poets, no matter what their colour
Or whether they sing of heaven or of earth,
Or praise in song great kings and valiant heroes?
Summon then our singers,
And may their praising equal in its beauty
The melodies that drift from white men's houses
When they enjoy their instruments of music!

O children of the Zulus!
Those harmonies arouse my drowsing spirit
And stir my aspiration.
I pray you Lord, awake my own black people! –
Your children too, created in your image –
That they as well may voice the spirit's longings
And torments of the flesh;
That they as well may reach towards the heavens
No less than Schubert, Beethoven and Chopin.

All Earthly Things Must Pass

In Zulu tradition, the first man emerged from the river accompanied by his wife Mamlambo (a daughter of the river). She is referred to in this poem as "Sacred Mother". Nomkhubulwana, the phantom Princess of Heaven, is the source of agricultural fertility. A communal field is planted in her honour by Zulu women. She veils herself in the mists surrounding the wooded kloofs in the early morning. Ncazane, the Maid of Melody, represents the girls who accompany the dancing songs with rhythmic clapping. Ntonjambili is the traditional name given to girls who dance to the accompaniment of the chorus. Also in accordance with tradition, the sexes dance separately: first the women, then the men, in their respective age groups. They provide entertainment for weddings and other festive occasions.

Okomhlaba Kuyadlula

ALL EARTHLY THINGS MUST PASS

Sing a song, O Sacred Mother!
Sing to me your song of rivers –
The lilting one that brings,
Not physical delight,
But tears to perceptive eyes
And echoes to ears
Attuned to suffering.

Sing, O Princess of the Heavens!
Sing the song of lands unknown to Man,
Where, in the veld, the lonely bird
Wandering, fearful of the dark,
Helplessly fluttering its wings,
Pursues a hidden destination:
My spirit is that bird!

Applaud, O Maid of Melody!
Do not tire but clap with zest,
Though even your hands grow weary

VINCENT.

Susan

Jaky
Lee

Oscar C.

Mo

U

O.

And struggle in vain to raise themselves
When Death approaching,
The body weakens,
And all applause is stifled like a flame.

Dance, O Maid of the Dancing-place! -
Even at midnight's hour,
For then the owl of sombre mystery
Is like the spirit of worldly longings,
Warning of danger from afar,
Telling of love so hotly burning
That flames of passion must consume it.

I too shall dance like a warrior
Wearing gaudy finery,
For inspiration fills my ears
As though I heard the march of soldiers
Passing, mounted on their horses
Whose footfalls echo on and on
Till sound is lost in silence.

What is a human life, O mortal?
Is it like leaves upon a tree
Or dreams that come to you in sleep
Which, when you wake, dissolve in air
Though haunting echoes linger on -
Faint murmurs of a dream that bore you
Where all ancestral spirits dwell forever?

Imfuno Ephakeme

HIGHER EDUCATION

Once, when my mind was credulous,
I thought I could be satisfied
By reading books, by earnest study,
By brooding on problems posed by learning
And struggling always to understand:
Today my head is aching.

I have spent so many years
Turning over leaves of books
Written by the white man;
I have worked through countless nights
Till sunrise tinged the darkness:
Today my eyes are throbbing.

Black poets also stirred my thoughts:
They sang in praise of kings' ambitions
And eulogized our native beer.
Their wisdom too I pondered well,
Letting it mingle with the white man's:
Today they quarrel in my mind.

He who does not know these things –
Sleeping calmly through the night,
Never reading till the dawn
Or musing on Cicero and Caesar,
Shaka, Ngqika and Mshweshwe! –
Today is free of doubt.

Those companions of my youth
Who did not ever go to school,
Despise me as I trudge the roads
While they in splendid motor cars
Drive swiftly past me, raising dust:
Today, they think that they are kings.

Yet I, at times, would change my ways
And pick up crumbs let fall by those
Whose years I share – but little else.
But then I find that I am trapped,

My thirst for knowledge never sated,
My hungry mind still unappeased.

Today, if I should dread the time
When age and weakness shall defeat me,
I search my pockets and my bags,
But find them crammed with books alone
That always, everywhere, pursue me:
Let me muse on what they teach me!

I think of heroes of my nation,
I see ancestral eyes regard me
And spirits put aside their shields
As, from beds of earth, they speak
To tell me I shall share their beer –
For never shall I be forgotten.

I gained degrees, I wrote my books,
That other children of Zululand
Might taste one day my fruits of knowledge,
Study, debate and help each other
While learning from my nightly writings.
These, never inspired by mere ambition,
Were prompted by you, ancestral spirits,
Who stirred my thoughts in hours of darkness:
But I shall be here no longer.

Tell Me, White Man's Son!

These verses reveal the confusion in the mind of the black man when first he comes from the rural area to the large city. They also describe the feelings of the poet himself when he first came to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Wo, Ngitshela Mntanomlungu!

TELL ME, WHITE MAN'S SON!

Tell, O tell me, white man's son,
The reason you have brought me here!
I come, but O my knees are heavy
And, when I think, my head is dizzy:
I feel confused, unhappy, lost,
And day is no less dark than night.

Tell, O tell me, white man's son,
Where shall I enter through these walls?
My father's father said when dying,
My home would be a Zulu hut
Where I, besmirched with smoke and soot,
Should eat boiled mealies mixed with whey.

Tell, O tell me, white man's son,
Why I am here and where I belong:
The colour of my skin condemns me,
My language – to me so beautiful,
A constant source of love and pride –
Brings sneers of scorn to many lips.

Tell, O tell me, white man's son,
What path I took to lose my way!
The walls surrounding me are high;
They go down deeply in the earth
And rise up high towards the clouds:
The Mboza warriors at Nodwengu¹
Never saw such sights as these.

Tell, O tell me, white man's son,
The meaning of all I see about me:

Such massive and majestic columns,²
Drawing my gaze where, high above me,
Doves are perched whose noisy cooing
Is like the bellowing of bulls.

Thus, as I gaze around in wonder,
I realize beyond all doubt
That I am lost! Yet well I know I came
To serve my own beloved people –
Aware of them always, I hear them cry:
“Take up your burden and be our voice!”³

Yin' ukwazi?

WHAT IS WISDOM?

Tell me, comrade,
What is wisdom? –
Dressing smartly,
Strutting about
With walking-stick
And light brown shoes?

Tell me, colleague,
What is wisdom? –
Going to school,
Learning from books,
Turning the pages
Until I am bald?

Tell me, mother,
What is wisdom? –
Making speeches,
Winning fame,
Interpreting laws
That make no sense?

Tell me, father,
What is wisdom? –
“Come, my son,
And listen well:
Speak but little,
Accomplish much!”

Old Man!

The Zulu people have a traditional veneration for the aged. In this poem Vilakazi, gazing reflectively at an old man, and longing to interpret his thoughts, finds that his own inevitably turn to Shaka and the glories of the past.

Wo, Lelikhehla!

OLD MAN!

Your greying hair crowns you with dignity,
Evoking pathways threading the past,
Symbolic of the story of your years.
It brings me sadness, strangely linked with envy
And fascinates my ever-inquisitive mind.
It signifies wisdom, deep beyond all sounding
For, should I try to plumb those depths,
I know they could never be fathomed.
You, silent, are unaware of me
And I, not daring to approach you,
Offer you homage from a distance.

In your ear-lobes I can see
The mark that proves you are a Zulu:
No ear-plugs pierce those lobes today,
For, having once discarded them,
You gave no thought to where they lay
Within a site for long abandoned.

Yet reading your eyes I spell out sorrow;
Now, watching the snuff-spoon in your hand
Adding to the furtive tears
That dim your watery clouded eyes,
I know your thoughts are far away,
Focused on visions of the past.

Are you recalling Shaka's shields
Beneath the waters of Dukuza,
Spreading now so far and wide

Above the heads of all the dead,
Lying in depths as grey as you?

Are you communing – motionless and brooding –
With wise old Zulus long since vanished?
If you would speak to me, I could write
Of all you hear, discuss and see
When grey-heads meet ancestral spirits.
O how I long for understanding! –
And though, old man, you still are silent,
Your hair and matchless dignity
Foster the love and envy in my heart.

Ukuhlwa

NIGHTFALL

I watch the darkness falling,
The hills spread wide their shadows,
The sun change gold to ochre.

The swallows are at rest,
The sea-wind stilled, is silent;
Above me fly the bats.

Now, as the streets are lighted,
I fear the lurking robbers
Who stalk their prey like hunters.

Here, in place of grasses,
Is dust that drifts from mine-dumps
Like smoke ascending skyward.

Here there is no river
To shelter leaping frogs
And harbour water-fowl.

Here are only people
Rushing away from toil,
Hurried home by nightfall.

The Moon

The Zulu has the same form of word for moon, month and medicine-man, as for an expert in any craft, the different meanings being conveyed by variations in tone. The "Man in the moon" of European origin is, to the poet, a medicine-man with his bag of medicines over his shoulder. The moon causes people to dream and inspires poets. It makes him think of home with its forests and valleys and fields of sugar-cane, while in the city, built with the life-blood of the African, there is always the curfew.

Inyanga

THE MOON

O moon, bright queen of darkness! –
Some see you as a healer
Who carries medicine bags
And shoulders horns and satchels;
I watch you climb the skies.

Dear moon, so radiant at night
When shadows dim the world
And mortals change to spectres,
Your shining presence in the sky
Renews my courage to look ahead.

How often I watched you when at home
You rose above the widely surging
Waters of the sky-bound sea;
While staring transfixed and open-mouthed,
I feasted my eyes in wonder.

My forbears must have watched you too,
Gazing down, as now, upon the world,
Bringing dreams to those who sleep
And inspiration to wakeful poets
Striving to compose such songs
As echo through the human soul.

Inspire me too, ☉ pallid moon,
Fading in the ghostly dawn,
Faintly hovering in beauty
Over the waters of the rivers
And greening grasses of the hills!

Enchanting and merciful to lovers
Whom often I see in sprawling cities
Raised by white men on the graves
Of children of the Zulus, Xhosas,
Sothos – all. But, when I thus
Have ventured out, enticed by beauty,
Sacred to one who worships nature –
I hear the warning of the curfew.

Heal, I pray, my vain nostalgia
When I hanker for the forests
And valleys eroded by the rains,
And crave to hear again the sea
Where fields of sugar-cane spread towards the shore.
Dreaming of these, once more I look above
And watch your elusive pale white globe:
Then, as I offer my obeisance,
I whisper my longing to reach you and embrace you.



Ukuthula

PEACE

If you and I could rest here
Beside this sea, upon this shore
Whose sands are white and welcoming,
Where peace from heaven calms the earth –
This haven should be my paradise
And brim with ecstasy my heart,
For here, where sound is melody
And all is blest, my soul awakes.
This refuge resounds with silent voices
Born of memory or dream,
Belonging to beings of flesh or fancy;
Some, like porpoises, ride the waters,
Others, like breezes, ruffle the trees
And rustle greening blades of grasses:
I ask: “Who are they?” –
“Spirits”, sighs the wind,
And listening to their calls, I learn at last
How strong are fragile bonds of mutual love.

Whither?

This poem, expressing Vilakazi's hopeless search for his dead wife Nomasomi, is addressed to his deceased brother Mandlakhe.

Nayaphi?

WHITHER?

O, I have been deceived, Mandlakhe!
They said: “Be patient, rest and wait!”
They told me, Makhwatha's grandson,
That you had never packed your things, and yet

You, leaving everything, have vanished
And gone away with Nomasomi.

I visited your room at home:
They said you were no longer there.
I went to Pietermaritzburg
And, looking at the red-brick homes,
Watched silent people, for only the houses
Seemed to say: "He's here! No, there!" –
And so I wandered hither and thither
Hoping to catch a glimpse of you,
Thinking perhaps you were detained
At school and might be working late.
O, do you too, seek Nomasomi?

But, when I visited the school,
The children cried: "Here comes the teacher!" –
Because our likeness had deceived them.
Everywhere I looked for you,
Convinced you could be found, Mandlakhe.
I even questioned the diviners:
They only stared at one another
And moistened me with tears –
For they as well mourned Nomasomi.

I left them, still resolved to find you.
I wandered through the city streets,
Combing Pietermaritzburg,
Peeping through the doors and windows.
I even went as far as Durban,
And near the sea where you were born
I searched for you throughout the day
Till darkness fell:
O would you not return with Nomasomi?

I rested beneath a plum tree's boughs
Where birds took shelter, and hidden mambas
Lurked to strike at bird and man.
I watched afar the curling waves
Forever chasing one another,
Then, as I stared, I saw two figures:
Could they be you and Nomasomi?

