

Cetshwayo kaMpande in Zulu Literature

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There is a very large *corpus* of literature that could be regarded as 'marginal' in South African terms, because it is not accessible to the majority of readers, being written in African languages. This is not a healthy situation for a country that professes multilingualism as one of its greatest assets. In an effort to break the barriers erected by language limitations, this paper presents one of the most popular figures in Zulu literature, namely king Cetshwayo kaMpande, the last independent Zulu monarch.

According to Harold Scheub (1985:493), modern Zulu literature has developed along two main directions, reflecting two great concerns: the glories of the historical past and the problems caused by the infiltration of western religion, education and ways of life.

These two broad areas of early literary activity were to combine in the 1930s in imaginative literature, thereby producing the crucial conflicts which have profoundly concerned southern African writers for decades: the urban, Christian, westernized milieu versus the traditional African past.

These conflictual directions often take the form of tradition versus innovation; of deep humanistic values versus their obliteration in the industrialised society, of rural versus urban setting.

The historical figure of king Cetshwayo can be seen as the ideal personification of such dichotomy, as he lived it in himself and in the people he ruled. Pushed by events that represented the inexorable tide of history and which were perceived as bearers of revolutionary innovations over which he had scant control, he felt power slipping through his fingers, and made a determined effort to barricade himself in the fortress of tradition, which he tried to revitalise. The oral poet describes him as obstinate and self assured, with appellatives such as *uNdonde lakuyalwa* (He who is reluctant to take advice), *uSalakutshelwa* (Who refuses to be told) and *uSalakunyenyezelwa* (Who refuses to be warned). While many of his subjects went along with him and his ideals, several felt the futility of his efforts, while outsiders, namely the colonial government, considered him as an anachronism to be ruthlessly disposed of and moved

out of the way. His resistance gave rise to the tragedies that culminated in two separate, but linked, wars: the 1856 battle of Ndongakusuka, where he fiercely fought for the affirmation of his right of succession and decimated the Zulu army in the process thus mortally weakening the nation; and the 1879 Anglo-Zulu war which, after alternate fortunes, saw the complete demise of the kingdom.

Cetshwayo's life

He was born in 1827 to Mpande and Ngqumbazi, allegedly lobola'd by king Shaka on behalf of the Zulu nation, therefore Mpande's *uNdlunkulu* or chief wife. He is supposed to be the heir to Mpande's clan, and to his kingdom once Mpande becomes king in 1840 with Boer support.

Various events in his youth reveal that he is brave and that he is being groomed for kingship.

After 1853 Mpande begins to fall under the amorous spell of Monase, a wife given him by Shaka, who was believed to be pregnant with Shaka's child, Mbuyazi. Mpande favours Mbuyazi for the kingship, against the advice of his councillors who uphold the traditions regarding succession, and begins to slander Cetshwayo's character. He lays several traps to place Cetshwayo in disfavour with the people. Eventually there is open war between the two princes, that culminates in the bloody 1856 battle of Ndongakusuka, where the whole army of Mbuyazi is destroyed and Mbuyazi with five of his brothers is killed.

Mpande begrudgingly accepts Cetshwayo as his heir, and the prince begins to effectively rule the kingdom because Mpande can no longer move about.

1872: Mpande dies, cursing Cetshwayo: 'Your kingdom will be very brief because of your lack of respect for your father!'

1873: Theophilus Shepstone (Somtsewu) crowns Cetshwayo king of the Zulu and imposes the so called 'coronation laws', according to which Cetshwayo must respect the borders with Natal and must avoid bloodshed.

The main events of Cetshwayo's reign:

The disobedience of the girls from the iNgcugce regiment, when they are forced to marry the men from the iNdlondlo regiment who are about 15 years older. Several girls are murdered.

The Boers' occupation of the Zungeni land on the northern border without the king's permission. Cetshwayo cannot accept this. Shepstone promises to intervene on his behalf with the Natal government, but then changes sides when it becomes expedient to appease the Boers after the annexation of the Transvaal republics. Mbilini

kaMswati carries out a disturbance campaign against the Boers with Cetshwayo's tacit consent.

The murder of the adulterous Sihayo's wives on Natal soil by Sihayo's son, Mehlokazulu.

In December 1878 the Natal government reacts fiercely by sending an impossible ultimatum according to which:

- Cetshwayo must pay 600 heads of cattle in reparation;
- He must hand over Sihayo and Mehlokazulu for trial in Natal;
- He must stop Mbilini's guerrilla attacks against the Boers;
- He must re-instate the white missionaries expelled from Zululand;
- He must disband all his regiments, thus destroying the kingdom's social organisation.

The king is furious at these conditions and, after vain attempts at conciliation, declares war to defend the physical and moral integrity of his kingdom. On Bishop Colenso's (Sobuntu) advice, the army is instructed to fight a defensive war and not to cross the Natal borders.

On 22 January 1879 The Zulu *Impi* surprises the British army at the Sandlwana hill and utterly destroys it. This is perceived as one of the most glorious moments in Zulu history. Some Zulu regiments, however, pursue the fleeing British, against Cetshwayo's orders, and are annihilated at Rorke's Drift. Another Zulu army defeats the British at Hlobane. The British obtain reinforcements from overseas and defeat the Zulu at Gingindlovu and then finally at the capital, uLundi. Cetshwayo is taken prisoner and sent to Cape Town in exile. The colonial government takes control of Zululand and divides it into 13 chiefdoms warring among themselves. Cetshwayo obtains permission to visit Queen Victoria in London in 1883 and is returned to a divided and subjugated Zululand soon afterwards. He cannot accept the substantial restrictions on his movements and power, as he is now a British vassal. He dies quite mysteriously in 1884, under suspicion that he might have been poisoned by the British.

