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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRAISE POETRY

AND POETRY IN ZULU AND XHOSA

by

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SUMMARY

This study deals with traditional, oral praise poetry and modern, written poetry in Zulu and Xhosa. Previous contradictory and confusing research findings are reassessed. The theoretical nature of poetry and conditions for its composition are examined. The development of praise poetry as an oral genre and previous hypotheses concerning this development are reviewed. The widespread incidence of praise poetry in Africa and the extensive exposure of children to ukubonga (praising) is traced. Tentative hypotheses are posed concerning the developmental sequence of ukubonga from the coining of a praise name, to the fashioning of unpolished praise images until finally, a fully-fledged praise poem is composed. The structural development of Zulu and Xhosa clan praises and the origins of modern Nguni poetry are shown. The profound impact on modern poetry by missionaries and Christianity, the pervasive traditional izibongo (praise poetry) as well as the European and Western poetic influence is set out.

Miscellaneous general theories on the structure of Nguni poetry and the frequent incidence of repetition are commented on. The nature, extent and efficacy of various types of imagery such as simile, personification, metaphor and symbolism in Nguni poetry is studied. The seemingly facile and obvious difference between traditional and modern Nguni poetry; that is, between oral and written poetry, is shown to be somewhat blurred due to the reduction of much oral poetry to writing.

The study highlights the urgent need for further research because the

oral art is increasingly falling into disuse due to the inroads of Westernization and urbanization. The composition of poetry on themes drawn from a new, technologically advanced society and the experimentation with Western literary techniques such as rhyme schemes, is shown. The recent poetic genius of Vilakazi, a modern poet, as well as the originality of traditional poetry is assessed and the general conclusion reached is that the best modern poetry in Nguni is that which is a symbiosis of traditional and modern, representing a continuum from the traditional genre of izibongo.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER 1.</u>	<u>INTRODUCTION.</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER 2.</u>	<u>WHAT IS POETRY?</u>	45
<u>CHAPTER 3.</u>	<u>THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAISE POETRY AS AN ORAL</u> <u>GENRE.</u>	73
<u>CHAPTER 4.</u>	<u>ORIGINS OF MODERN NGUNI POETRY.</u>	115
<u>CHAPTER 5.</u>	<u>THE STRUCTURE OF NGUNI WRITTEN POETRY AND</u> <u>PRAISE POETRY.</u>	192
<u>CHAPTER 6.</u>	<u>IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM IN PRAISE POETRY AND</u> <u>MODERN POETRY.</u>	263
<u>CHAPTER 7.</u>	<u>CONCLUSION.</u>	334
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	350

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRAISE POETRY

AND POETRY IN ZULU AND XHOSA.

	<u>Page</u>
<u>CHAPTER 1. Introduction.</u>	
1.1 Preamble: Source of Material.	1
1.2 The nature and scope of this work.	1
1.3 The distinction between traditional and modern poetry..	12
1.4 The adequacy of the term "Nguni".	15
1.5 Previous research findings concerning traditional Nguni poetry.	16
1.6 Conclusion.	42
 <u>CHAPTER 2. What is Poetry?</u>	
2.1 The nature of poetry.	45
2.2 Poetry and "Truth".	55
2.3 Conditions for the composition of poetry.	61
2.4 What is oral poetry?.	66
2.5 Conclusion.	71
 <u>CHAPTER 3. The Development of Praise Poetry as an Oral Genre.</u>	
3.1 The widespread occurrence of praise poetry in Africa. .	73
3.2 Previous hypotheses concerning the development of praise poetry as an oral genre.	74
3.3 The long established, popular appeal of praise poetry..	78
3.4 The interrelationship between praising and the complex cattle culture.	79
3.5 The extensive incidence of <u>ukubonga</u> among children. . .	81
3.6 The stages of <u>ukubonga</u>	84

3.7	The structural development of Xhosa clan praises.	93
3.8	The development of clan praises among the Zulu.	95
3.9	Conclusion.	112