It seemed that I might see at last
Your vanished forms emerge:
Then suddenly the moon appeared
And looking on high, I questioned her;
But she denied that she had seen you.
Sadly my gaze returned to earth
Then rose once more to see that being of legend
Carrying wood within the moon's pale orb,
I signed to her and begged again for news:
Alas, she turned her back on me
And, in the haze, continued with her task.
I hung my head in silence.

Thus everyone deceives me always,
And you, Mandlakhe, delude me too:
I see you only when in sleep
I dream of you with Nomasomi;
Yes, then you come, aware that I –
Sleep's prisoner – am duped by dreams.
Thus you cheat me, then you vanish;
And suddenly, as I awake,
Grasping the chilly air, I glimpse
A shape like drifting mist dissolving.

Alas, Mandlakhe! Why deceive me?
Where, when you left us, did you go?
My feet are worn with trudging roads
In never-ending search of you.
O, where can you be, with her I long for?
Why did you steal my Nomasomi?

Ngoba . . . Sewuthi

BECAUSE . . .

Because you always see me smile,
You think that I must be content:
Because I sing with all my voice,
The while you drive me underground

To find the treasure hidden there –
Those diamonds tinting earth with blue:
You say that I am like a log
Insensitive to pain.

Because you see my laughing lips,
My downcast eyes,
My trousers rolled above the knee,
My matted hair like ochre
From dust of sandy roads,
My hand around a pick,
My shirt without a back:
You say I am insentient
And durable as rock.

Because, when night approaches,
You see me loosening the chains
Of daily drudgery,
And, meeting people black like me,
Dance with new-born energy
While chanting tribal songs
That rouse our stifled zest
And banish weariness:
You think me but an animal
Who, should it die, is soon replaced.

Because I am a simple dupe
Who pays the price of ignorance
And cannot understand these laws
That use, abuse me and exploit me;
Because you see me build my shack
Beneath the rocky krantz
And know my home is made of grass,
My garment but a sack –
You think that I accept my lot
And have no cause to weep.
But tears secreted in the heart,
Flow only onto sacred hands
Of spirits never blind to human anguish.

Izinsimbi Zesonto

THE BELLS OF THE CHURCH

I hear the pealing of the bells
Which called to me when I was young:
Their volume grows, pursuing me
Down to the shore where crashing waves
Mingle their thunder with the chimes:
Thus, as sound envelops me,
Re-echoing with a fugal theme,
Its rhythmic chanting penetrates
The deep recesses of my heart.

O bells, you chime above the graves
And ash-pits where our fathers lie,
Where Zulu people loitered once
To gaze across the quiet bay
Where pale green waters stir like leaves
Whose boughs conceal a gliding mamba:
I gazed and shuddered: Had I weapons?
No! I knew I was unarmed.

Then running, I sought a place to hide,
For surely the earth must soon explode,
Though not with battle's shattering din,
For now there clanged no spears on shields;
Instead there boomed the white man's bells.
At first I listened sullenly,
My fury rising as they clanged:
Rage possessed me – then subsided:
Calmed, I rested on a stone.

Then, bells, my soul received your message:
It urged me to discard my loin-skin,
Wear these unfamiliar trousers
And other garments strange to me.
My weapons too, must be abandoned,
My smoking-horn enjoyed no longer.

Today, the most abased of mortals,
What is mine beneath the sun? –
Two eyes, two ears – but little else

To nourish and console my spirit,
For, when I use my mind to weigh
And analyse the things about me,
The actions of my white-skinned neighbours
Change what once had been my nature.

My present dims my past: I now accept
The white man's conquest of the Zulus.
Helplessly I watch his triumph
And stare at lofty walls that mock me,
Rising on this soil, O Zulus! –
Seeming to tower above the might
Of seas and even ancestors
Who, we believed, were giants of wisdom.

Ring out, O bells! for now I love
To listen to your joyous chimes
Heralding thus a bright new world,
Recalling the place where I was born
Which, from my birth, had held my heart –
Durban, fair city by the sea:
No love was this of man for maid –
You, Durban, claim my lasting love.

Yes, you I love like Mameyiguda
Who leads at Msizini¹ the Zulu dancers;
You, I love like Allison Champion²
Whose spell had once bewitched the white man;
You, like Ngazana Luthuli,³ I love –
Luthuli whose 'Ilanga' enlightened my people;
You, I love like Samvu's son⁴
Who understood the white man's healing.

So peal out loudly, white man's bells!
John Dube and his fellow teachers
Have given knowledge to the black man.
Your call is not to waken those
Who look on idly while they ring you:
You call to us who cower in darkness
Here where white men cast their shadows.
Peal out, O bells – the charge is yours!

The Valley of a Thousand Hills

The Zulu name for this valley, translated literally, would be: "Get out of the way that I may spread out my sleeping mat". This would be difficult as there is little level ground available on these almost countless hills.

KwaDedangendlale

THE VALLEY OF A THOUSAND HILLS

My memories bring back to me my home
Where rosily the rising sun
Gilds lofty mountains
And, when it sets, reddens the fading west
Till darkness falls
Accompanied by peace.
Out in the air, how deeply we can breathe,
Filling our nostrils,
Thrilling our bodies
With humid breezes from the sea.

Even in the country of the Qwabes,
I can recall that camel-thorns grew thickly
And hornets were as numerous as thorns.
There we built
Our rickety huts,
Encircled by the hills
Whose cliffs and rocks
Were shawled with mosses
Soft as fleeces
On a new-born lamb.

There we lolled
And chanted like the winds,
Or else we climbed the crags
Cleft by little rivers
Rushing forever downward
To reach the place of no return,
Called by the aged when they chatter,

“The sea of deepest mystery” –
Whose waves have heaved and roared
Throughout their lives.

I too once stood
Relaxed on Table Mountain,
And looking below,
Gazed at smoke that looms and fades:
Puzzled, I asked about its cause;
And then they whispered in my ear
And showed me how the haze appears
At Greytown first, and then like vapour spreads
To fade away beyond Mhlali
And north of Pietermaritzburg.

At first I thought: How marvellous! –
Seeing that countless rich green fields
Were filled with mealie-stalks
And ripening millet.
Doves and finches, singing in the branches,
Welcomed all this burgeoning:
And then my eyes were drawn
To higher slopes
Where tracks wound ever upwards.

Climbing there,
Were dark-skinned girls
With calabashes
Balanced on their heads,
Their bodies gleaming
Because of all the care they took
To win the praises of the tribe.
Behind these nubile maids
I noticed ox-tails raised on high
And saw the shields of strong young men.

I watched these courting couples,
Noticing how successful suitors
Were being adorned with beads.
Yet, though my heart was stirred by envy,
Much was there to comfort me;
For, when I looked at pools below,

I saw as well the grazing herds
Of goats and sheep.

Among them were the herd-boys
Turning them back,
Sending them home.
Then, as I gazed towards the sea
Where all was hazy in the mist,
I felt a pleasant breeze
That whispered softly in the trees
And soothed my thoughts: red in the west
The fading sun was sinking.

Decending, I strolled below
To see the shining river
Whose waters were alight,
And watched as in a mirror,
My own reflection quivering
Faintly in its depths:
Entranced I gazed, and felt content.
Afar, at Mlazi and Mkhomazi¹—
If you should travel to these rivers —
You too will see the things I saw
And feel your heart beat faster.

You too will see the iridescent waters
Lit by scattered stars
In skies of drifting clouds;
And, if you have a tranquil heart,
There you will rest and offer praise
To all your ancestral spirits
Who brought you up in Zululand,
Where beauty is unchanging,
Where streams are high with water,
Where grass is green forever.

The camel-thorns that flourish there,
Even in winter bear their fruit
Although the trees are bare of leaves
And seem to have no sap.
I too, one day, shall bear good fruit
And, like a palm tree, feel the weight
Of rich abundant clusters,



During the time that camel-thorns
Bloom in the land of the Zulus.

I too, one day, shall stand erect
Like mountains in the valley
Where tower a thousand hills.
The strange enchantment of their beauty
Caused a white man I was watching,
Driving too quickly on his way,
To stop his car
And leaving it, sit silent on a rock,
Light up his pipe, and smoking, gaze about him
Enraptured to the point of tears.

O, how frequently have I –
Intoxicated by these hills –
Wandered so far that none could find me,
Lost among those glorious valleys
Mantled by a wealth of flowers
Mingling the scent of water-lilies
With the lilies of Natal.
How lovely are the tranquil pools
Green with blossoms gently floating
Above the quiescent waters!

At times I wandered almost blindly
Through the heavy veils of mist.
In shadowy forests I glimpsed baboons
That startled me with raucous cries,
While from afar, the button-quails
Chirped their songs to one another
As joyously they serenaded twilight;
I heard as well the louder chorus
Of other forest birds and creatures.

I watched the night-jar watching me,
I heard his call and echoed it;
Then I lay beneath the moon
Upon my cosy bed of earth
Whose soft green grass became my blanket
And little grassy tufts, my pillow.
Head over heels I seemed to turn,
Gazing dizzily at the stars

That rose and fell: the Milky Way
Revolving with the turning earth.

Give me, I pray, a place like this –
O you spirits of my fathers! –
When I, one day, shall have the power
To glean the wisdom of the Zulus
And write about it in my books.
Then I shall chant our tribal songs,
Sung in victory by Shaka
Who crossed this valley of rolling hills
Until he reached the Drakensberg
And subjugated Langalibalele.²

Thus I recall the Zulu way of life
Familiar on the banks of the Thukela,
Which, when I went to Ndongakusuka,
Rejoiced me with its ancient customs.
I see the surrounding country-side
Where beauty sparkles like the day,
And lost to rest, at peace forever,
Asleep beneath the cool green palms
And, in the shelter of the thorn trees,
At last commune with hidden spirits.

O, blessed spirits who linger here! –
You lure me onwards to reach Ntshangwe³
And further still to Botha's Hill
And lands where Qadi⁴ tribesmen dwell.
There once I met the great John Dube
Whose words I drank so greedily
That even though my thirst was quenched,
I longed for more.
O, Valley of a Thousand Hills! –
Your legend haunts me; dreaming of you I gaze
Westward once more – towards my far-away home.

Imifula Yomhlaba

RIVERS

My mind is filled by dreams of rivers
Spreading out before me,
Rushing as though on human feet,
In lines widespread towards the sea.
I watch them all, entranced and awed,
As winding, widening, straightening,
They flow eternally, never at rest.
Sometimes I pause to sound their depths
And leaning upon my Zulu staff,
Long and strong and carved from wood,
I send it down through shallow water
Trying to reach the sandy bed.

My best-loved river is near my home:
How often I watched it before I left
My father's hut
To build a dwelling of my own!
This river glided through my dreams,
Shining before me as I slept,
Sighing softly sad forebodings
And warnings of my weaknesses;
It led me where trays of wood were spread
With corn and goodly things to eat;
It brought to mind the ancestral spear¹
Which, if I throw it, might never return.

Yet I would aim it at those who betray
The true descendants of my father –
Sons of Makhwatha's clan and Govu's.
Yes, I would aim it at those who rushed
To be enclosed by Johannesburg's walls;
And now how miserable they must be,
Deluded that living death is life
When only their will to live endures:
How low they have fallen, not ever to rise! –
A river of wretchedness faces them there,
Submerging its victims in tears of regret
And bitter suffering, self-inflicted.

Once, I remember how, in a dream,
I struck at the leaders of the clan
Whose sons were planning to destroy me;
And then I felt that giant wings
Had changed me to an eagle:
In flight I saw the Mvoti River,
The Hlimbithwa's and the Mthandeni's waters
At Makhovane dividing the tribe of Qwabe.²
There once, Mancinza's son, Bhambatha,³
Drank of these waters through a reed,
Then looked for men to aid his cause.
He fought and fled: the white men chased him,
And captured him soon in the Nkandla Forest.

My river! How often I followed your course
Towards the distant ocean!
Once seeing your waters were polluted
I, wondering what the cause might be,
Discovered the skulls of men
Like "lucky heaps of stones"⁴ piled high.
I knelt beside them, staring in horror,
And peered around me, stunned: in hazy twilight
The valleys and rivers were veiled by mist
Though well I knew the distant sea -
Boundless, clamorous, deeply blue -
Spread beyond the shrouded forests
And rankly tangled jungle.

Another dream revealed the Thukela River
That none has ever waded
For white men's skill alone can bridge it.
I saw once more within its depths,
Our long-haired, bearded enemies -
Whose broad-brimmed hats had crowned white faces -
Drowning with us - their black-skinned foes,
Whose ornamental tails and loin skins
Had floated long upon the waters;
And those who saw them among the reeds,
Stretched out fingers, pointing:
"Thus were found Langalibalele
And Zwide of the Ndwandwe tribe."