There are seven major works in modern Zulu literature that portray events that happened during Cetshwayo's time. Two major historical dramas, *Mageba Lazihlonza* (The dream has proved itself, by B.B. Ndelu 1962) and *Izulu Eladuma eSandlwana* (The storm that thundered at Sandlwana, by C.T. Msimang 1976) are not considered here as they deserve a much deeper analysis. They should be the object of separate papers. The works to be considered here are: two of B.W. Vilakazi's poems: *Kalani maZulu* (Weep, you Zulu) in *Inkondlo kaZulu* (1935) and *NgoMbuyazi eNdondakusuka* (Concerning Mbuyazi at Ndondakusuka) in *Amal'Ezulu* (1945); the work of the two Dhlomo brothers, i.e. H.I.E Dhlomo's English drama *Cetshwayo* (1937) and R.R.R. Dhlomo's historical novel *UCetshwayo* (1952); a novel by Hlela & Nkosi, *Imithi*

Ephundliwe (Stripped trees 1968), and a drama by M.A.J. Blose, *Ugomisa Mina Nje Ugomisa Iliba* (By wooing me you woo the grave 1968). Muntu Xulu's 1969 novel, *USimpofu*, deals only marginally with fictional events that took place during Cetshwayo's reign and the king's figure is not outlined at all; it is therefore excluded from this analysis.

Due to the proximity of the historical period, to the availability of western historical sources that had a vested interest in portraying the king as a monster, and to the high level of emotions evoked by the simple mention of Cetshwayo's name among the Zulu, it has to be expected that the vision expressed in fictional works will result ambiguous, and that the authors will represent our character either as the hero who fought to preserve the kingdom and its ways of life, or as the villain who, through blind obstinacy, caused the downfall of the nation and all it stood for.

Cetshwayo's figure in B.W. Vilakazi's poems

Vilakazi is considered the father of modern Zulu poetry. His poems were written during the 1930s, a critical phase for the black people of South Africa, characterised by racial atrocities and wide-spread misery. While a number of black leaders vigorously tried to oppose the oppressive segregation laws, the general populace seemed exhausted by constant in-fighting and by the seemingly hopeless situation in which they found themselves. Vilakazi, who felt elevated to the rank of national bard by his poetic inspiration, reflected at a distance on the reasons for his people's plight. He looked at historical events with the benefit of historical hindsight, and judged them globally as either beneficial or damaging to the process of national progress. Rather than in violent resistance to the oppressors, he saw national salvation in the preservation of traditional values and in modern education. Any loss of life is therefore condemned as pointless and cruel. The poet sees the great battles of Ndongakusuka and Sandlwana as unmitigated national tragedies, in spite of the fact that the Zulu showed great valour. In the two poems, *Khalani maZulu* and *NgoMbuyazi eNdongakusuka*, Vilakazi formulates strongly-felt judgements on the two battles and their protagonists. They destroyed the Zulu nation, which still mourns the brave young men who perished there. Vilakazi's poems may be considered as a romantic externalisation of the despondent popular feelings which possibly prevailed at the time of writing.

A call for national reconciliation

Vilakazi's poem *Khalani maZulu* can be considered a call for national reconciliation. It was composed on the death of Solomon kaDinuzulu (1933), the king who had tried to re-establish unity among the Zulu chiefdoms, had erected the Nongoma school to train chiefs' children in the ways of peace and progress through education, and had

founded the *Inkatha kaZulu* cultural movement. Vilakazi calls for a national awakening to pursue the aims of peace and reconciliation set out by the deceased monarch.

Vilakazi is, to some extent, a poet in the tradition of the *imbongi*. The subject of his poem is 'praised', or rather, 'appraised', in terms of his ancestry and of his actions. This gives the poem historical depth and relevance. The poet offers a multifaceted portrayal of the good and bad characteristics of the subject. In terms of his ancestors, Solomon is praised for continuing and developing the positive plan of peace and harmony set out by his father Dinuzulu when he signed a peace treaty with Pretoria. His grandfather Cetshwayo, however, is especially remembered for the fratricidal battle of Ndongakusuka and for the hurried venture of the Anglo-Zulu war.

Vilakazi has absorbed and developed the tenets of romantic poetry, whereby a person is considered a hero with a high degree of human qualities, who has, however, to constantly suffer a tragic fate. The character that fits this description is not Cetshwayo, but Mbuyazi, the young prince slain in the senseless Ndongakusuka battle. He thus becomes the incarnation of the tragic fate of the suffering black, which is further represented by the humiliation of the Zulu royal house. The tragic element is also reconstructed through the wailing of Zulu women, who lament their fallen husbands and sons, like the women's chorus of a Greek tragedy.

When also Cetshwayo is portrayed as the tragic hero, his tragic flaw is seen in not recognizing that fratricidal fights would lead to the weakening of the nation, at a time when only absolute unity would have afforded the strength necessary to withstand the threats of foreign interference. This tragic flaw becomes even more noticeable when he rushes into war against the British, although he knows that he can not win. Even though some battles were won, thus restoring Zulu national pride, the war was lost, and so was Zulu independence.