CHAPTER 4. Origins of Modern Nguni Poetry

4.1	Conflicting sentiments about the emergence of modern Nguni poetry.	115
4.2	The missionary influence and the impact of Christianity on Nguni poetry.	123
4.3	Early press publications and the Killie Campbell Archives.	143
4.4	The European and Western influence on early Nguni poetry.	155
4.5	The content of modern Zulu and Xhosa poetry.	173
4.6	The traditional influence on modern Zulu poetry.	177
4.7	Conclusion.	189

CHAPTER 5. The Structure of Nguni Written Poetry and Praise Poetry

5.1	Miscellaneous theories on structure.	192
5.2	Repetition as a structural element in Nguni poetry.	199
5.3	Perceptions of the structure of a modern Xhosa poem.	207
5.4	The repetitive structure of Zulu and Xhosa poetry.	216
5.5	Pouring new wine into old wineskins ?	222
5.6	Traditional and modern poetry concerning current issues.. . . .	226
5.7	Conclusion.	260

CHAPTER 6. Imagery and symbolism in Praise Poetry and Modern Poetry

6.1	What is imagery ?	263
6.2	The various types of imagery and their usage in Nguni poetry.	266
6.2.1	Simile.	266

		V11
6.2.2	Metaphor.	274
6.2.3	Personification.	294
6.2.4	Symbolism.	297
6.3	Conclusion.	330

CHAPTER 7. Conclusion

7.1	Rationale for this study.	334
7.2	The need for further research.	335
7.3	Summary of research findings.	337

<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	350
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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRAISE POETRY AND POETRY IN ZULU AND XHOSA

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION.

1.1 Preamble: source of material.

This study deals with Nguni poetry collected from many different sources. For a previous dissertation (Wainwright, 1979) recordings were made of over 250 oral praise poems as recited by Xhosa-speaking mineworkers on various South African gold mines. However approximately only one fifth of the poetry collected was discussed in that dissertation and the present work includes that recorded poetry that has hitherto not been published, as well as previously published or unpublished material found in the archives of the Killie Campbell Africana Museum which possibly represents the richest storehouse of izibongo (praise poetry) in the world. Included in the archival material are the poetic expressions of those Nguni who either because they failed to find a publisher or because they only wanted to compose one or two poems, sent their literary works to local Nguni newspapers. Finally, as an ultimate progression, the present work also includes that body of poetry which is readily available in the form of published anthologies of recent poets.

1.2 The nature and scope of this work.

This study will incorporate an assessment of previous research findings in so far as they have bearing on literary forms of poetry. Concerning the corpus of prior work on izibongo, one is struck by the large number of mutually contradictory comments of various critics.

A chapter will be devoted to the question, "What is poetry?" Besides incorporating an assessment of the nature of both written and oral poetry, this chapter will treat the controversial concept of poetry as a vehicle for the conveyance of social norms, conditions for the composition of poetry, and the frequent incidence of repetition in poetry, (this latter quality being regarded by many literary critics as the hallmark of the oral tradition).

The third chapter will deal with the development of praise poetry as an oral genre. The development of praises from simple praise names to more complex praise images and finally to praise poetry, the nonpareil of Nguni literary endeavour, will be traced. A picturesque facet of the Nguni tradition is the frequent incidence of praise names for chiefs and dignitaries as well as for the rank and file members of society. Thus, Xhosa praise nomenclature such as Zanoxolo (Bringer-of-Peace) or Jongilanga (Starer-at-the-sun) is often encountered. Incidentally, Zanoxolo was the praise name given to Dr. Diedrichs, the late State President of the Republic of South Africa, on the occasion of the granting of independence to Transkei. Several thousand assembled Xhosa, when asked to do so over the public address system, called out to him in unison saying, "Aa! Zanoxolo!" Yet such honorary designation is not limited to humans alone because animals, especially cattle, (and from an Nguni viewpoint, even lesser creatures such as birds) have similar praise names usually reflecting some real or imagined feature. For example, among the Xhosa and Zulu the goliath heron is called uNozalingwenya (Giver of birth to crocodiles) and the bateleur, because its sighting is considered an omen of impending war, is aptly named, inter alia, Intlaba-mkhosi (The War-cry), Intaka yamadoda (The Bird of the men), Intaka yempi (the Bird of war), or Intaka yotshaba (The Bird of the destroyer).