Further along the river's course,
Came rumours of dancing in the south:

I heard of Shaka at Dukuza,
I heard of Shaka at Mlambongwenya;⁵
I heard of Shaka at Bulawayo⁶—
And everything was seen by the Thukela!
Further north the Phongolo flowed,
And there indeed I felt perplexed,
Seeing it streaming towards the west!
Then, on a peak of the Bombo Mountains
Above the Mdedeleku,
I saw below the cliffs, the Orange River.

It too was flowing towards the west;
Crossed by herds of elephant,
Waded by the Hottentots
And tribes of little men smeared bright with ochre.
Silent and still, I hid behind some plum trees
Where hammer-heads were lurking
And no one dares disturb them.
I watched those strangely dwarf-like men
Who speak a foreign tongue,
Hide from me, then disappear
Into the caves beneath the cliffs.
I climbed a tree and rested there.

At times another dream took shape
And seeming to whisper in my car,
Enticed me from my blanket's warmth:
It showed me Retief and all his men⁷
Spreading across the entire land,
Scattering generations
Of children of the white man who, in future,
Would wash themselves in waters of the Orange,
Cleansing themselves of filth
While we, the peoples who are black,
Tainted by humiliation,
Should bear it like a foul disease
And live unclesed of our affliction.

Alas! How many of these rivers
Flow past crumbling ruins,
Neglected yards, and mealie-fields
Barren and deserted,
Where dongas, deepened by the rain,

Are bordered everywhere
By tangled weeds and bushes.
There the rivers sluggishly
Flow beside the roads,
Bearing the sands below
Forever towards the sea --
That place of no return.

Some of my rivers are mighty indeed!
The Mzimkhulu, the Thukela, the Phongolo,
All turning their backs upon the Orange
Which, flowing westward, winds to the Atlantic.
I, peering in those depths, see yet again
The waters reddening with blood;
And, as I gaze, I ponder sadly,
Haunted by a terrible vision:
Our fathers' fathers drowning, dying,
Their bodies torn by hailing bullets,
Clutching, as they died, their shields.

Musing thus on past events,
I walked along the sandy banks
Slowly, with a heavy tread;
Pausing, I filled my mouth with water
And stood there with a pounding heart
Watching the glittering stream unwind
As though a carpet were unrolled.
And then joy new-born I walked ahead,
Aware of confidence renewed,
Kicking the water with my feet,
Scattering it in myriad drops
Glittering with so bright a beauty,
My heart was filled with ecstasy.

And O, how many other rivers
Come to life within my soul
When I read and think about them!
I visualize the waters of the Thames
Where ships are bellowing like whales
When plunging through the surging waves
Spouting water from their nostrils.
I watch the graceful flight of birds
And bright blue herons soaring high,

Stretching out their long curved necks,
Spreading their wings in beauty.

One of these rivers of my dreams
Is wonderful and strange:
It flows where Indian peoples dwell
And gushes strongly from the mountains
Which tower upwards, ever higher –
We know them as the Himalayas.
Grouped where the river joins the ocean
Are poor old people, bent and shrivelled,
Bowing before their ancestors;
And these remind me of my home
At Groutville by the Mvoti River,
When families meet to greet another year.

O, how often I return
To these, the rivers of my dreams!
I follow, at times, the Egyptian Nile
Where, far-away from here, it issues
From the heart of Africa –
Our dark and mighty continent
Where first the earth gave birth to Man:



But he, departing from that place
And pressing ever further southward,
The river turned its back, offended,
And winding northwards, reached and blessed
The land of Ethiopia.

This so confused me that I paused
To stare, unsure, in all directions.
But soon my search revealed the Congo
And, as I followed its winding course,
I came across the wide-spread lakes
And saw the children of Nanana
At Kilimanjaro and Nyasa,
At Tanganyika and at Kivu.
Exploring further along those banks,
I noticed that at Zomba
Quite suddenly the river turned
To flow towards the east.

At last I reached the great Zambezi
And there I heard the tale of Manukuza⁸
Who had, when stabbed by Shaka, tried to flee,
Impaled by an assagai in his back.
I heard as well about Mzilikazi,
The son, so it is said, of Mashobana,
Who with a part of the Zulu force, decamped
And founded the tribe of the Ndebeles
And later made his home at Bulawayo.
Thinking of all these things I paused to rest
And happily my thoughts and feelings
Reviewed in retrospect my journeys.

Then, with my strength restored, I roved the forests
And saw how some receded, others spread,
While moving sands of all the rivers
Were swept inexorably towards the sea.
Above the trees, I watched the skies
As threatening storm-clouds gathered,
Darkening all the ocean's swaying waters
Whose swelling breakers rose, advanced
And chased each other tirelessly.
I gazed at all, transfixed with wonder,
Until I felt a shower of raindrops.

Everywhere the rain was falling:
Little rivulets appeared,
Flowing swiftly on their way
Like carefree children running towards a parent:
They cleansed the fields and open veld
As, washing leaves of bush and tree,
They buzzed more loudly than the flies
Seeking food in noisy swarms.
Sometimes they glided, quiet as thieves,
Tunnelling underneath the kloofs,
Finding their way through tangled plants
That creep and climb and spread.

Swelling, these streams unwound before me
And falling from heights in bright cascades,
Covered with swirling foam the rocks below.
How numerous were these waterfalls
That seemed to my astonished eyes
To be eternal cataracts of tears.
They made me think of Zululand
Where in profusion artichokes
Can flourish far-away from any river
And which, as they steam beneath the blazing sun,
Are watched like cooking-pots by hungry children
Impatient, with greedy watering mouths, to eat them.

And then I hear my own dear waterfall,
Greeting at dawn that giant ball, the sun:
Awake, I hear it rushing through the day
And racing never wearied, through the night
When darkness shrouds the drowsing earth
And every living creature is asleep.
I think how rain revives the thirsty soil
And brings to life again the arid fields:
O blessed rain! – the source of future rivers
Which, in my dreams, I hear and see
Winding through eternity.

Rivers and forests! – how they haunt my mind!
The multitudes of trees where countless streams –
Protected by the woods through which they flow –
All wander as they will, upon their way.
These guardian trees make sweet the forest air

And scatter fragrance on the waters
When spring in blossom, tempts with flowers
Greedy bees to suck their pollen
And butterflies to grace their petals,
Till night, transforming rivers into mirrors
Of liquid glass beneath the sky,
Reflects within their glittering depths, its stars.

O rivers, countless and eternal,
Flowing on your ways in beauty
With rippling, restless, radiant waters
Rushing forever towards the sea!
How often I gaze at you at night!
How often I watch you throughout the day!
I see you flowing in the moonlight,
I trace your meanderings in the sun:
Yet, though I watch incessantly,
None of you do I ever see
Openly gazing back at me.

Thus these rivers haunt me always,
Waking in my heart and soul
A never-failing ecstasy
And, with their flow, a flowing mind
That yet remains at peace.
I think of the lands through which there wind
Yet other rivers of delight:
But these – although they soothe my heart
And bring it solace when I sleep –
Arouse a nagging discontent
And longing for wonders yet unseen
Where rivers drift through lands of dreams.

Dear streams of fancy! – real till I return
Once more to watch the river near my home –
The river of my own ancestral spirits.
Well do I know it follows me each night! –
And did it not reveal to me that spear,
Warning me not to treat it lightly?
But now, O river of sleeping and waking dreams,
I finally have cast aside my spear! –
Thus, when I heard one day an ominous sound
And, on my guard, saw members of my clan

Waiting with intent to kill me,
All I could do was hurl them down the cliff
Where you, my guardian river, soon engulfed them.

Therefore I shall remain with you,
Dear river whose restless flow enticed me
To roam the world in search of happiness:
But when, after all my wanderings,
Weariness made me weak, you uttered warnings
And saved me from my enemies.
Ah, may you sweep them all away
Into the chasm of never-sated Death!
Because of you, all rivers have enslaved me
And everywhere on earth assuage my thirst
As I, with joy, inhale their scent of hemp
And kneeling beside them, praise the ancestral spirits.

UMamina

MAMINA — AN ODE TO THE MUSE

Come, Mamina!
Come with me
Into the distant wilderness
Where springs of water rise
That trickle over moss-green rocks
Slippery with slime!

Say not "No!" to me Mamina!
Come as though to draw some water,
Carry the calabash, go downstream,
And you will find me by the myrtles
Bowed beneath their weight of berries
Dark with oozing nectar!

Come, Mamina!
You alone can glow like gold
And all your ways are beautiful,
Adorned with shining flowers

Bowing their heads when you appear,
Paying you gentle homage.

Shall I pause, Mamina,
To rest upon the soft green verge?
I hear the grasses rustle
A greeting to you, Princess:
I am aware of distant echoes,
Miracles and colours.

Come, Mamina! –
You who reign as Queen within my heart
And linger always in my soul!
Veiled you are, yet like a torch
Dispelling darkness from a hut,
And lone you are – as lonely as a ship
Adrift on distant seas.

Where can you have gone, Mamina?
Seeking for you I grope,
But all my fingers grasp is air;
And yet you are imprisoned in my heart
To strengthen my resolve:
Stir, I feel you! Breathe, I hear!

Come, Mamina!
I can see your body swaying
Like a reed in rippling water;
Tiny are your head and neck
Like the forest's fearsome mamba,
Gliding, hidden by the branches.

Yes, Mamina!
Always when I feel your presence
You bring me thoughts of far Nongoma
Where girls are no less numerous
Than mushrooms springing from the earth.

Answer, Mamina!
Will you give yourself to me?
Your sweet surrender shall be a secret,
Known to you and me alone:
For me your beauty is the bud's,
Kissed by dew-drops in the darkness.

Yet, Mamina,
Not the dew and night alone
Adore you: our own Nomkhubulwana
Senses your presence by your fragrance
And folds you in her soft kaross
To hide you there for me.

Come, Mamina!
You gazed at me, you dusky maiden,
And I, bewildered, knew not where to hide;
My knees gave way, my weapons fell,
As new awareness entering my heart
Revealed to me the mystery of love.

Alas, Mamina!
Where shall I find the goal I seek?
Excitement brings me close to madness,
Yet I, though frenzied, cannot be insane:
A love-charm has transported me
And I am drunk, like birds on leonotis.

Thus at last, my song is born! –
I send it forth on wings of passing winds
To fill the ears of men till I am sated:
It floats on high, above the rising sun,
And sinks among the shadows of the forest
Where they are busy chasing fading sunbeams
Until the sun shall set.

Yes, always I must seek for you, Mamina,
And, as I search the grasses, tall, unburnt,
I feel my spirit is that grass
Wherein you wander freely,
Gathering berries and succulent leaves.

My song is not of shields and spears;
Its key-note is your own sweet pipe:
I heard it calling in the land of Shaka,
And listening in rapture to its tones,
I gazed upon your full dark lips
Coaxing your tuneful pipe to sing duets
With wild canaries of the forest.
Would that my heart could echo that refrain

And thus express its own imprisoned passion
That wears away my strength till I am puny
And feel no more a stalwart Zulu –
One of my nation's countless courageous sons!

Because of you, I proudly sit in council,
Deeming myself as one among the poets
Whose heads are crowned with laurel,
Whose names will live forever on the lips
Of each successive generation.
Because of you my soul is in a ferment!
Because of you I cannot be at peace!
Ah, let me kiss your hair,
Those tresses falling like a veil
To hide from me your face
Whose two bright stars reflect for me
Eyes of the Witch of Love.

Each glimpse of you has made me shy, confused,
A man no more, but timid as a girl.
I borrowed from Sonkomose's friends
A shield and ostrich plumes to make me smart,
Then armed with these, I courted you, Mamina.
To honour you I put upon my shoulders
Skins of the bush-buck doe with creamy tails,
And, on my head, those of the bush-buck ram.
I made for you a throne of plants,
Woven of reeds and rushes:
I left for you a pot of creamy yaourt
And aloe flowers to lie about your feet.

Fruits of the wild and berries are yours and mine,
And these I picked for you,
Squeezing the juice within your mouth
Of cordia-caffra and salacia.
With you I sauntered, with you I bathed
Beside the shores of glorious seas –
While water in a pot sufficed for others.
You ask me of this love of mine, Mamina,
This adoration drunk by you like water!
Mamina, O Royal Princess, how shall I answer? –
I only know its gift is from the spirits
Up in the sky, beneath the earth and ocean.