The oral bard had also expressed the popular fear of a war against the whites:

*UMzingeli kaShaka benoDingane,
Uz' uzingel' ubuy'ubuye nganeno mntakaNdaba,
Ngaphesheya kukhon' abaMhlophe;
Uze wesab' imiland' emidala,
Eyayenziwa ng' oyihlo
(Cope 1968:219 lines 73-77).*

Hunter descended from Shaka and Dingane,
Hunt and return, keep on this side [of the Thukela], son of Ndaba,
Across the river are the white people;
Be fearful of old wounds and grudges,
Caused by the actions of your forefathers.

The internecine destructive war among the Zulu factions culminated at Ndondakusuka where the flower of the nation perished, thus opening the way for the whites to steal the Zulu inheritance.

*Nibon' ukuth' amankonyane
Osapho lukaMlungukazana
Asencel' izinkomazana
Ezazimiselw' abantwana
Benzalo kaSenzangakhona (Vilakazi 1935:25).*

Can't you see that the calves
Of the despicable white man's race
Are sucking dry the milk-cows
Which were destined
For Senzangakhona's children?

Vilakazi scolds the opposing factions for causing irreparable harm to the nation. They should have united against the national enemies rather than destroying each other, thus top-slicing the flower of the Zulu youth, the hope for the future.

*Seniyakhohlwa yin' ukuthi
Nathi nibhixana bukhomo,
Nichithan' eNdondakusuka,
Nafa ningashiye miphako
(Vilakazi 1935:25).*

Have you truly forgotten
How you destroyed one another,
Utterly wasting each other at
Ndondakusuka,
Letting death triumph on a barren future?

The poet mourns for Mbuyazi and the Zulu princes killed by Cetshwayo. Their bones cannot be distinguished from one another, and Mbuyazi, the prince who had taken into his hands the fortunes of the Zulu nation, cannot be given proper burial, as his bones cannot be found. The poet appeals to the Zulu to listen, at least, to the cries of the mothers who searched in vain for the remains of their loved ones on that harsh plain.

As if the blood poured at Ndondakusuka were not enough to bring the nation to its knees, Cetshwayo later hurried into a bloody war against the British. The futility of this all out war is demonstrated by Cetshwayo's Pyrrhic victory at Sandlwana, where thousands of Zulu perished.

Vilakazi blames Cetshwayo for thoughtlessly taking Sihayo's side and thus rushing into the Anglo-Zulu war, which proved the last straw that finally destroyed the Zulu nation.

He believes that only through peace and education can real progress be achieved. Cetshwayo is thus compared to Dinuzulu, who, rather than waging war, signed the peace treaty, and to Solomon, who worked within it to establish unity in a positive way.

In spite of his negative judgement on Cetshwayo, with a bold metaphor that speaks volumes, the poet stands in awe in front of the king's figure as he contemplates the irreparable loss of his departure from the historical scene:

*Kwaf'inyon'enkulu,
kwabola ngish'amaqand'ezikaQwabe
(Vilakazi 1935:25).*

When the great bird died, even the
eggs of the Qwabe nation became rotten.

Inyon/enkulu, the great mother bird, is Cetshwayo; *amaqanda* are the eggs, the seed of future generations; *Qwabe* refers to the Zulu nation, since Zulu and Qwabe were brothers. Once the great mother bird that brooded over and protected the Zulu nation has gone, it is the end of the future: the eggs remain unproductive, they rot out: all hope is destroyed.

Mourning for Mbuyazi's disappearance

In the poem *NgoMbuyazi eNdongakusuka* Vilakazi joins a number of Zulu writers in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s in presenting the evil effects of *ubuthakathi*, or witchcraft,

The poet highlights again the tragedy of Ndongakusuka, where so many young Zulu lost their lives together with Mbuyazi, a prince that constituted a link between the Zulu nation and its founder, King Shaka. Mbuyazi is presented, however, as the victim of Manembe's black magic rather than of Cetshwayo's heroism. The poet accuses Manembe, Cetshwayo's *inyanga*, for defeating Mbuyazi and his iziGqoza through his powers of *ubuthakathi* (witchcraft), when he was able to steal Mbuyazi's shield for Cetshwayo to kneel on and thus bring utter defeat on his iziGqoza.

The first stanzas are in quotation marks, as if they were Mbuyazi's words. The prince spurs on his iziGqoza in spite of the tremendous opposition they are facing, namely, Cetshwayo's uSuthu regiments, the rising Thukela river and Manembe's sin-

ister power. Thus it is both human and superhuman powers fighting on Cetshwayo's side.

Witches, such as Manembe, do not simply kill a person, but destroy also his life-chain, his essence, as corpses are used for evil medicines. Normal burial allows a person's life to continue in the world of the *amadlozi* (ancestor spirits), but witchcraft makes this impossible, and the deceased is condemned to wander about for ever. He cannot, therefore, become an *idlozi*, he has no life. Hence the poet's desperate search for Mbuyazi's bones and those of his companions. The Thukela river, whose waters are supposed to be life-givers, knows nothing about those bones, as witnessed by the river animals questioned by the poet. The prince has not been assumed into the world of the *amathongo*, or spirits, either, as the poet carries his search into the moon, the stars and the planets. Nothing and no-one can be found able to point to this valiant prince and his retinue. Their death was, therefore, a complete loss, a supreme waste of young lives. This image powerfully stresses the futility of Mbuyazi's life and that of his comrades in arms, and of the evil battle that put an end to it. The witchcraft of Manembe has obtained its purpose: to divide the nation and to destroy a sizeable section of it, by fomenting hatred among the brothers. Vilakazi regards the death of Mbuyazi as a historical catastrophe for which Cetshwayo and Manembe should be called to account.