Although the praises of humans have been fairly extensively documented, very little has been written concerning the praises of such birds. Nguni herdboys during the long hours spent watching their charges, become clever mimics of nature. Consequently, bird calls are rendered as the personal praises of the various birds' cries.

Having traced the development of the izibongo from praise names such as these to praise poems of many lines, a chapter of the thesis will deal with the origins of modern Nguni poetry. This will include comment on the first fledgling literary endeavours (of a non-controversial nature) that were published by missionary printing presses. However, such ecclesiastical benefactors, assisting as they did those emergent poets and novelists, were essentially concerned with the propagation of the faith and they naturally favoured religious articles rather than secular topics of belles-lettres. Later, individual poets sent their work to local newspapers and only after collating a sizeable amount of such contributions did they approach local printing houses, who like the missionaries (but for different reasons, including the fear of having a work banned or considered unsuitable) also extended considerable influence over the nature of the work that was accepted for publication. It is also quite possible that the authors and poets themselves exercised a form of self censorship, producing "acceptable" works which were usually intended for school use, which in any subsistence level economy, usually provide the prime market for such literary works. Obviously this had a profound effect on the nature of the poetry composed.

A separate chapter will concentrate on the structure of Nguni poetry. Because Western poetry has a structure totally different from Nguni poetry, even ~~certain~~ earlier critics who could speak Nguni fluently, failed to recognize izibongo as poetry. In the Western genre,

regularly lined stanzas are often encountered; there is rhyme, and sonnets, for example, can conform to the structure of the Shakespearean or Italian type. Unlike traditional poets who were totally unaware of such matters on another continent, modern Nguni poets who have had some exposure to Western (particularly English) poetry, have tried to imitate Western poetry; but with very little success. Within the traditional poetry itself, various styles and structures are evidenced; some praise poems, usually the work of less proficient poets, consisting only of staccato praise images.

Thus, the penultimate chapter will deal with imagery in both praise poetry and modern poetry. Certain izibongo, often the product of more adept praisers, can have a more rambling or narrative style relating past incidents in a flowery and allusive manner. In a previous dissertation (Wainwright, 1979, p.p. 113-115) this allusive imagery of certain izibongo was commented on, a viewpoint sharply contrasting with that of Raymond Kunene (who confirming a statement of I. Richards) wrote

/The aim of the poet is to communicate his experience in the clearest and most effective manner possible.

(Kunene, 1962, p. viii).

A further aspect in the art of ukubonga (literally, "to praise") concerns the transition from the traditional type of praising of chiefs and kings to a more recent yet similar praising of God in hymns. An interesting, yet separate study could be made of such hymns, because although they do not have the diction of izibongo, were they to be recited in the traditional mode instead of being in Christian ritual, they might closely resemble praise poetry. Recited thus, they could even be viewed as modern poetry in praise of the Christian God. In 1974 S. D. Ngcongwane wrote a Masters' degree dissertation on this aspect and ten years later, in an article entitled "The church hymn as a kind of

literature", he wrote a subsection under the heading of "The hymn and poetry". Today the close relationship between songs and poetry is widely acknowledged and in this connection Ngcongwane wrote:

Most hymns use various forms of repetition, and in this respect they are like traditional songs which basically also use repetition. The hymns repeat the first line, or sometimes the last line.

(Ngcongwane, 1984, p.69)

Elsewhere in the same work he wrote

These choral creations were really great songs, great in their structure and great in their power for praising.

(Ngcongwane, 1984, p.65)

My study will deal with repetition as a structural element of Nguni poetry.

The close relationship between hymns and praise poetry is evidenced in the following quotation from St. Augustine's writings, as cited in Ngcongwane's work.