How often, when I watch young men who court you –
Approaching you with confidence and smiles,
Sidling towards you, swaggering,
Bedecked from head to foot with finery –
I – seeing them thus display themselves,
Their bodies arched like cats
Who sense, in fear, the presence of a dog –
Have felt the shadow of envy cloud my mind
And drain me of my powers;
But then your eyes, two never-fading stars,
Have heralded the dawn, dispersed the darkness,
And hearing your pipe once more, I come towards you.

Yes, Mamina, again I heard your call
Sounding softly from the shadows
While summer dusk was darkening the pools
Of Zululand, where the Mfolozis meet
And courting couples vanish as you play.
I sensed your presence, and Woodford's owl I heard
That, hooting on an ant-hill, sang your praises.
I paused, intently listening to your call
That sounded like the night-jar's cry
The while it feeds its children in the dusk.
Then, leaning on a stump, I asked myself:
“Can this consuming love endure forever?”

May passion give you eloquence, O my throat,
And never let a pipe of reeds excel you!
God gave me vocal chords, a tongue and lips,
O let them be articulate,
That haunting thoughts and strange insistent longings
Shall, like a spring, gush upwards from my soul!
For how shall I plead before the bar of heaven
To Him, His council and the ancestors,
If I have failed to voice the inspiration
And binding love you offered me on earth? –
Therefore I write of wonders all around me
And may you, blessed Muse, inspire my pen!

Yes, Mamina, I accept
The spirits' decree that I should bear this burden:
This knowledge haunts me – wakeful or asleep.
How often in my dreams I hear your voice,
Then waking, light a torch, sit up in bed,



And stretch my arms in longing to caress
Your shoulders gleaming near me.
Thus inspiration comes to me
And fills my heart and mind:
I seize my pen; a song is drifting earthwards –
I hear it falling downward from the skies
To take possession of my soul and voice.

So now I ask of you, Mamina –
You whom I know as one
Among these ancestral ghosts
Who haunt me, sleeping or awake –
Confused and ignorant I ask:
“Where can it be – the heaven of the spirits?”
The stars and awesome boundlessness of space
Content me for a while,
And drunk with joy, I rise and go
To watch the lizards clinging to the wall,
Reminding me of lovers who, embracing,
Are nonetheless the prey of doubt and fear.

Your strange obsession and my own, Mamina,
None can understand: diviners
Puzzle as they throw the bones,
Concoct their brews and cast their spells.
O, say you are not deluding me, Mamina!
As steadfastly I gaze within your eyes
Whose depths are fathomless, I question thus:
“Are you, as well, but one among the spirits?” –
Perchance you lost your way and, as you wandered,
Thought you had reached the gleaming gates of heaven,
Whereas in truth, you drifted to the earth,
And there were captured by the roots of love.

I saw you, freed you, lifted you,
And led you gently to the trickling spring
That dripped upon the rocks
Where slime had made them green.
I gave you nectar of the bees to drink
And then, as we sat beneath the tree of rooks,
We ate the berries of crippling indolence!
Alas, that I had tempted you to eat them! –
Our time thus lost, forgetfulness was all.

And yet it does not matter! – you will return
To lead me and present me to the spirits
To whom I shall sing our songs at last, Mamina.

Then shall my singing, inspired by you on earth,
Be clearly by you interpreted in heaven –
For well you know the tongues of men and angels:
These songs shall be of green and tranquil pools
Where you and I had knelt at peace
Till I, inspired by love of you,
Lured you towards the grasses, tall, unburnt,
Where you had played your pipe for me
While all the krantzes echoed it:
Then watching eyes were dazzled when they saw
A falling star that streaked towards the earth.

Come, Mamina,
Star of my very soul,
The only source of blood within my veins
To animate my heart!
The ways you clear are like the paths of field-mice
Wandering through the grasses far and wide.

Stay, Mamina!
I love your flowing gown,
Your veils that waken me to frenzy,
Your hair, which, as you braid it,
Puts to shame my finery
And makes of me a man who is possessed.

Come, Mamina!
Warm with a spark from heaven's hearth, your children!
Ah, let us gather fruits of the wild and berries –
That food the spirits eat,
Beyond the reach of those who idly dream
But which, on earth, you taught me how to savour.

Come, Mamina!
I, too long have been alone,
Seeking a refuge on this alien earth:
So lead me to your dwelling-place, Mamina,
To solve at last the mystery of love
And learn, Mamina, what the spirits know.

Mbuyazi at the Battle of Ndondakusuka

This poem praises Mbuyazi, son of Mpande, who contended with his brother Cetshwayo for the succession to the royal throne of the Zulus. Mbuyazi was killed with four of his brothers at the Battle of Ndondakusuka, on the banks of the Thukela River. Many Zulus believe the story that Manembe, a witch-doctor who favoured Cetshwayo, stole the shield of Mbuyazi and so bewitched it, that as long as Cetshwayo knelt on it, he would have ascendancy over Mbuyazi. During the battle, Cetshwayo did so and thus emerged victorious. The body of Mbuyazi was never found. It was thought to have been swept out to sea by the Thukela, at that time in flood.

UMbuyazi ENdondakusuka

MBUYAZI AT THE BATTLE OF NDONDAKUSUKA¹

“Advance, you brave warriors!
Mantantashiya,²
Come near me, my brother!
Attack, O you Gqozas,³ who never give way!
The fight is upon us, see it come closer!”
Mbuyazi⁴ spoke thus to rally the Gqozas,
Wielding his assagai,
Pointing ahead to dust slowly rising.

The dust drifted skywards:
I rubbed my eyes, staring,
And that which I saw made me weep.

“Advance, you brave fighters!
Mantantashiya, hear what I say!
My shield is too heavy, come, see for yourself
And say if in truth it is mine!
My curse on Manembe!⁵ He gave to Cetshwayo⁶
The charms to ensure that my shield would assist him,

Though I had been crowned by our father
Who chose me to be his successor.”

In terror, I stared yet again,
Then hastened to join in the conflict
And stab with my glittering spear.

“Advance, you brave warriors!
O, how my blood is on fire!
See how our enemies charge us!
Come, Mantantashiya,
Stand here at my shoulder
And I shall keep watch at your back.
Come! first we shall crawl, then twisting and turning,
We soon shall stand upright – and kill!”

Assagais flashed, for the fight had begun;
As one praised his shield for saving his life,
Another was wounded and died.

“Advance, you brave warriors!
See the Thukela
Is raging with currents
As strong as our ancestors!
Watch it uprooting the plants on its banks
And sweeping away giant branches and trees!
But shall it envelop the Gqozas? –
No, no, Hairy Elephant, never!”

Some shouted: “Take that! Look there, they are trapped!”
Some cried: “See them fleeing! Yes, yes, they are routed!”
The strong with the weak were tottering, falling.

At last I could look at the battlefield –
That field of destruction at Ndongakusuka –
Overcome, I felt dizzy and faint.
I stared at the men who, like me, had survived:
Not one of them handled his snuff-box.
And still, ever denser, I saw overhead
That static and thickening clouds
Were merging their darkness with death.
I spat magic medicine towards them
And jabbed at their throat my ancestral spear:
Then, seeing them fade, I gave thanks.

Ah, there is Manembe,
He kneels on a shield I know well,
For had I not seen it before, many times,
Used as a head-rest by him –
“Whose walk was as stiff as a warbler’s of the bush”?
You stole, O Manembe, the shield of Mbuyazi,
Yes, dragging it down from the roof of the hut,
You then, for Cetshwayo, bewitched it:
And thus you deceived Mbuyazi; you lured him
To battle’s disaster and final defeat
When, losing their courage, his armies retreated.
You shunned open veld where acacia trees grow
And lured, as you hurried towards the Thukela,
The son of your king:
You made him faint-hearted, afraid to confront you;
As you, with black magic, bewitched him.

You led him to pools where the elephants once
Had snatched from Nanana⁷ her children:
Nanana who lived near the main beaten track,
Secure in her strength and belief in the power
Selesele, her father, had won.
And when, to the cliffs of Dlokweni⁸ you lured him,
Soon warriors’ loin-skins and head-rings were sinking
And vultures were hovering, waiting.

Today, about Ndongakusuka,
There drifts a constant mist
That covers the field like a shroud;
It falls from above, floats up from below,
And blades of the grasses whisper
Where stalks of withered flowers
That once had blossomed in beauty
Have shrivelled to dust and death.

The howl of the blast is mournful –
It rustles the grasses with sighs,
And I am alone with the wind-beaten trees
Whose branches and leaves wave wildly:
And everything seems to be searching, bewildered,
Where nothing survives but suspicion
And fear of the fate of Mbuyazi
That none seems to know – for no one will speak.

I questioned the riverside otters,
And spoke to the crocodiles too:
Of all living things I implored a reply,
But each one ignored me and all seemed to gape.
The fishes alone showed compassion
As though they would soothe me with tears.
At last I turned back in frustration:
Despairing, I rested and gritted my teeth.

That night I – a stranger to sleep –
Peeped through the gaps in the reeds,
And staring above at the great rounded moon,
Saw in its glimmer a woman
Who bore on her head a bundle of wood.
I questioned her also, she spread out her hands
And pointed: I gazed at the bright Milky Way
Which scattered through heaven its stars.

Then suddenly one, an Unknown, approached me
Aware of my plight, amazed at my rashness,
He spoke – and I showed him the whites of my eyes!
I felt he was tenderly stroking my back:
He roused my drowsing spirit.
I stretched out my hands and groped with my fingers;
Then strangely and swiftly, my brain became clear
And showed me a glimpse of the truth.

I felt on my shoulders were growing
Light embryonic wings:
I knew a sudden urge to fly
High in the air among the clouds
To search the world of stars.
It seemed I was weaving a measureless rope
And would, with its help, join the spirits
Who dwelt in the pastures of heaven;
Unheralded, swiftly I rose to my goal
Where surely my prayer would be answered.

I felt I need question no longer:
The eyes of the stranger drew mine – I gazed round me;
The stars seemed to know what I sought
And answered my anguish with tears
That dimmed their golden eyes.

I, cupping my hands, held them out:
They suddenly stiffened and froze
As they the untouchable touched.

I thought of earth, where vessels I held
Had brimmed with the tears of widows and orphans
Who wept till, exhausted by sorrow,
Their only desire was death.
And now I seemed to feel those tears
Like burning rain upon me:
But weeping stars bewildered me
And even now I am baffled.

Fearful and helpless I trembled
And, as I gazed about me,
I felt the beating of my heart
Thumping against my ribs
As though my lungs would burst.
I turned in longing towards the earth
And seeing an arm that beckoned,
I thought: Where now must I go?

I felt my own two frozen hands
Were trying to restrain me,
But wings were fluttering urgently
Upon my trembling shoulders.
Thus I returned once more to earth
And, as I floated, a gentle rain
Was covering me with drops:
Without volition I drifted downwards.

I landed on a verdant plot,
And blinking my eyes, saw once again
The dawn about to break,
The night on wings departing,
Leaving the world to new-born light
That soon would warm the utmost depths
Of frozen earth. I saw myself
Lying upon the dew-drenched grass.

O how often I had watched
The dews of summer change to winter's frost,
And climbing a hill had found the summit

Shrouded by storm-clouds dark with rain
Transformed before my eyes to snow.
Today I can accept these wonders,
For had my hands not once been frozen
By tear-drops of the stars
Falling upon my quivering wings?

All people, including mine – the Zulu nation –
Marvel at earthly miracles;
The clans and tribes are constantly astounded,
The Milky Way and galaxies astonished,
The great Thukela's crashing cataracts
Amazed by fragile minuteness of dew-drops –
And yet, despite these wonders, none may learn
The whereabouts of Mbuyazi's bones.
Therefore I search the valleys and the bushveld,
Crying always: "Where are the bones I seek –
The Hairy Elephant's bones? – Ah help me find them!"

Thus I explore the heavens and the earth,
Thus do I search the air, the land, the waters,
Forever seeking, forever in despair.
At graves of kings, ruled by the dead, I cried:
"O, tell me where to find you, mighty spirits! –
Long have we sought for one among your numbers,
Yes, high and low we have searched to no avail;
Yet only his bones we seek, for these alone
Would be for us enough, and we should gaze
With reverence upon them, in the hut
Where vessels and mats would screen them and
protect them.

O spirits, these bones might tell us where to find you,
And lead us to Shaka – famed in our history –
To Mantantashiya and Mbopha we could speak,
And chant the praises of our mighty heroes –
Men like Mvundlane – Menziwa's son – and Jeqc.⁹
Then we, rejoicing, never need ask again:
'O, Hairy Elephant, where can we find your bones?'

Ezinkomponi

THE GOLD MINES

Roar and clang, you machines of the mines,
Roar from dawn till darkness falls;
I shall wake, O let me be!
Roar, machines, continue deaf
To black men groaning as they labour,
Tortured by their aching muscles,
Gasping in the fetid air,
Reeking from the dirt and sweat,
Shaking their bodies desperately.