H.I.E. Dhlomo's Drama *Cetshwayo*

Although this drama is written in English, it can be considered as Zulu literature in a wide sense. In fact, Dhlomo is a Zulu by birth, writing about Zulu historical events and projecting the Zulu point of view, in a language filled with Zulu idiomatic expressions and in a style that reflects the imagery found in traditional Zulu literature. The writer intends to reach a large audience, and to present the reasons for the present plight of the Zulu, and of all the Africans in this country. The drama was written in 1937 and circulated in manuscript form. It only appeared in print in the collected works of H.I.E. Dhlomo, edited by Nick Visser and Tim Couzens in 1985. *Cetshwayo* is regarded by some critics as the most important and the most interesting of Dhlomo's plays, as he demonstrates the ability to handle western dramatic techniques.

The drama is sealed between two tragic events: the report of the death of Mbuyazi at Ndongakusuka, and Cetshwayo's own death at the hand of John Dunn, the British patriot who comes to represent the strangling forces of the colonial system against which Cetshwayo was forced to fight in order to preserve his kingdom.

The initial setting is crucial: a messenger brings the news of Mbuyazi's defeat to some women working in the fields. The ensuing wailing for the slain prince is like the lyric chorus in a Greek tragedy, and shows the pain that war has caused, and all to

satisfy Cetshwayo's *hubris*, or wanton insolence, as he has fought to ensure the throne for himself. People are terrified by the war, by the fear that Cetshwayo's reign might be characterised by bloodshed, and by the fact that the two princes' fight demonstrates the deep divisions in the nation.

Cetshwayo's *hubris* does not stop there. He shows an obstinate enmity towards his father, whom he blames for selling the nation to the whites, both materially and spiritually. Materially, by satisfying their hunger for land; spiritually, by allowing white missionaries to work in the kingdom thus subverting the minds of young people with western ideas. He is ambitious to ascend the throne while Mpande is still alive and to redress his father's mistaken policies.

His greatest antipathy is naturally reserved for the whites: he expresses a fierce antagonism against the colonists, and especially against Shepstone, whom he would like to see dead. John Dunn had made it known that he wanted to become a Zulu. His conversion to Zuluness was however only superficial, to suit his own lust and interests. He is seen as a pawn in the machinery of British imperialism that is eventually to destroy Cetshwayo. He represents the false friendship of many whites who outwardly spoke kindly of the Zulu king, but inwardly were completely unsympathetic to his cause. They, in fact, cannot achieve their objectives as long as the great defender of the Zulu is alive. To this group belong Lord Chelmsford, the British general, and a number of white missionaries.

The great oppositions that delineate the terms of the conflict are thus identified: Cetshwayo is determined to fight for the independence of his territory and for the preservation of Zulu customs and traditions. The British (Shepstone and John Dunn) intend to subjugate the Zulu kingdom under the excuse of the civilising mission of the British Empire, but practically because they intend to extend the Empire. Cetshwayo's war victories become hollow, but he still resists, until he is killed, while uttering a final challenge to the whites, reflecting the powerful image in Cetshwayo's *izibongo* quoted above.

Cetshwayo has enemies also among his own people, in the persons of Hhamu and Zibhebhu, who plot his downfall for personal gain. They hate him for killing Mbuyazi, and claim that he has become very arrogant and insolent since his Ndondakusuka victory. They really want a form of independence with British support.

It is interesting to note Dhlomo's portrayal of Cetshwayo in relation to women, who play a major role in this play. His mother, for whom he shows great respect in *Mageba Lazihlonza* (1962), does not appear at all. The harsh attitude towards the girls of the iNgcugce regiment, later shown in the play *Uqomisa mina-nje uqomisa iliba* (1968), is hinted at here, when Cetshwayo forces a number of women to marry Dunn so as to strengthen the Briton's ties with the Zulu kingdom.

And yet it is the women that give the hero a human dimension: Cetshwayo

earnestly woos Bafikile, but she, like the women in the initial scene, is scared by the threat of bloodshed that hangs over the nation. Cetshwayo does not listen to her plea for moderation, and does not care about his own wife's jealousy. The king's obstinacy thus causes problems in the nation and in his own family.

When Cetshwayo's passionate anger gives way to a more realistic mood and he advances the idea of solving problems by negotiation, his councillors advise him that the Zulu army is itching to go to war. The king must not worry; he must simply declare war and the ancestral spirits will be pleased to fight on his side. Cetshwayo's anger is further aroused by the colonists' claim that he should obey the king of England. He decides to take the final plunge and declares war, to the great acclaim of his army.

In the European camp, in the meantime, Harriette Colenso tries in vain to persuade Shepstone to view Cetshwayo in a positive light. She and her father are great sympathisers of the Zulu nation. Shepstone, seeing that Bishop Colenso might constitute a threat to his ambitions over the Zulu, asks him to leave politics to the politicians. At the same time a message is received that a tragedy has befallen the British army at Sandlwana.