A hymn is the praise of God by singing. A hymn is a song embodying the praise of God. If there is merely praise, but not praise of God, it is not a hymn. If there is praise, and praise of God, but not sung, it is not a hymn. For it to be a hymn, it is needful, therefore, for it to have three things - praise, praise of God, and these sung.

(Ngcongwane, 1984, p.65)

However, this study will not concentrate on Zulu and Xhosa hymns, but only on their poetry, both traditional and modern.

There have been certain trends in the transition from traditional praise poetry to modern poetry. R. Kunene (1962, p p. 57,78-79) has

✓
 hypothesized that pre-Shakan praise poetry was "lyrical" which became more "warlike" in the Shakan area. Gentler images drawn from nature were replaced with those of ferocious, devouring beasts of prey. Part of this study will deal with that modern written poetry which has reverted to the former lyricism of a bygone age. Again, there will be discussion on the Romantic themes treated by some latter day Nguni poets who were undoubtedly influenced by men such as Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley. For example, of late one finds Xhosa, nature poetry such as A.Z. Ngani's praises of springtime, entitled Isilimela (1957, p.29), his poem about a mountain, entitled Intaba yeGudu (1957, p.23) and Jolobe's praises of a springbok, entitled Umbongo webhadi (1972, p.56).

Westernization has also played a very significant role in the changing of poetic themes and of subjects deemed worthy of poetic composition. For example, as a result of a tour by members of Britain's royal house in 1947, many poems commemorating the event were composed and various Xhosa iimbongi (praise poets) declaimed extempore before the Royal Family. The Killie Campbell Museum also has a collection of poetry dedicated to white, black and Indian political figures, including that of the world famous Mahatma Gandhi who in the earlier part of his life played a prominent part in black politics in Africa. On a technological level, Nguni poets, impressed by subjects such as aeroplanes, and if prolificity is a yardstick, even more so by trains, composed poetry lauding these new subjects.

This study will also include a literary analysis of the traditional praise poetry which I have collected during the past few years. Use will also be made of the unpublished izibongo found in the Killie Campbell archives as well as more recently published, yet from a literary viewpoint, uncommented on anthologies such as D.P.L. Yali Manisi's Izibongo zeenkosi zama-Xhosa. The title page of his anthology credits

him with the description of Imbongi entsha (The modern poet) yet the subjects he praises are the traditional Thembu, Gcaleka and Rharhabe chiefs as well as various amaqhawe (heroes).

The aforementioned Killie Campbell archival material contains a great deal of Zulu izibongo and press cuttings of early poetry published in the columns of a local newspaper. The Zulu bias of this material is understandable considering that the museum itself and its initiator (after whom it is named) were in a Zulu area. Modern Zulu poetry by prominent poets such as B.W. Vilakazi, as well as recent Xhosa anthologies will also be used as source material. Whenever such poetry is quoted in this work (unless it is expressly stated to the contrary) the translation thereof is my own work. Such translations are as literal as possible but naturally cannot do full justice to the poetic features inherent in the original.

An anthology such as Ngani's Intlaba-Mkhosi, which he subtitled Izibongo zesiXhosa (Xhosa poems) but which title, in fact, literally means "A War Cry", is particularly useful. In brackets after the Xhosa poet's name are the words Imbongi yaseXesi (The imbongi from Middledrift) and although the poetry was composed by 1947 it was only in 1957 that it was published, by the Lovedale Missionary Press, whose commendable efforts in promoting early Xhosa poetry will be commented on in some detail in the chapter entitled "Origins of Modern Nguni Poetry".

In Ngani's anthology are poems such as Eyomalusi, Ngqusha Mfazi and Ufikile na Mkhozi ? which show an interesting developmental sequence of a repetition of phrases. This structural aspect will be commented on in greater depth in another chapter.

In the preface to his anthology the farsighted Ngani wrote

Kumamaphepha - ndaba (sic) esiNtu,
ungafumana izintlu ngezintlu
zezibongo zodidi oluphezulu,
ezithe sa kuloo maphepha-ndaba,
ebe zinokuqokelelwa zenziwe
umqulu omnye wencwadi
yezibongo, zingalahleki.