Bellow you frenzied bulls of steel!
Far is that place where first you came to life
And – roasted by fiery furnaces
Until you were ready and only ash remained –
Were quickly dispatched, and having crossed the sea
Were loaded on trucks, for puffing fuming engines
To bring you to Goli,¹ place of gold, and us.
Loudly you bellowed, till we, like frightened dassies
Swarming towards you, answered your strident summons.

These dassies, each and all, were black,
And, shorn of their tails, you captured them;
Then you pushed them down the mine,
Exploited them and drained their strength.
Turn you tireless wheels of steel!
I know you did not choose to come
And cause us all this drudgery.
For you no less enslaved, must toil and roar
Till, one by one, worn out you rot
On some neglected rubbish plot.

Sometimes, as I walk along the road,
I turn to look at you and wonder
If you as well beget each other,
Increase and multiply! – How vain a thought!
Yet we are brothers, for we like you, must rot,
Be shattered and exploited in the mines
Until, with damaged lungs and ebbing strength
We cough without relief, collapse and die.
But you are spared that fatal coughing – Why?

Around the noisy compounds of the mines,
We hear that black men born of many tribes
Had come to raise these great white dumps,
Astounding to their ancestors.
Yes, when a siren screeched one day
A poor black dassie heard its call
And answering its summons, in confusion
Was trapped, and then, transformed into a mole,
Was forced to burrow deep and search for gold.

Soon swarms of puzzled dassies came to join it;
Then swiftly rose the great white dumps:
Deep were the holes and high the hills –
Sandlwana itself is now no higher!
Sweating I climb them, reach the top
And watch the dust like clouds of smoke
Where mists of fine white sand are blown:



I see them swirling there beneath me
Forever obscuring the sullied earth.

Roar and clang, you machines of the mines!
Thunder loudly and louder yet,
Drown our voices with your clamour,
Stifle our cries and groans of pain
The while you eat away our joints.
Mock us, old tyrants, callous and mighty,
Let our sufferings cause your laughter!
Too well we know your terrible powers,
For you are the masters – we the slaves!

When we agreed to leave our huts,
Be herded like oxen, forget we are men,
We left our mealies and creamy milk
To eat this lumpy, soggy porridge.
Our manhood diminished and known as 'boys',
We all must acknowledge our world has changed;
Now, wakened at dawn, we stand in lines,
Thinking – how strange to be interred,
Open-eyed creatures buried alive!

Roar, as you will, machines of the mines!
I am awake and never dawdle;
See I am going underground
To shatter the rock-face with my pick;
And you above, though hearing nothing,
Will know I wield the white man's drill
Because you see the little trolleys
Filled with stones of white and green.

My brother also carries a pick,
Heaves a spade upon his shoulder,
Drags on his feet a miner's boots
And enters the shaft to follow me.
The earth soon swallows us who burrow,
And, if I perish underground,
What does it matter, who am I?
Day after day, O, fellow men! –
I, helpless, watch my brothers collapse.

Where I have come from, far away,
The lands are free of towering buildings

Whose tops I stretch my neck to see;
But when I return there, clutching my bundle,
All I can find are shrivelled stalks
And empty huts: I scratch my head
And ask about my family.
They answer: "Ask your white employer!" –
I close my mouth in weary silence.

Roar, still louder, machines of the mines!
Though far away in Germiston,
Your clamour penetrates my soul
And echoes in my ears
Like distant bells of booming brass;
They bring to mind the giant buildings
Owned by men enriched by me
Who daily exploit my sweated toil,
While I, the proverbial church mouse, starve.

Yet, thunder more softly, you harsh machines!
Because the white man's heart is stone,
Must you be pitiless too, O steel?
Silence your uproar in the mines
And listen, I beg you, to all our pleas,
Or else we too may have no pity
When, on that day the future hides,
We cry at last: "O things of iron,
You are the slaves of black men now!"

Beware! Though now my hands are empty,
These puny arms, in days gone by,
Wielded the fatal assagais,
Which as we hurled them, darkened the earth.
Great Queen Victoria's realm was shaken,
Paul Kruger's soldiers terrified –
And yet we were defeated!
But still I dream – O steel contraptions! –
That lands our fathers once possessed
Shall, by their sons be ruled again.

Today I have no place to rest
Beneath dark clouds of alien power;
Our fathers' fields lie barren now,
Untilled by men all cowed like me.

For even if I owned great wealth,
This land my father's fathers owned,
I never may purchase or possess.
O, mighty spirits of heaven and earth! –
Will you not end this vile oppression?

Down in our fathers' resting place
Where you, our ancestral spirits dwell,
They say your powers are unsurpassed
When you commune with God
Who sees the man – but not his colour!
Here, earth is reddened with my blood
That clots and dries in savage heat
While I, exhausted, pray to you –
But hear no echo in reply.

O see how day by day this land
Is being plundered by those who seized it –
These foreigners who enrich themselves
While I and my deprived black brothers
Are landless, penniless, empty-handed!
Above the mine-pits grass is green,
Vivid as heaven's blest horizon,
Where dwell the spirits to whom we pray –
But they, alas, are silent still!

How loud your roar, machines of the mines!
My hands are torn,
My feet are swollen,
They throb, but where are remedies? –
White men's medicines cost much money!
Hush, you machines, and spare my ears!
Well have I served my rich white masters, –
But O my soul is heavy within me!

Subdue your thunder! I long to sleep,
Close tight my eyes, hear nothing more,
And dread no longer tomorrow's dawn.
I yearn to sleep and wake afar
Where I may know among the spirits,
Repose unmarred by earthly turmoil,
When I, enwrapped by ancestral arms,
Shall rest at last in heaven's own green pastures.

Now I Can Accept . . .

This is a later version of the poem "Sengiyokholwa-ke" (I shall believe . . .). In these verses, Vilakazi has changed his attitude to his father's death and is at last reconciled to his loss.

Sengiyakholwa

NOW I CAN ACCEPT . . .

Today I can accept that you have died:
Yet, while the sun is lighting up the earth
And morning shows me grazing flocks and herds
Swishing their flanks with bushy tails
As white as our Mhlali cows at home,
I nonetheless, retain the taste of sorrow.
Now I believe in truth that you have died!
The death of Mandlakayise tortured me,
For all my pleas to see him were in vain
Although my kindred wept in sympathy:
At last I saw him, rigid as they dressed him,
And watched a frightful dream take shape in daylight.

For Nomasomi too, it was the same:
Her eyes, once stars, no longer shone,
And she was cold and never could be warmed.
Helplessly then, I stood with trembling arms,
Watching the shadow of death above her face
Clouding for me her once unrivalled beauty.

O, how can I not believe that you have died?
Your presence had been so vivid to me always,
So clear those vanished years whose paths you trod!
When you had gone, the door remained unlatched,
That all who were overspent might follow you,
Not knowing that they should nevermore return.

No! nevermore, O hero of Mzwangedwa!¹-
They said farewell, and I remained alone.

Some I have buried deep at Gulukudela²
Where stillness and the darkness have enclosed them.
I dug the graves of others at Mhlathuzane
Where all are gently tended by the nuns.
How clearly I hear the bells of angels ringing,
Summoning them at dawn's first light, to prayer!
How clearly I see them when the sun is sinking
And all the surrounding hills are dyed with crimson!

Yes, red are the cliffs at lower Mhlathuzane! –
When shadows were enveloping the light
I stood where, underneath a fig tree's shade,
Lay Father Francis, once our noble mentor –
And heard a voice cry: "Ring the Angelus!" –
Winter and summer that summons never fails.

Today, these things convince me you have died
And now, as well, I see my head is losing
The hair of youth; I watch it growing grey,
Giving me dignity, the mark of age
Which you had shown when you were grey and weary,
When gradually your spark of life was dimmed
And, as I watched you, slowly was extinguished.

Thus I believe at last that you have died.
How often in my sleep I see you now,
Coming towards me, calm in spirit,
To guide me where the gates and fords of wisdom
Lead to the paths of ripeness and perception.
I hear your familiar walking-stick
Tapping before me, though I cannot see you,
For I, with merely mortal eyes, am blind.
Yes, now I must accept that you have died –
Vanished and gone away from me forever.

Explanatory
Notes

Explanatory Notes

BHAMBATHA, GRANDSON OF MAKHWATHA — PAGE XXI

- ¹ Bhambatha — Vilakazi's Zulu name, was given to him by his father, because he was born in 1906 during the Bhambatha Rebellion which was caused by the government of the day imposing a poll-tax on all adult male Zulus.
- ² Makhwatha — Vilakazi's grandfather.
- ³ "Lightning through time has struck at the acacia" — Zulus believe that the mimosa or thorn-tree attracts thunderbolts. There is a saying that illustrates this: *Lidume ladla umunga, ladla umtholo*, which means "It thundered and struck the thorn-tree, and acacia". This indicates possibly fatal consequences of thunderbolts.
- ⁴ Magolwane — Dingane's singer of praises who was renowned for his gift in this art.
- ⁵ Dingane (Dingaan) — the Zulu king notorious for his treachery.
- ⁶ Mshefane — Vilakazi was known by this name when he taught for a short time at the Ohlange Institute, in 1935. It refers to a prominent gap in his upper front teeth.
- ⁷ "Despite your name" — the surname Vilakazi, rendered as a noun *ivilakazi*, means "an extremely lazy person". Dr Vilakazi's personality and achievements prove the opposite of all this name implies.

THE XHOSA CALAMITY — 1856 — PAGE 5

- ¹ Kreli — the eldest son of the Gcaleka chief, Hintsa.
- ² Sandile — the son of the Rarabe chief, Gaika.
- ³ Mhlakaza's daughter — refers to Nongqawuze (Nonquassi). In actual fact, Nongqawuze's father was Mhlanhla. She was brought up by Mhlakaza after his younger brother's death.
- ⁴ Old Mthontela — a servant of Chief Mhlanumpofu Luthuli of Groutville. He was a feeble old man who was Vilakazi's favourite story-teller.
- ⁵ Mlanjeni — the witch-doctor of the Ndlambe tribe.
- ⁶ Tsili — the chief of the Tola clan.
- ⁷ Ndlambe — the second son of Rarabe, chief of the Rarabe tribe, who acted as regent during Gaika's minority.
- ⁸ Makana — the executioner of the Rarabe tribe.
- ⁹ Linda — the hero who distinguished himself at the Battle of Amalinda which was fought on the Debe Flats near Alice in the Cape Province in 1818.

- 10 Amabele — the name of the junction on the railway line to Umtata in the Transkei.
- 11 Nqamakwe — a village near Butterworth in the Transkei.
- 12 Malinda — the battlefield at Amalinda.
- 13 Bokwe — Dr Rosebery T. Bokwe, a doctor in Middledrift in the Cape Province.
- 14 Jabavu — Professor D.D.T. Jabavu who was educated at the University of London where he became a Bachelor of Arts — the first black South African to obtain this English degree.
- 15 Tshiwo — the chief of one of the Xhosa tribes.
- 16 Menziwa — the chief of the Fingo tribe.
- 17 Hahabe (Rarabe) — the father of Ndlambe and grandfather of Gaika.
- 18 Nukwa — the younger brother of Ndlambe.
- 19 Suthu — Sandile's mother.
- 20 Hintsa — the senior chief of the Gcaleka tribe.
- 21 Qonce and Monti — the Xhosa names for Queenstown and East London.

SONKOMOSE'S BEER-POT — PAGE 10

- 1 The Mzwangedwa tribe — occupies the inland territory between Stanger and Groutville. The Qwabe chief's Great Place is called Mzwangedwa in the Mvoti district.
- 2 Sonkomose — Vilakazi's great-grandfather.
- 3 Mkhwethu — Mkhwethu Gumede — the chief of the Qwabe tribe in the Mvoti district who was a close friend of Makhwatha, Vilakazi's grandfather. Makhwatha was Mkhwethu's headman.
- 4 Nkombose — Vilakazi's eldest sister.
- 5 "Surrounder of the Hills" — a praise-name for Vilakazi's grandfather, Makhwatha, who occupied much territory in the neighbourhood of Memorial in the Mzwangedwa area.
- 6 Mzilikazi (Moselikatse) — a Zulu general under Shaka, who, with his army broke away from his king, and advancing northwards, founded the Matabele (amaNdebele) tribe in Rhodesia. They were renowned as warriors who "stained the grass with blood". Mzilikazi was a member of the Khumalo clan and his father was Mashobana.
- 7 Qwabe — the brother of Zulu. When their father Malandela died, both brothers made the claim of being his heir. The matter was settled amicably by Qwabe who moved away with his followers and formed the Qwabe tribe. The Vilakazi clan owed allegiance to early Qwabe chiefs.