The moment of final recognition of the forces allied against him comes at the following battle of uLundi, where Cetshwayo is utterly defeated by the British. He feels betrayed by people very close to him. When Bafikile sees him in a desperate state, she cries endlessly, thus reinforcing the theme that it is the women who are left to mourn over the dead heroes. The white imperialist wrench tightens. During an audience with John Dunn, who is accompanied by Zibhebhu and other armed men, the king is fatally shot by the Briton. *Hubris* has been vindicated, the whites' plot to destroy him and his kingdom has been brought to completion. Although the Dunn's shooting incident is not traceable in history, it dramatically portrays the Zulu suspicion that Cetshwayo was murdered by the British, probably by poisoning, since they had plotted his downfall all along. With his last breath, Cetshwayo heroically and defiantly tells Dunn: '*Ugejile*', 'You have missed!'. Cetshwayo's word means that, in spite of their apparent victory, the British have failed to crush the spirit of the Zulu kingdom.

In *Cetshwayo*, Dhlomo proves that great tragedies are the stuff of real life, and that a competent writer can create one in any setting, even in Africa. He applies Shakespeare's dramatic theories, at times twisting historical details, so that his play can be seen as a classic example of tragedy in an African milieu and with a very distinctive African flavour.

The work can be considered a political statement on the times of its writing. Blacks were severely oppressed and dehumanised by whites. Political freedoms were denied, the African voice was constantly ignored, no matter how reasonable or authoritative it was. Even the missionaries who stood up for the Africans were sidelined

and unceremoniously told to leave politics alone. All the whites wanted to hear was their *raison d'état*, all they cared for was their own commercial and financial interest. But the African spirit cannot be crushed. Cetshwayo's murder is the sign of the utter degradation of the white man's system of government. His blood is the seed of new life, and marks the dawn of a new era of freedom.

Cetshwayo (1985) is also a reflection of Dhlomo's life experience. His relationships with his white superiors on the mines were very strained. He felt that his intellectual abilities were not appreciated, but were rather abused and destroyed because he was a black person. Due to the stress he suffered, he became addicted to alcohol which would eventually lead him to the grave. He blamed the socio-political situation, and his white superiors, for his ills, thus identifying with Cetshwayo's plight.

R.R.R. Dhlomo's *UCetshwayo* (1952)

The two Dhlomo brothers wrote about Cetshwayo for different purposes. While Herbert set out to write a tragedy, Rolfus wanted to produce an account of the king's life that is only marginally fictionalised. He wanted to set the records straight about the events in Cetshwayo's life. He thus contests the accuracy of information given by white historians by interpreting them from the point of view of the victims, i.e., the King and the Zulu nation.

UCetshwayo (1952) follows Dhlomo's journalistic method of telling a separate story in each chapter, without following a strict chronological order. But, with regard to his sources, he clearly collected information from Zulu people who had known Cetshwayo in person. He is thus able to follow an independent approach to the events and to forcefully take issue with several misconceptions of Cetshwayo disseminated by colonial officials and other writers. The criticism levelled at his earlier historical novels on the Zulu kings made him distrust stereotyped sources about the history of black people. *UCetshwayo* (1952) is a strong vindication of a national figure, with powerful arguments against the slanderous interpretation of the king by the British, who had betrayed him in order to pursue their expansionist schemes.

From the very beginning, Dhlomo (1952:1) highlights the reasons of the conflictual views about Cetshwayo: we should not be surprised that he suffered the way he did because he was made regent in 1857 when Mpande was unable to move as he had grown too fat, and then ascended the throne after his father's death (1872) during a difficult historical time. The problems were the result of Mpande's policies, as he had given the whites large land tracts as a form of compensation for their support in gaining the kingdom. Cetshwayo not only disagrees with his father's policies, but he is also faced with the problem of unlawful occupation of land by whites. Dhlomo also believes that Mpande's curse might have contributed to Cetshwayo's flaws, al-

though he maintains that Mpande was completely irrational in this. The only fault that the author attributes to Cetshwayo is the appointment of John Dunn, a former fervent friend of Mbuyazi, as a chief, with dire consequences during the Anglo-Zulu war.

Dhlomo is however adamant that many of the criticisms thrown at Cetshwayo are completely unfair and irrational since they are just sweeping and unsubstantiated assumptions.

Kepha kukho konke lokhu kasilizwa nelilodwa izwi nesenzo esenziwa nguCetshwayo esikhomba ububi bakhe nokukhohlakala kwakhe (Dhlomo 1952:13).

But out of all this, we do not hear any word or action done by Cetshwayo which shows his perversity and corruption.

Dhlomo (1952:10) also points out that Cetshwayo ascended the throne while Mpande, who had bitterly opposed him, was still alive, and that his father's hostility was caused by the jealousy of a father who feared that his son would demonstrate greater leadership qualities than himself.

Dhlomo fights the perception that Cetshwayo is a cruel killer. Whites have maintained that no Zulu king ever killed on legal grounds, and they have used minor incidents to discredit Cetshwayo. On the sensitive point of the iNgcugce girls' rebellion, our author argues that Cetshwayo was simply pursuing a trend set by his father when he gave the iNdlondlo permission to marry the iNgcugce regiment. Before Mpande's death, many regiments had been given permission to marry, and Cetshwayo was simply continuing the tradition. Dhlomo denies the allegations that Cetshwayo killed a large number of iNgcugce girls for defying his directive. He states that, according to eye witnesses, not more than ten girls died during the operation. What shocked the nation was not the number of girls who died, but the young women's defiance of the king's order, because they thought he would not be able to take strong action against them as a result of the coronation laws laid down by Somtsewu.