(Ngani, 1957, p.3)

In Black vernacular newspapers one can find various poems of good quality which remain scattered by being in those newspapers but which should be collected to form an anthology of poetry, to obviate their being lost.

This indeed was done by certain librarians and these early poems provide valuable source material for this work.

Others such as J.S.M. Matsebula collated anthologies of poetry by putting together the contributions of numerous poets. In the anthology, Iqoqo Lezinkondlo, there are 57 Zulu poems by 10 different poets including J. Matsebula, the editor of the work. Similarly, the academic, A.C. Nkabinde collected 132 poems (composed by almost as many poets) and published them under the title Inkwazi, but without attempting to contribute any poetry of his own.

Likewise, C.L.S. Nyembezi, a Zulu academic-cum-novelist, under the title of Imisebe Yelanga (The rays of the sun) published various anthologies of Zulu poetry. He numbered his publications, and Imisebe Yelanga 2, for example, consists of 60 poems, number 3 had 74 poems, and number 4 comprised 73 poems by numerous poets some of whom (B.W. Vilakazi, E.E.N.T. Mkize and J.C. Dlamini), had a wide readership. Of interest is the fact that he published photographs of certain of the poets next to their poetry. For example, the first poem in anthology number 3 is by a very youthful J.C.N. Hlongwa who composed an equally juvenile poem entitled Kusile (It has dawned). Extracts include the first and the third verses.

Ilanga seliphumile,
Umyama usudlulile,
Abantu sebevukile
Ngakho ngoba sekusile.

Isikhathi siyadlula,
Masinyane sizophela,
Lokhu ngawukuqaphela,
Ngoba nawe uzophela.

(Ed. by Nyembezi, 1961, p.1)

The sun has risen
 The darkness has passed
 The people are awake
 Because it has dawned.

Time is passing
 Soon it will be finished
 This I alert you of
 Because you, too, will pass away.

The didactic nature of such poetry is more suited to school-children for whom this poem in all probability was intended. The inclusion of such poetry is partly explained by Nyembezi who wrote that

Abanye lapha ngabalobi abaziwayo
kodwa abanye siyabaqabuka

(Nyembezi, 1961, Preface).

Some of the poets herein are well known writers whereas others we meet for the first time.

Of greater literary merit than the rather juvenile Imisebe Yelanga 2 were his Imisebe Yelanga Numbers 3 and 4 where Nyembezi mainly catered for more adult readers. This latter trend was continued in the three anthologies which he edited, namely, Imikhemezelu, Amahlungu aluhlaza and Izimpophoma zomphefumulo.

Insight is also given to what stimulated some Zulu poets into putting their creative talents on paper.

Izinkondlo eziningi ezikulencwadi
zazilotshelwe umncintiswano
owawenzelwe abalobi abansundu
wenziwe yiAfrikaanse Pers Boekhandel
ngo - 1953.

(Nyembezi, 1961, Preface).

Many of the poems in this book were written for a competition for Black writers organised by the Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel in 1953.

Nyembezi saw his publication of the poets' work as a promotion of the cultural heritage of the Zulu nation as well as being the spur to prick the sides of their intent.

Lomsebenzi ngiwamukele ngoba ngiqonda
ukuthi izincwadi zibaluleke
kangakanani entuthukweni yesizwe . . .
Siyethemba futhi nokuthi laba
balobi okuvezwe izinkondlo zabo
lapho bayokhuthazeka, baqhubekele
phambili, umsebenzi wabo
ukhanye njengemisebe yelanga

(Nyembezi, 1961, Preface).

I have accepted this work because I know that books provide great direction in the advancement of a nation ... We trust also that these whose poems are published herein will be encouraged, and forge ahead so that their work will shine like the rays of the sun.