HAIL WIND! — PAGE 12

- 1 The Ngangas (amaNganga) — famed for the solidity of their huts.

THE LARK — PAGE 14

- ¹ Cele, Frances — a well-known musician of the 1920s.
- ² Caluza, Reuben T. — a Zulu choirmaster and composer of many published Zulu songs. He studied music in America.

THE VICTORIA FALLS — PAGE 17

- ¹ Sibungu's rock — Vilakazi likens the overhanging rocks of the Victoria Falls to those of the Durban Bluff called, in Zulu, iSibubulungu.

COME, MONSTER OF STEEL! — PAGE 19

- ¹ Water-kelpies — a rendering of the Zulu name *otokoloshe*, denoting a fabulous water-sprite or kelpy, alleged to haunt certain rivers and to be fond of women. They are seen only by mischievous children and are said to be of service to aid witches in their nefarious purposes. These kelpies are believed to resemble hairy male dwarfs.
- ² Thukela (Tugela) — the largest river in Natal.
- ³ The Vendas and the Tshopis (Chopis) — native tribes who inhabit the Northern Transvaal. They contribute cheap labour to the gold mines on the Witwatersrand and elsewhere.
- ⁴ Mameyiguda — the leader of the Zulu traditional dancers who performed for tourists at the Somtseu Sports Grounds in Durban.
- ⁵ Mfolozi (Umfolozi) — there are two rivers of this name in Zululand: the Black Mfolozi and the White Mfolozi.

WEEP, YOU ZULUS! — PAGE 21

- ¹ Suthu (Usutu) — a regiment established by the Zulu king, Cetshwayo. The name originated with him because he was the leader of the uSuthu faction, as opposed to the iziGqoza faction, under Mbuyazi.
- ² Mandlakazi — a powerful clan of the Zulu nation which was formerly ruled by Zibhebhu, a chief who fought against Cetshwayo at oNdini in 1883.
- ³ Ndongakusuka — the Battle of Ndongakusuka in 1856.
- ⁴ Senzangakhona — Shaka's father.
- ⁵ Cetshwayo (Cetewayo) — the last of the independent Zulu kings. He died in 1884.
- ⁶ Mbuyazi (Mbulazi or Mbuyazwe) — Cetshwayo's half-brother.
- ⁷ Sihayo — Cetshwayo's trusted councillor who was killed at oNdini when Zibhebhu attacked the king's Great Royal Place.
- ⁸ Sandlwana (Isandhlwana) — the name of a hill in Zululand where the British forces were defeated by the Zulu army in 1879.
- ⁹ "The great Bird" — refers to Cetshwayo.
- ¹⁰ Qwabe (abakwaQwabe) — one of the largest Zulu tribes.

- ¹¹ Dinuzulu — Cetshwayo's son who died in 1913.
- ¹² Sikhwebezi — Dinuzulu's Great Royal Place.
- ¹³ Mahhashini — another Great Royal Place of Dinuzulu, later occupied by his son, Solomon.
- ¹⁴ Nongoma — a town in Zululand. In its magisterial area live the ruling uSuthu clan and the reigning *Ingonyama*, "king".
- ¹⁵ Madlokovu — the praise-name of Dinuzulu.
- ¹⁶ Sobantu — the name by which William Colenso, Bishop of Natal, was known to the Zulus.
- ¹⁷ Solomon — the son of Dinuzulu. His other names were Nkayishana Maphumuzana. He died in 1933. His son, Cyprian Nyangayezizwe Bhkuzulu, succeeded him. Goodwill Zwelithini succeeded his father, Cyprian, in 1971.
- ¹⁸ The school referred to is the Zulu National Training College, renamed Bhkuzulu College, which was established by Solomon for the education of the sons of chiefs and headmen.
- ¹⁹ "The journalists writing in Durban" — this refers to a lawsuit in which the proprietors of the Zulu weekly, *Ilanga laseNatal*, were sued for libel by Mr S. E. Marwick whose Zulu name was Muhle, meaning "good". This journal, because of Mr Marwick's attitude towards Solomon, had referred to him as Mubi, meaning "bad".
- ²⁰ "The Lion" — in Zulu, *Ingonyama*, refers to Solomon.
- ²¹ "O mighty ruler" — refers to Solomon.
- ²² Dukuza — now Stanger, where Shaka's monument stands.
- ²³ "Mdima from Mgovu" — areas adjacent to Stanger. Mdima and Mgovu were headmen during the reign of Shaka.
- ²⁴ The year referred to is 1932.
- ²⁵ "Peacemaker" — refers to Solomon.
- ²⁶ Nkandla — the belt of forests where Cetshwayo and other Zulu kings are buried.
- ²⁷ Monase — the favourite wife of Mpande.
- ²⁸ Qulusi (abcQulusi) — the tribe which was administered by Shaka's paternal aunt, Mnkabayi.
- ²⁹ "Zulus' Inkatha" — the inner council known as *Inkatha kaZulu*. Usually the *inkatha* is a secret national emblem designed to ensure the continued solidarity of the nation and the loyalty of its councillors to the *Ingonyama*. But during Solomon's royal leadership, its symbolic character was changed. It became a covenant between the *Ingonyama* and the chiefs in Natal and Zululand. This enabled him with the aid of contributions made to a central fund, known as *Inkatha kaZulu*, to carry out certain national projects such as the building of a school for the education of the sons of chiefs and the purchase of land for allocation to his landless subjects.
- ³⁰ "A king" — refers to Solomon.

- ³¹ "Son of Ndabuko" — refers to Mnyayiza who was the son of Ndabuko and the grandson of Cetshwayo. He was the most senior and influential member of the inner council, *Inkatha kaZulu*.
- ³² John Dube — The Reverend John Langalibalele Dube (popularly known as Mafukuzela), the founder of a college for Africans called the Ohlange Institute, which is situated near Durban. He established also the Zulu weekly which he named *Ilanga laseNatal*, "The Natal Sun". He was educated at the Oberlin University in America and has hitherto remained the only black man to have been awarded an honorary doctorate in philosophy by the University of South Africa. He won the award for his distinguished contribution to the education of his people. He was a member of Solomon's *Inkatha kaZulu* and belonged to the Qadi (amaQadi) tribe.
- ³³ Bhulose, W. F. — was a member of Solomon's *Inkatha kaZulu*.

SING THAT I MAY HEAR! — PAGE 30

- ¹ "The mythical Familiar Spirit" — in the original, the word *isidawana* is used. It may be translated as "a small animal used by witches". Witches were believed to employ weasels, wild cats, kelpies such as the *otokoloshe*, and even baboons, to aid their nefarious purposes.
- ² Nomkhubulwana — the Zulu goddess of rain and harvests.

I HEAR A SINGING . . . — PAGE 33

- ¹ Ngungunyana — one of the notable chiefs of the Shangané tribe.
- ² "Vendas of Thobela" — Thobela was one of the early chiefs of the Venda tribe.

THE MUSE OF LEARNING — PAGE 34

- ¹ "Peoples of the Bombo" (Ubombo) — refers to the Swazi people. The Drakensberg mountain ranges extend to the borders of Swaziland, and are known as the Lubombo Mountains.
- ² Magudu (amaGudu or Magut) — a range of mountains near the Phongolo River. The Thonga clans inhabit this area.
- ³ Zimbabwe — the famous ruins in Rhodesia. The Matabele of Mzilikazi and other tribes live not far from the ruins.
- ⁴ Basutoland — renamed Lesotho, an independent kingdom which is inhabited by the Sotho people (abeSuthu).
- ⁵ Ndaba — the Zulu king who was the grandfather of Senzangakhona, Shaka's father.

SHAKA, SON OF SENZANGAKHONA — PAGE 35

- ¹ Phunga — one of the seventeenth-century Zulu kings.
- ² Jama — the father of Senzangakhona.
- ³ Zwide — the founder of the powerful Ndwandwe tribe and its first chief. He was subdued by Shaka.

- ⁴ Matiwan — the chief of the Ngwane (amaNgwane) tribe.
- ⁵ "Your mother" — refers to Shaka's mother, Nandi.
- ⁶ Mavela — the chief of the Nkomo clan.
- ⁷ Soshangane — the founder of the Shangane (amaShangane or Shangaan) tribe.
- ⁸ Nxaba — the chief of the Msane clan who was driven out of Zululand by Shaka.
- ⁹ Mshweshwe (Moshesh or Moshoeshoe) — the founder of the Sotho nation and its first king.
- ¹⁰ Thaba Bosiu — Mshweshwe's stronghold in Basutoland.
- ¹¹ The Kgatla and the Pedi — Sotho-speaking tribes living in the Northern Transvaal.
- ¹² Faku — the Phondo chief who was attacked by Shaka.
- ¹³ Cezana — a place-name in Zululand.
- ¹⁴ Nodwengu — Mpande's Great Royal Place on the White Mfolozi River.
- ¹⁵ Farewell — Lieutenant F.G. Farewell, R.N., one of the early traders and settlers who came to Port Natal (Durban) in 1824.
- ¹⁶ The Wombes (amaWombe) — the name of one of Shaka's regiments.
- ¹⁷ Mhlongos (abakwaMhlongo) — the clan name of the Langeni tribe from which Shaka's mother, Nandi, came.
- ¹⁸ "The Hoe" — the Zulu word *iLembe*, meaning "The Hoe", is taken from the praises of Shaka in which he is described as "The Hoe that surpasses all other hoes", meaning, "The hero who surpasses all other heroes".
- ¹⁹ "Son of Nungwane" — a praise-name for Senzangakhona, Shaka's father.
- ²⁰ "The River Mona" — a small stream near Nongoma in Zululand.
- ²¹ Msweli (abakwaMsweli) — a Zulu sub-clan well liked by Shaka.
- ²² "The coming of the swallows" — the early settlers in Natal, who were the first white men to communicate with Shaka, built their houses of wattle and daub. The Zulus referred to them as "the swallows who build with mud". The incident alluded to here, is Shaka's assassination by his brothers Dingane and Mhlangana in 1828. As his life-blood was ebbing, he is reported to have said: "You think you will rule this country, but I see the coming of the swallows who build with mud, and they will become your masters."
- ²³ "At Kuqobokeni" — the Great Place of the Ndwandwe chief, Zwide.

THE HISTORIC HOME OF GROUT — PAGE 43

- ¹ "The Makhabenis'" (abakwaMakhabeni) — the territory occupied by the Makhabeni clan. Makhabeni Nyongo was the first convert of the Reverend Alden Grout.

- 3 "The Ndlovus" (abakwaNdlovu) — the territory occupied by the Ndlovu clan. Ndlovu, after whom the clan is named, was a rich man by Zulu standards, because he owned many herds of cattle and stored much food.
- 3 Mvoti — the river near Groutville.
- 4 Menzi's son — refers to Shaka. Menzi was Senzangakhona's praise-name.
- 5 Zenzeleni, Mnyundwini and Manzasengwa — inland territory between Stanger and Groutville.
- 6 Nxabas (abakwaNxaba) — one of the prominent Christian Zulu families at Groutville. Nxaba was a headman.
- 7 Ntaba and Mqwebu — leading Christian families at Groutville. Ntaba Luthuli, son of Madunjini, a chief who was the great-grandfather of Albert John Luthuli, also a chief who became a prominent Zulu political leader. Chief Albert Luthuli won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1961. He died in 1967. Mqwebu Khuzwayo was a headman.
- 8 "At Nkobongo near Mhlali" — Nkobongo is a tributary of the Mhlali (Umhlali) River, near Groutville.
- 9 "At Govu and Mkhwethu" — places named after Govu Vilakazi, the poet's great-grandfather who was a headman and Mkhwethu Khuzwayo who also was a headman.
- 10 Bantukabezwa — Bantukabezwa Mvuyana was Mkhwethu Gumede's headman and a close friend of Makhwatha. He was the father of Vilakazi's mother-in-law.
- 11 Noqhomela — the Zulu name for a neighbouring white sugar-cane farmer.
- 12 Mbopha — an accomplice of Dingane and Mhlangana who assassinated Shaka. Mbopha was Shaka's senior councillor and trusted friend.
- 13 Mbuyazi of Durban — the Zulu name for Henry Francis Fynn was Mbuyazi weTheku.
- 14 Febana kaMjoji was the Zulu name for Lieutenant F.G. Farewell. Mjoji was the Zulu name of King George IV of England.
- 15 Dumase, Wohlo and Phobana — the Zulu names of Thomas Halstead, Henry Ogle and Francis W. Fynn.
- 16 Mhlophe was used by Shaka to spy on the white men's camp in Durban where Berea is now situated.
- 17 Nobamba — the Great Royal Place of Shaka's father Senzangakhona, in the Babanango district in Zululand, where Senzangakhona was buried.
- 18 Mgungundlovu — the Great Royal Place of Dingane on the Mkhumbane River in Zululand. Mgungundlovu is also the Zulu name for Pietermaritzburg.
- 19 Sobhuza (Sobhuza I) — a king of the Swazi nation.
- 20 Hangu and Manombe — are places named after Hangu Khuzwayo and Manombe Zungu, who were headmen.