Another incident blown out of all proportions is Cetshwayo's unsuccessful attempt to stop the fight between *amaMboza* and *iNgobamakhosi*, which resulted in the death of about seventy men from the two regiments. According to the British, these incidents proved Cetshwayo an incapable leader. They accused him of deliberately provoking the fight because he enjoyed seeing his people kill one another.

To the British Cetshwayo is a fearsome monster. They take control of the Transvaal in fear that Cetshwayo may have ambitions over it. Once they have ensured the Boers' loyalty to the British-led confederation, they fear that they could be in danger of being destroyed by Cetshwayo. Dhlomo however portrays Cetshwayo as a peaceful king who seeks to negotiate before venturing into a fight. For instance Cetshwayo

asks Somtsewu to place British settlers between the Zulu and the Boers especially in the Zungeni area, because he is afraid that conflict might arise between his people and the Boers. This sounds a rational plea, which Somtsewu deliberately ignored.

The whites further regarded Cetshwayo as a warmonger who encouraged other black populations to rebel against the British sovereignty. According to Dhlomo (1952:37) Somtsewu complains that Sikhukhuni has come to blows with the British because he has been befuddled by Cetshwayo. The king is also held responsible for the endless fights between the British and the Xhosa, which were, however, endemic.

Cetshwayo is compared neither with Mpande nor with Dingane but with the founder of the Zulu nation, king Shaka. He is a great experimenter who tries to restore and repair the damage to the Zulu culture that had occurred during the reign of Dingane and Mpande. As a prince living during a time which is completely different to that of Shaka, he does his best for the nation, at least if compared to Mpande and Dingane. Even Somtsewu in 1873, during the coronation ceremony, stated that Cetshwayo was the best among all African leaders with whom he had had dealings.

Dhlomo makes Cetshwayo appear as a peace lover who fights only if war is forced on him and in the aftermath seeks to establish peace with his opponents. Cetshwayo is no longer an evil planner: even Frere, the British commander in Natal, is surprised as to why Cetshwayo, after destroying the British army at Sandlwana, does not attack the defenceless Natalians while they are waiting for reinforcements from Britain.

According to Dhlomo, Cetshwayo believes in a fair fight, and that people should be killed only in battle. He refuses help from a Thonga doctor who offers to supply him with *umuthi* (destructive medicine) to poison the water and thus destroy all the British. Cetshwayo turns down the offer because his intention is to fight and defeat the British in battle not to annihilate them.

The Zulu army sustained a large number of deaths at Rorke's Drift and Hlobane. According to Mehlokazulu (Dhlomo 1952:71), Cetshwayo had warned his army not to cross the Thukela to Rorke's Drift. Again at Hlobane, he warned his general, Mnyamana, not to allow his army to attack the British in their camp, but the opposite happened.

From the battle of Sandlwana to the return of Cetshwayo from exile, about eleven thousand Zulu soldiers lost their lives. After the kingdom was dismembered, the Zulu suffered horribly under the authority of the thirteen appointed chiefs. Even the Boers demanded the return of Cetshwayo because there was more bloodshed than during the king's rule. This proved that the British were wrong in their assumption that people were unhappy under Cetshwayo's reign. As a matter of fact, Cetshwayo even established the Ekubazeni homestead to shelter people who had been smelt out by *izangoma* as dangerous witches. This means that Cetshwayo was not a blood-thirsty

tyrant who killed on barbaric grounds. The Zulu know that Cetshwayo had tried to re-establish the might of the kingdom, something they were longing for. He was thus able to fire the people's patriotic imagination, and he was loved and supported throughout his life. When the king went into hiding after the destruction of his uLundi homestead, many people were tortured and even killed, but no one revealed his whereabouts.

He held no grudge when he was in exile in the Cape. When he was visited by Sobantu (Colenso) and his daughter, he asked about many people in Zululand, both friends and enemies, such as Hhamu, Zibhebhu and John Dunn. In England, Cetshwayo explained that he would not be able to live with John Dunn as a neighbour since he had destroyed him in all respects. Cetshwayo sustained both physical and spiritual wounds after the destruction of the people of note by Zibhebhu in 1883.

Dhlomo tells the story of how Cetshwayo's *inyanga*, Manembe, through his powerful magic had contributed to Cetshwayo's victory at Ndondakusuka, by stealing Mbuyazi's shield for Cetshwayo to kneel on. Later, Cetshwayo and Manembe quarrelled because of Manembe's son's death while serving at the king's palace. Manembe accused Cetshwayo of acting abominably: the king should have informed him, and he would have tried all means to heal his son. He then boasted that while Cetshwayo had won the Ndondakusuka battle through his magic, he had let his son die. Seemingly the king's advisers called for Manembe's death, fearing that he would try to kill Cetshwayo through his magic. A group of people was sent to kill Manembe. Before he died, he cursed Cetshwayo that his rule would not last for killing the person who had put him on the throne. Dhlomo argues that although Manembe's accusations angered the king, it was the people around him who thought the king in danger and disposed of Manembe.

Dhlomo's portrait is therefore a positive reconstruction of this central figure in Zulu history.

Cetshwayo in two 1968 fictional works

The year 1968 sees the death of king Cyprian kaBhekuzulu, and the rise of chief Gatsha Mangosuthu Buthelezi to the leadership of the KwaZulu homeland. One of his first actions is to try to revitalise the cultural movement *Inkatha kaZulu*, which will later be transformed into a liberation movement to oppose the ANC and eventually into a political party.