In doing so he indicated whence the title of the anthologies originated. The multi-talented Nyembezi, widely acknowledged as the best Zulu novelist, was honoured by D.B. Ntuli in the poem KuSibusiso Nyembezi (To Sibusiso Nyembezi) which appeared in the anthology Amehlo kaZulu (Through the eyes of the Zulu) which book was the joint product of the Ntuli brothers. The opening lines of D.B. Ntuli's poem are

Bangiboph' izandla ngingashay' ihlombe
Bangivala umlomo nce ngithule,
Bangibuthela kwelikaFelaphakathi !
Eathi umuntu akabongwa esadl' amabele . .
 * * * * *

Ngibaphikisile mina, Mkhwanazi,
Ngoba lenkunzi ngiyibuke ngayethemba

(Ntuli, Amehlo kaZulu,
 no date, p. 45).

They tied my hands so that I could not clap
 They closed my mouth so I couldn't utter a
 syllable
 They recruited me to the Felaphakathi regiment!
 They say a person is not praised while still
 alive (lit. "while still eating sorghum")

 But I have gainsaid them, Mkhwanazi
 Because this bull I have seen and trusted.

Ntuli's reference to the Felaphakathi regiment is extremely appropriate because it means that they tried to preclude his doing anything just as the Felaphakathi regiment, as a homeguard, remained kicking their heels while others were away on military campaigns. Interesting, too, is his reference to the common Zulu maxim that one is not praised while still alive (literally, "while still eating sorghum") because as Ntuli has shown, contrary to what is averred in the idiom, people are praised while still alive.

A few of these modern poets give some indication of their motivation in writing poetry. For example, M.A. Blose, prefaces his Zulu anthology, Inkondlo KaNobantu (Poems on Nobantu) with the poetic lines

Idlozi likaPhunga lathi, loba
Nkonyane kaZulu, wondle usapho
Nemiphefumulo kaNobantu ...
Ngasuka ngiphuthazela
Ngasuka ngiphakazela
Ngaloba ngilangazela

(Blose, 1966, Preface).

The ancestral spirit of Phunga said
 "Write, Calf of the Zulu nation. Support
 the children and souls of Nobantu .."
 I got up groping in the darkness
 I got up in great excitement
 I wrote with great desire.

What these modern Nguni poets wrote about and why they did so is expressed in the words of the Xhosa poet, W.S. Nkuhlu, in his anthology Imvaba. His title has a wealth of meaning including "a receptable" or "a source of supply" or even the more traditional "leather milk-sack". In the words of the poet then

Le Myaba ndiyiyaleza kuni zihlwale. AsiMvaba yamaXhosa odwa,
ingeMvaba ya-Afrika yodwa kuba

"Ndibongel' izizw' ezintsundu nezimnyama,
Ndibongel' izizw' ezibomvu nezimhlophe:
Ndibongel' iAfrika neMerika,
Ndibongel' iNgilane neJamani ..."

(Nkuhlu, 1956, p.i.).

This Storehouse I commend to you, multitudes of people. It is not a Treasury for the Xhosa alone, or a Repository solely for Africa because

"I praise for nations brown and black
I praise for nations red and white
I praise for Africa and America
I praise for England and Germany .."

In one of the chapters a study will be made of early written poetry submitted to vernacular newspapers such as Ilanga lase Natal (which later became known simply as Ilanga). Modern poems such as Vilakazi's Ugqozi, Imbongi, Wo, Lelikhehla, and KwaDedangendlale will be used to illustrate the traditional influence on modern Zulu poetry. This and other poetry will receive closer attention in the following chapters which will be concluded with a summary of relevant research findings concerning the relationship between oral and written poetry in Zulu and Xhosa.