- ²¹ The Mthimkhulus — the Reverend A.S. Mthimkhulu, who was one of those who defected from the established Methodist Church and later became president of the Bantu Methodist Church. His youngest son was the Zulu educationist, Dr D.G. Mthimkhulu, who gained his degrees in America and South Africa. The Mthimkhulus came from Indaleni, in Natal.
- ²² Makobosi — Makobosi Dimba was the grandfather of Walter Dimba who was trained as a priest in America.

THE GRAVE OF SHAKA — PAGE 48

- ¹ "O Zulu!" — refers to Shaka.
- ² "Suthu kings" — the Zulu kings who belong to the uSuthu clan and royal house are Cetshwayo, Dinuzulu and Solomon. It could be surmised that Vilakazi had in mind other Zulu kings before and after Shaka's reign.
- ³ Nyuswa (abakwaNyuswa) — one of the main Zulu tribes under their founder of that name. During Shaka's reign, Sihayo was the chief of the Nyuswa tribe. The women of the Nongabi clan derided Shaka before he became a king.
- ⁴ Mavela — the chief of the Nkomo clan.
- ⁵ The Mthethwas (abakwaMthethwa) — one of the main Zulu tribes ruled by Xaba, their first chief.
- ⁶ Mjokwane — Senzangakhona's praise-name.
- ⁷ Mabledana — a place-name of an area on the White Mfolozi River.
- ⁸ The Mbozamo and Nonoti — two streams in the Stanger area.
- ⁹ Nandi — Shaka's mother, for whom he had great love and respect.
- ¹⁰ Langeni — Nandi's tribe.
- ¹¹ Nkontshela — Vilakazi's mother, born Hlongwane, of the Ngwane clan.
- ¹² Madidiba — a small lake in the vicinity of Stanger.

AGGREY OF AFRICA — PAGE 55

- ¹ Lovedale — The Lovedale Institute was established by the Church of Scotland at Alice in the Cape Province.
- ² Morija — the headquarters of the Paris Evangelical Mission in Basutoland, now Lesotho.
- ³ Kilnerton — The Kilnerton Institute was established by the Methodist Church near Pretoria.
- ⁴ Wilberforce College — established by the American Methodist Episcopal Church at Evaton in the Transvaal.
- ⁵ Amanzimtoti — Adams College which was established by the American Board of Foreign Missions and is situated near Amanzimtoti in Natal.
- ⁶ Ohlange — The Ohlange Institute, near Durban, was established by the Reverend John L. Dube.

- ⁷ Moton — Dr R.R. Moton, at one time principal of the Tuskegee Institute in America.
- ⁸ The Rand — derived from “Witwatersrand”, the “ridge of white waters” in the Transvaal, famous for its gold mines.
- ⁹ “Paul Kruger’s people” — the Boers or Afrikaners.

DEATH — PAGE 59

- ¹ “Descendant of Govu and Sonkomose” — Vilakazi’s son, a direct descendant of his great-grandfathers, Govu and Sonkomose.
- ² “Makhwatha’s orphaned people” — the Zulus.
- ³ “Your grandfather” — refers to Vilakazi’s father, Mshini who had six children, two boys and four girls. All died young. Vilakazi’s father moved from Mnyundwini into Grouville Mission when he became a Congregationalist.
- ⁴ Ndoda — freely translated means “Man-of-Action”.
- ⁵ Menzi — one of Vilakazi’s forebears.
- ⁶ “The hospital” referred to here is McCord’s Zulu Hospital in Durban, where Mbongeni was born.
- ⁷ Mbongeni — Vilakazi’s eldest son.
- ⁸ Mafu — Vilakazi’s praise-name.
- ⁹ Nontula — Makhwatha’s eldest daughter and mother of the Reverend J. Mdelwa Hlongwane, Vilakazi’s maternal uncle.
- ¹⁰ “Fumuka’s daughter Mphandle” — Mphandle was Vilakazi’s wife’s great-grandmother.
- ¹¹ Fani — the name of Vilakazi’s first wife. Her full names were Fanny (Fani) Nkomfu Nomasomi. She was a member of the Nxaba clan and her surname was Msoni. Mrs Vilakazi died in 1942 at St Mary’s Hospital in Mariannhill, in Natal.
- ¹² Mdleyana — Vilakazi’s wife’s great-grandfather.
- ¹³ “Grandson of Makhwatha” — Makhwatha was Vilakazi’s grandfather. Vilakazi’s Zulu name was Bhambatha. Thus he was Bhambatha, son of Mshini, son of Makhwatha, son of Govu, son of Sonkomose.
- ¹⁴ The Drakensberg — a range of high mountains which runs parallel to the east coast of southern Africa and forms the western boundary of Natal.
- ¹⁵ “My father” — Mshini Vilakazi.
- ¹⁶ Mzondwase and Khalisile — freely translated Mzondwase means “The Hated One”, and Khalisile means “The Causer of Tears”.
- ¹⁷ Mdelwa — son of Nyokana of the Mgobhozi clan.
- ¹⁸ Felephi, alias Phillip — the cousin of Mdelwa and the son of Nyokana’s sister. There was a family feud between them.

- 19 Sihlonono — Sihlonono Langeni was a well-to-do headman of the Mhlongo clan.
- 20 Ngongoni — Ngongoni Vilakazi was Makhwatha's son and brother of Mshini.
- 21 "The chameleon" — from a mythological Zulu tale about the origin of Death.

IN CELEBRATION OF FIFTY YEARS — PAGE 67

- 1 Mhlathuze — the name of both a river and a district in Zululand.
- 2 Mhlathuzane — the river that passes through Mariannhill and enters the sea at Durban Bay. Mhlathuzane is also the Zulu name for the Mariannhill Mission near Durban.
- 3 "The battle of the spears" — the site near Weenen in Natal where Dingane's army massacred Voortrekker men, women and children in 1838 after the murder of Piet Retief and his party.
- 4 Masiphula — the Zulu general who was in command of the Zulu army at Sandlwana.
- 5 Makhedama — the son of Chief Mbengi of the Langeni tribe.
- 6 The missionaries who established the school at Mariannhill mostly came from Germany and Austria.
- 7 Father Francis — Abbot Francis Pfanner — the founder of the school at Mariannhill. St Francis College is named in his honour.
- 8 Lindley, Grout and Adams — the missionaries of the American Board of Foreign Missions who came to Natal in 1840. Alden Grout founded the Groutville Mission near Stanger. Daniel Lindley founded the Inanda Seminary, a college for African girls, near Durban. Dr Newton Adams established an educational centre, later known as Adams College.
- 9 Table Mountain — the flat-topped mountain to the east of Pietermaritzburg in Natal. (Not to be confused with Table Mountain in Cape Town.)
- 10 "Four young men" — Fathers Andreas Ngidi, Alois Mncadi (Mantshonga's son), Edward Mnganga and Julius Mbhele.
- 11 Khofi — Khofi Mnganga, father of Dr Edward Mnganga. He was one of the first two converts at the Mariannhill Mission — the other being Mabhabha Muthwa, father of Henry Muthwa.
- 12 Pelepele — Henry Muthwa's nickname. He was the first black Catholic teacher at Mariannhill and was known to be a strict disciplinarian.
- 13 Wesley and Gumede — Daniel Wesley was a teacher and musician. Gumede, an early convert, was the father of Savela.
- 14 Savela — Savela Gumede was a teacher and organist at Mariannhill.
- 15 Khathi, Vitus — a farmer and public speaker.
- 16 Huss, Father Bernard — author and journalist, and one-time principal of St Francis College at Mariannhill.

- 17 Bryant, Father A.T. — a priest of the Mariannah Mission, compiler of a Zulu-English dictionary and writer of history books on the Zulu people before and after the arrival of the white men. He was an authority on Zulu social life.
- 18 Ngcobo and Mayathula — both were teachers at Mariannah and St Wendolin's, a smaller school attached to the mission.
- 19 "O maid of Hwanqa" — Miss Lillian Kwazikwakhe Vilakazi — Vilakazi's second sister who was at one time headmistress of St Anthony's School at Mariannah. After her brother's death in 1947, she became a nun, and was known as Sister M. Seraphica of the Poor Clare Capuchin Nuns of Perpetual Adoration. She died in 1971. Hwanqa is a Zulu cognomen for the Vilakazi clan.
- 20 Juba — The Reverend Sister Ignatia — was at one time headmistress of St Francis College for girls.
- 21 Siziwe — Miss Ivy Siziwe Vilakazi — was Vilakazi's third sister who also became a nun.
- 22 "Makhwatha's grey-haired son" — Mshini Vilakazi, the poet's father.
- 23 *UmAfrika* — the Zulu weekly journal, printed at the Mariannah Monastery.
- 24 Brother Felix — the house-master of the boys' school. He was given two Zulu nicknames, iNgcayi and iNkoloyi.
- 25 Mancinza — Brother Narcisius — assistant to Brother Felix.
- 26 "The Kheswas" — refers to Zakarius Kheswa and his associates. He was the first president of the Catholic African Union.
- 27 Marti Zulu — the Zulu patriot who lived in Alexandra Township, near Johannesburg.
- 28 Guma, Robinson — a teacher at Adams College.
- 29 Made, Emmanuel — a teacher and an author.
- 30 Masheshisa, the Reverend Father William Kick — also an editor of *UmAfrika*.
- 31 Cele, Bartholomew Bernard — one of the editors of *UmAfrika*, who lives in Clermont Township, near Durban.
- 32 Fosholo — Henry Fosholo Dube donated the land on which was built the St Joseph's Pro-Cathedral Church in Mariannah.
- 33 Vuma, Magogoda, Magodola and Ndamana — converts of Father Francis who took an active part in the activities at Mariannah.

INSPIRATION — PAGE 76

- 1 Mancinza — Mancinza Vilakazi lived at Mandeni in Zululand and was the eldest brother of the poet's father, Mshini Vilakazi.

HIGHER EDUCATION — PAGE 82

- 1 Shaka, Ngqika and Mshweshwe — Shaka (Chaka) was the great king who founded the Zulu nation. Ngqika was the Xhosa chief who founded the

Ngqika (amaNgqika or amaGaika) tribe. Mshweshwe was the great king of the Sotho people and founder of the nation.

TELL ME, WHITE MAN'S SON! - PAGE 84

- ¹ "The Mboza warriors at Nodwengu" — the name of one of Mpande's regiments called, in Zulu, amaMboza. It was stationed at his Great Royal Place of Nodwengu in Zululand.
- ² "Such massive and majestic columns" — refers to the Corinthian columns of the Central Block at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
- ³ "Take up your burden and be our voice!" — these words are reputed to have been said to Vilakazi by Dr J.L. Dube when bidding him good-bye at the Ohlange Institute in Natal, when Vilakazi left to become a lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1935.

WHITHER? - PAGE 90

- ¹ Mandlakhe — Vilakazi's eldest brother. His full names were Ephraim Mandlakhe Mandlakayise. He died in 1940.

THE BELLS OF THE CHURCH - PAGE 94

- ¹ Msizini — the Somtseu Road Sports Grounds in Durban. Also, the Great Royal Place of Mpande which was situated in the same area.
- ² Allison Champion — veteran Zulu politician and journalist.
- ³ Luthuli — Ngazana Luthuli succeeded Dr J.L. Dube as editor of the Zulu weekly journal *Ilanga laseNatal* "The Natal Sun", renamed *Ilanga* "The Sun".
- ⁴ Samvu's son — Dr Imnes B. Gumede, a medical practitioner who qualified in England and later practised in Durban and Inanda.

THE VALLEY OF A THOUSAND HILLS - PAGE 96

- ¹ Mlazi (Umlaas) and Mkhomazi (Umkomaas) — both rivers in the Natal South Coast area.
- ² Langelibalele — the son of Mthimkhulu, the chief of the Hlubi tribe. He succeeded his father.
- ³ Ntshangwe (Inchanga) — a village between Durban and Pietermaritzburg.
- ⁴ Qadi (amaQadi) — a tribe which inhabits the Inanda Zulu Reserve in the lower reaches of the Valley of a Thousand Hills.