Two fictional works on Cetshwayo are published in 1968: the novel *Imithi Ephundliwe* (Stripped trees by Hlela and Nkosi) and the drama *Uqomisa mina-nje uqomisa iliba* (By courting me you may court the grave by M.A.J. Blose). Both works present a rather negative view of Cetshwayo's reign, in spite of the rehabilitating work of R.R.R. Dhlomo.

Both works intend to encourage a deep reflection on the historical events dur-

ing which they are written: Hlela and Nkosi's novel, by stressing and exaggerating the cruelty during Cetshwayo's life, seems to sound a warning: 'Don't push the Zulu glorious past too far: it was not all glorious and clean, and we might not be prepared to return to it wholeheartedly!' Blose's drama seems to emphasise another important point: Chief Buthelezi's policies are read, by commentators, as political expediency and a half-hearted way of co-operating with the apartheid government. Political expediency caused Ngqengelele, the heroine's father in *Uqomisa*, to betray his own daughter and to murder her lover. Is this then worthy, in spite of the consequences it may bring to one's family?

The stories are fiction, not history, and they portray negative aspects of human behaviour as symbols of what might happen in reality. History provides the actual facts, while fiction provides universal interpretations that make the facts relevant and meaningful for those who are able to read between the lines at the particular time the works are written.

Imithi Ephundliwe (1968)

Hlela & Nkosi's novel is a slightly fictionalised account of the Anglo-Zulu war. The reason they find for this national disaster is Cetshwayo's obstinacy and unmitigated cruelty. The novel portrays Cetshwayo and his cronies in a completely negative way, which inspires no sympathy for them. For instance, Cetshwayo's favourite scout, Mehlokazulu, is depicted as a murderer, a wicked and cruel person. He kills Sihayo's wife because she talks slanderously about him to the lady he woos. Cetshwayo and those around him are openly blamed for causing a war which took thousands of people's lives.

There are a number of hair-raising incidents that go against any historical record or widely held ulu customs, such as the one regarding the Natal messengers sent to request that the murderers of Sihayo's wife be brought to the colonial government. They are brutally killed on Cetshwayo's own instruction:

Babambeni nibakhiphe amehlo. Bayonuka amakhala indlela ebheke konina abalungu, boncela bajuphulule imibele yendelelo. Izinja lezi! Babambeni! Ngithi babambeni! UJama yini! Babambeni! (Hlela & Nkosi 1968:12)

Catch them and gauge out their eyes. They will smell the way back to their mothers, the whites, they will suck dry the teats of insolence. These are dogs! Catch them! I say catch them! I swear by Jama! Catch them!

This episode would run contrary to the Zulu custom that *Isithunywa asoni* (A messenger is not responsible for his message), and is not based on any historical record.

Cetshwayo is portrayed as a raging and superstitious maniac who kills a lunatic for pointing at him with a bone. He is disrespectful, as he calls Somtsewu a mere person, disregarding his official position. He spits on the white man who comes to arrest him after the defeat of the Zulu army. And yet, the king's arrest leaves the nation leaderless and dismayed.

The king is deeply upset by the various defeats suffered by his army after the Sandlwana victory. He believes this is the result of the death of his doctor Manembe who has been swallowed by a python. He blames the defeat at Rorke's Drift on the insubordination of Zibhebhu, who ignored the king's warning not to cross the Thukela to pursue the whites. At Hlobane, another great battle not described in other Zulu works, the Zulu army valiantly engaged the British, putting up the last desperate fight to save king and country.

It is difficult to contextualise Hlela & Nkosi's darkly negative portrayal of Cetshwayo. In their preface the authors clearly state that what they write is not history but fiction. Perhaps they might have felt that, from such a negative picture, there could emerge the positive message that fighting against whites was useless and that only a maniac would engage in such an enterprise, when the law enforcement forces were so strong.

Cetshwayo in M.A.J. Blose's *Uqomisa Mina Nje Uqomisa Iliba* (1968)

The play, *Uqomisa Mina Nje Uqomisa Iliba* (By Courting Me You are Courting the Grave) (1968), considers a series of events that depict Cetshwayo as an unreasonable tyrant, ready to force his will on the innermost feelings of his people, namely feelings that concern the choice of a marriage partner. In fact, it deals with the king's order to the iNgcugce regiment to marry the men from the iNdondlo regiment. Disobedience to the king's command may mean death, as the title clearly implies. The play poses the honerous question of how far can the state go in imposing its demands, when they infringe on individual freedom? Could the cruelty that surrounded black people in the late 1960s, the fights between ANC, PAC and Inkatha, which all claimed to be fighting for a better dispensation for the blacks, be justifiable? Are political interests above individual rights?

The iNgcugce's disobedience is construed as a precedent capable of disturbing the king's running of the country's economy, because it was through the regimental system that he was able to balance the country's population with the country's economy, by allowing only certain regiments to marry at any given time, and to impose fines on the transgressors in order to raise cattle for himself and the nation. As a token of appreciation, the king paid *lobolo* for the regiments who offered their services, which were greatly beneficial to the king and his family, because they did a number of jobs,

including: 'building military kraals, planting, reaping and making gardens for the king' (Webb & Wright 1978:80).

When Cetshwayo ordered the iNgcugce regiment to marry the iNdlondlo, he expected to be obeyed. Attitudes were however changing. The influence of the white colonists, and especially the coronation laws that restricted Cetshwayo's ability to enforce his will, echoed in people's minds to the extent that the iNgcugce girls felt able to challenge the established mores.