1.3 The distinction between traditional and modern poetry.

In any work of this nature it is essential to give a clear definition of one's terms. Generally speaking, traditional poetry is oral and modern poetry is written, yet the distinction is not always that facile because the dividing line can become blurred due to the

traditional izibongo having subsequently been recorded in writing - and more recently composed in writing. Such traditional oral praises could have been transcribed some time after their composer's demise or even while he was still alive. Certain budding poets of the traditional school sent their work to newspapers or had it published by missionary printing presses, yet to all intents and purposes their poetry was traditional in both form and content. Furthermore, men with insight such as James Stuart, spent many painstaking hours attempting a written recording of oral praises. These would be transcribed while the imbongi repeated his praises time and again - a Herculean task for both poet and writer. Such poetry remains essentially oral, traditional poetry - but oral poetry reduced to writing. The word "reduced" is used advisedly because much is inadvertently lost in the process. Therefore it is not as easy as it may first appear to draw a clear delineation between oral and written poetry, simply because so much oral poetry has subsequently been written! In this sense then, it is not necessarily correct to assume always that izibongo are oral poetry only.

Even so, certain broad generalizations can still be made. Nguni oral poetry can be narrative, laudatory or a combination of both whereas its written counterpart can treat themes and concepts never heard of by oral poets. Oral necessarily also implies aural, whereas most modern written poetry is not, and few written poems are composed for public declamation on social occasions.

Yet with the transition to modern poetry, various stylistic elements of the oral tradition were largely ignored. It would be very seldom (indeed if at all) in recently published anthologies that one would find introductory formulae such as the Xhosa Ho-o-o-yini! or Inzwi! inzwi! khanibek' indlebe or Athi ke,mna! or Viyo-viyo-viyo-o! (alternatively, Vi-i-tyo! Vityo-o-o!) or the Zulu Izwa-a-a-a-ke!

Again, traditional closing formulae such as the Xhosa Ndee-gululu-u! or Ndevovololo-o! Phangalala-a-a! or the invocation Ewe,makube njalo! are also seldom incorporated in poetry today. Similarly, Zulu oral poets can sometimes conclude traditional love poems with the formulae

Gege lagege !
'Ntaba ziyangigegela !
Akukho ntombi yagan' inyamazane
Zal' abantu ziy' ebantwini !

Passer-by, (daughter) of a passer-by !
 Mountains are avoiding me !
 There is no girl that married a buck.
 They refuse people, yet go to (other) people!

Lack of evidence makes it difficult to determine categorically whether the above excerpt is a short poem in itself or merely a concluding formula to a much longer poem. Again, a Zulu praiser, not wishing to state that he has run out of praises for his King, can conclude with the formulae

Yibinda, nkosi !
Yibinda, wena kaNdaba !

It is a blockage in my throat, king !
 It is a blockage in my throat, you, (son) of Ndaba !

As with the introductory formulae, it is suggested that such stylistic elements appear to be unique to public declamation and should they perchance ever be encountered in written poetry, they would probably be in older anthologies which were to a great extent a "written version" of a public performance, or else a striving by the poet to record the declamation as closely and as accurately as could be remembered.

✓ There is undoubtedly a continuum from "traditional" to "modern" praise poetry with elements of the former recurring in present day praises, as in the example cited above.

1.4 The adequacy of the term "Nguni".

At present, according to "official" classification, one cannot refer to the Nguni language, but only to Nguni languages, all of which are related. Thus present nomenclature implies that Swazi, Ndebele, Zulu and Xhosa are separate Nguni languages, and Mpondo, Xesibe, Mfengu, Gcaleka, Rharhabe et al are dialectal variants of one of those Nguni languages, namely Xhosa. (The Zulu and Xhosa "z" is realised a "t" in Swazi and consequently the Swazi refer to themselves as the Swati. However, most population groups in South Africa refer to them as the Swazi.)

Yet this commonly held assumption that the Swazi, Ndebele, Zulu and Xhosa all speak separate languages needs to be re-assessed. Were there a public gathering and spokesmen from all these separate languages to be assembled, each speaking his own "language", the audience would readily understand the gist of the discussion. In such a situation where mutual intelligibility is affected, is it not more correct linguistically, to assume that these languages are not separate per se, but merely dialectal variants of what is but one language, namely Nguni? None of these people consider the term, Nguni, opprobrious when used as a reference for themselves. Indeed, they themselves use this term when distinguishing between them and other groups such as, for example, the Sotho.