RIVERS - PAGE 102

- ¹ "The ancestral spear" — this spear is inherited by the eldest son after his father's death. It is a symbol of his becoming head of the family and its guardian.
- ² Qwabe (abakwaQwabe) — a portion of this tribe joined Bhambatha in his rebellion against the poll-tax in 1906.

- ³ Bhambatha, son of Mancinza — was of the Zondi clan.
- ⁴ “Lucky heaps of stones” — in Zulu *isivivane*, usually accumulated at the side of a path where it enters strange territory.
- ⁵ Mlambongwenya — Shaka’s lesser-known Royal Place where several of his warriors were killed by one of Dingane’s regiments. Mlambongwenya was later occupied by Mpande and his son Cetshwayo.
- ⁶ Bulawayo — Shaka’s Great Royal Place in Zululand.
- ⁷ “Retief and all his men” — Piet Retief, the Voortrekker leader, who was killed with his party by Dingane in 1838.
- ⁸ Manukuza — a member of the Ndwandwe tribe. He was one of the forebears of Soshangane.

MBUYAZI AT THE BATTLE OF NDONDAKUSUKA - PAGE 118

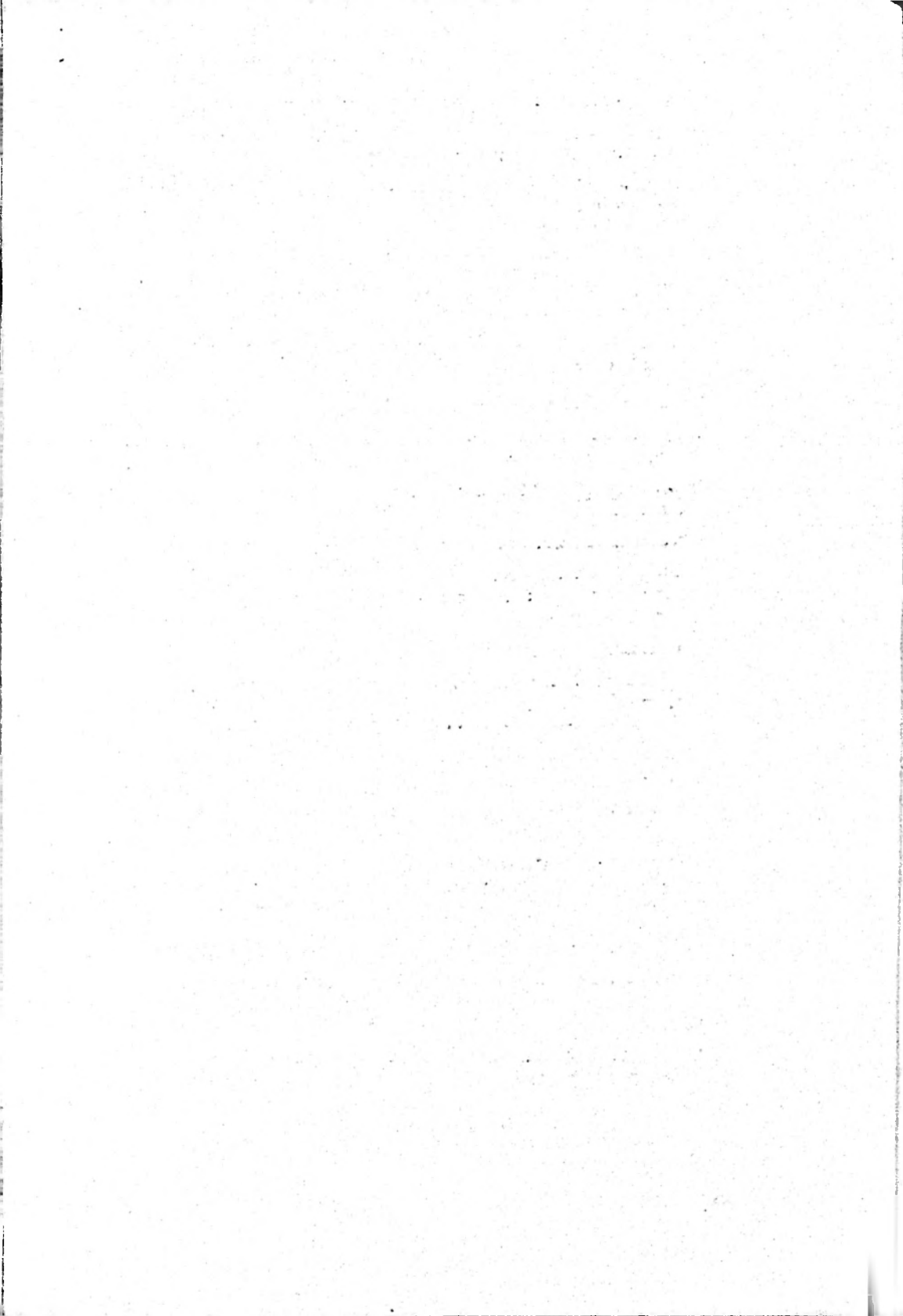
- ¹ Ndongakusuka — the battlefield where Mpande’s two sons, Cetshwayo and Mbuyazi, fought each other in 1856. Mpande was the reigning Zulu king.
- ² Mantantashiya — Mbuyazi’s brother. Their mother was Monase, Mpande’s favourite wife.
- ³ The Gqozas (*iziGqoza*) — the faction which supported Mbuyazi.
- ⁴ Mbuyazi (Mbuyazwe or Mbulazi) — Cetshwayo’s half-brother. Mbuyazi was killed in the Battle of Ndongakusuka after being defeated by Cetshwayo over the succession.
- ⁵ Manembe — Cetshwayo’s most trusted witch-doctor.
- ⁶ Cetshwayo (*Cetewayo*) — Mbuyazi’s half-brother whose mother was Ngqumbazi. He was Mpande’s eldest son and succeeded his father who died in 1872. Cetshwayo was supported by the uSuthu faction.
- ⁷ Nanana — the daughter of Selesele, of the Zulu fairy-tale called “UNanana-bosele”.
- ⁸ Dlokweni — a place which has kloofs, not far from the mouth of the Thukela River.
- ⁹ “Mvundlane — Menziwa’s son — and Jeqe” — Mvundlane was Shaka’s greatest warrior and hero. He belonged to the Biyela clan. Jeqe was Shaka’s personal servant who fled to Swaziland when Shaka was assassinated in 1828.

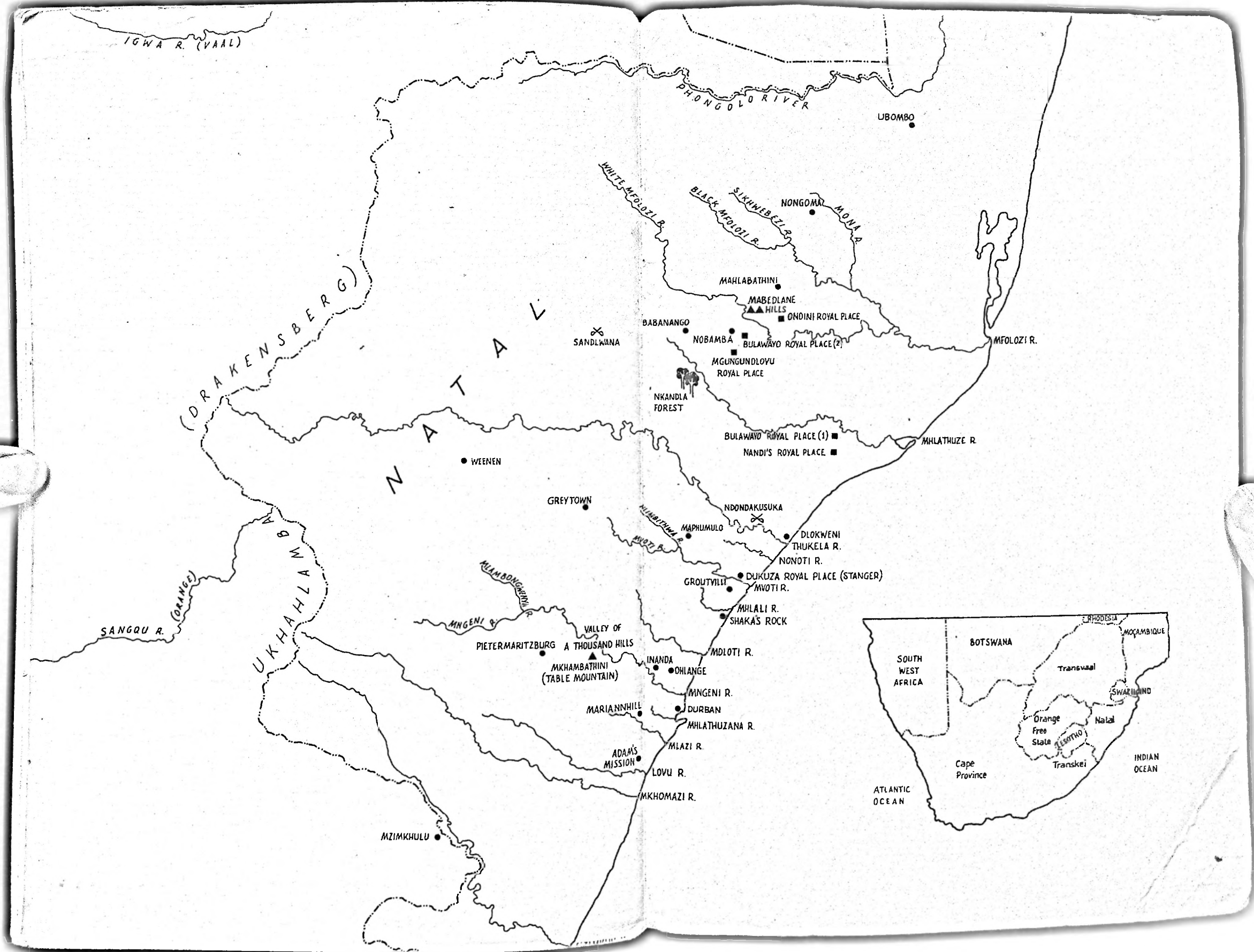
THE GOLD MINES - PAGE 124

- ¹ Goli (*iGoli*) — the Zulu name for Johannesburg, meaning “a place of gold”.

NOW I CAN ACCEPT . . . - PAGE 129

- ¹ “O hero of Mzwangedwa!” — refers to Vilakazi’s grandfather Makhwatha, who lived at Mzwangedwa.
- ² “At Gulukudela” — the cemetery at Groutville in Natal.





IGWA R. (VAAL)

PHONGOLO RIVER

UBOMBO

(DRAKENSBERG)

WHITE MFOLOZI R.

BLACK MFOLOZI R.

SIKUNEBEZI R.

NONGOMA

MONA

MAHLABATHINI

MABEDLANE HILLS

ONDINI ROYAL PLACE

SANDLWANA

BABANANGO

NOBAMBA

BULAWAYO ROYAL PLACE (2)

MFOLOZI R.

MGUNGUNDLOYU ROYAL PLACE

NKANDLA FOREST

BULAWAYO ROYAL PLACE (1)

MANDI'S ROYAL PLACE

MHLATHUZE R.

WEENEN

GREYTOWN

NDONDAKUSUKA

MAPHUMULO

DLOKWENI THUKELA R.

NONOTI R.

GROUTVILLI

DUKUZA ROYAL PLACE (STANGER)

MVOTI R.

MHLALI R. SHAKA'S ROCK

MGENI R.

PIETERMARITZBURG

VALLEY OF A THOUSAND HILLS

MKHAMBATHINI (TABLE MOUNTAIN)

INANDA

OHLIANGE

MDLOTI R.

MNGENI R.

DURBAN

MHLATHUZANA R.

MARIANNHILL

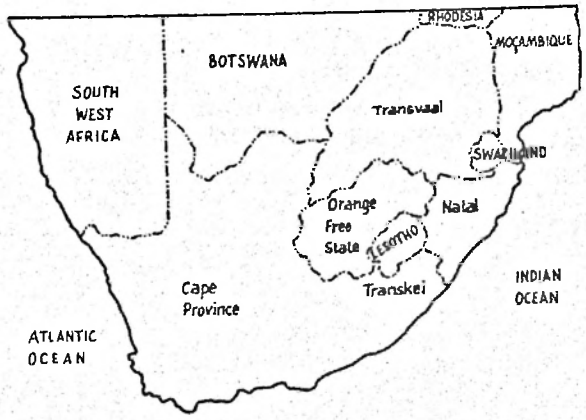
ADAM'S MISSION

MIAZI R.

LOVU R.

MKHOMAZI R.

MZIMKHULU





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