The play opens with the nation's astonishment at the iNgcugce's resistance to the king's order. The assembly is blazing with indignation and calls for the death of the iNgcugce, while the king complains that his power is being curtailed by the white authorities.

Most of the characters in the play are angry with the girls who seem to jeopardise the king's reputation. The problem with some of the girls is that they have already secretly chosen their lovers. This group is exemplified by the two main characters, Nontombi and Maqanda, who are deeply resentful of the king's command. They do not want to even consider breaking up their relationship. Nontombi's father, Ngqengelele, a royal councillor, knows that the young suitors' disobedience reflects negatively on his loyalty to the king, and therefore takes drastic action against Maqanda whom he regards as a rotten young man who undermines the king's word. Ngqengelele is prepared to show that his loyalty to the king overrides concerns for the harmony of his family. The two lovers try to escape to Natal. Unfortunately, they are caught by Ngqengelele and his men as they are about to cross the Thukela river. Maqanda is killed by Ngqengelele and Nontombi drowns herself after seeing her lover dead.

The question remains: who is to blame for the death of the two lovers? Ngqengelele kills Maqanda out of political expediency. Cetshwayo is angry that his word is defied by the iNgcugce. This incident takes place under the hostile watchful eyes of the British, who expect him to respect the coronation laws to put an end to wanton murders. The girls dare disobey the king's order on the grounds that the ways of the heart must be followed, and that the king has no right to enforce this traditional practice.

The girls know that the king's wings have been clipped by the Natal government, which also encourages his opponents to cross over to Natal. This freedom makes it difficult for Cetshwayo to enforce tradition in the ways his predecessors had done. The king complains that he is unable to punish wrongdoers in his own country, because, when he tries, they flee to Natal where they are welcomed as they reinforce the picture that the Zulu kingdom is brutal while the Natal government is benevolent.

Blose makes Cetshwayo responsible for the death of the iNgcugce girls. Dhlomo had explained how this incident had been blown out of all proportions by the Natalians in order to disgrace Cetshwayo in the eyes of overseas people, and to reinforce the

sentiments that the kingdom should be brought under the 'civilizing rule' of the British empire. In the play, Cetshwayo does not order the girls' massacre; he only expresses his anger at the iNgcugce's disobedience. His elders interpret this as a sign that he wants them to take revenge on the girls.

In this romantic drama, the reader's sympathies go to the two main characters, Nontombi and Maqanda, whose love relationship is forbidden by the nation and is consequently obstructed by their parents. They know that pursuing their love could mean death, and they accept the challenge, as it is stated in the title, 'By choosing me you [may] choose the grave'. Maqanda is prepared to die for Nontombi, and this promise is fulfilled at the end. Nontombi then chooses to follow her lover in death rather than betraying his memory by accepting to marry someone else.

Blöse's drama regards the lovers' death as symptomatic of the national tragedy faced by the youth of that time. The iNgcugce regiment's rebellion casts a slur on Cetshwayo's reputation, portraying him as a hardened king who does not care for his people's lives. The death of these two characters makes the reader reflect on the validity of the whole body of tradition, when it seems intended to strengthen the hand of the privileged classes to enforce ways that disregard the rights of the lower classes. And one should perhaps further reflect whether the obstinate approach to tradition shown by Cetshwayo as a defence against innovation was really worth the costs that it requested from the people at large.

A Zulu proverb runs: *Kofa abantu kosal'izibongo* (People will die but their praises shall survive). The fact that Cetshwayo is remembered through his deeds is an honour, no matter how bad or good he was in life. After nearly a hundred years Cetshwayo was still alive in the people's memory to the point that his portrayal could fire their imagination.

Conclusion

The paper clearly shows that Cetshwayo's figure is very popular in Zulu literature, especially in that section of it that reflects on past history in order to shed light on the present situation. The last independent king's memory is enshrined in the *Izibongo*, published by James Stuart in the 1920s. Stuart's books served as school readers for various generations, and fired the imagination of many young scholars, among them, the writers presented in this chapter.

Since Cetshwayo's achievements are rather recent, it is probable that some of the early writers had heard about them from people who had served under the king. The feelings expressed by *Izibongo*, by the oral traditions and by the current writers could be roughly divided into two sets: those that idealised the king as the last bastion of defence against the invading whites, and those who imbibed the notion that

Cetshwayo was a fearful and angry monster who put everything at stake in order to preserve his authority.

Apart from Rolfus Dhlomo's anecdotal narrative, which should be considered more a popular history than a novel, the other works are all fiction, and they reflect on only a limited number of events. What they say about Cetshwayo must not be taken as history but as fictitious re-creations for artistic purposes. Thus Herbert Dhlomo's drama emphasises the conflict between Cetshwayo and the white colonists, to the point that John Dunn is made responsible for the king's death. Vilakazi reflects on the weakness of the Africans of his time and places the responsibility of it at Cetshwayo's door, especially due to Ndondakusuka. Blose considers the plight of rural women who are still subjected to parents' arranged marriages and makes the episode of the iNgcugce regiment an extreme example of the practice.

R.R.R Dhlomo felt there was a need to forcefully reconstruct the history of Cetshwayo as he believed that many people, including academic writers, were hopelessly misled. According to him, the two incidents in Cetshwayo's life (the Ndondakusuka and Sandlwana battles) reveal the king's commitment to a just society, as he was a hero who only fought to defend his people.

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