When one considers that the Zimbabwean Ndebele people were originally an offshoot of the Zulu, formed as a result of its flight from Shaka's wrath in the first two decades of the previous century, further credibility is lent to the argument that the Ndebele and Zulu, at least, speak dialects of the same language. It is for considerations, both political and nationalistic, rather than linguistic criteria that have determined that these people are said to speak separate languages, rather than dialectal variants of the same languages.

Arguing strictly from a linguistic point of view it is probably correct to view all these languages as dialects but what constitutes a separate language and what is recognised as such, concerns historical and political factors and not just linguistics. Because of these factors, including furthermore geographical considerations, these "languages" can develop separate literatures. For example, Swazi has not always been regarded as a separate language. Zulu was taught in the schools, Swazi scholars used Doke's textbook (on Zulu grammar) and they wrote Zulu national examinations. There was no such thing as Swazi written literature. Political factors have given Swazi separate status - just as they have given Southern Sotho a separate orthography.

Therefore throughout this work the term "Nguni language" refers to these related dialects that are popularly, if controversially, viewed as separate languages. In the interest of clarity, when reference is made to examples from this Nguni language, it will be shown whether the example is from Xhosa or Zulu.

1.5 Previous research conclusions concerning traditional Nguni poetry.

Few informed literary critics today could legitimately argue against the case made for praise poetry that it represents the epitome of the literary art of the Nguni. The most successful modern poetry is that which is a logical extension of the traditional imbongi's (praise poet's) art. Yet there was a time when izibongo were not even regarded as a poetic form by certain critics.

In comparison with Western literature, literary criticism about Nguni poetry is but mere minutiae. Of the scanty copies of material available, the majority of criticism concentrates on praise poetry with

modern poetry being neglected. The reasons for this are not hard to find. Published anthologies of earlier written poetry include attempts that were of a poor quality, largely imitative of the Western genre. Some of these imitations were in fact, direct translations, without any embellishment or creativity being incorporated in the "new work of art". Certain modern poets, including B.W. Vilakazi, the best of the Nguni school, attempted rhyme, but although there has been much debate about this subject it can be stated quite succinctly (if controversially!) that Nguni with its open syllables, does not seem to readily lend itself to rhyme. Interestingly enough, Italian, with its open syllables, does not seem to experience the same problem, if the prolificity of good Italian sonnets is any yardstick.

The themes treated were also largely imitative, particularly those of romantic lyricism about nature and one might be excused were one to imagine that at a certain stage in the development of Nguni poetry there was a wealth of budding Wordsworths, Keatses or Shelleys.

In the traditional izibongo, however, critics (most of them speaking a non-Nguni language and with different cultural perspectives) found much to comment on. Unfortunately some of these observations were made with a skewed value interpretation or simply in the seemingly infallible assumption that all poetry must be measured against the Western genre, naturally the nonpareil of all poetry anywhere.

Thus one finds comments such as those of the early pioneer, the highly regarded and well meaning Professor Alice Werner, who in an article entitled "Swahili Poetry" wrote

Altogether one is inclined to suspect that the illiterate populace of Zanzibar, Mombasa and Lamu is not greatly inferior to the Italian peasantry in the gift of song.

Many of these productions are crude enough in thought.....

(Werner, 1927, p. 101).

Whatever misconceptions Werner might have had concerning poetry were more than compensated for by the sterling work she did in the field of Bantu grammar.

The inland Bantu tribes, though equally given to expressing themselves in song, have nothing which we may call a system of versification. Their chants, intimately associated with the dance and its drum accompaniment, have a sort of rhythm, but no meter; they may consist of one or two phrases, repeated ad infinitum, and perhaps interspersed with a string of meaningless syllables,
.....

(Werner, 1927, p.101).

It is pertinent to point out that Alice Werner's use of the term "Bantu" would not have incurred the emnity it might today. First used by the philologist, Wilhelm Bleek, over a century ago, it merely referred to a family of genetically related languages with cognate morphemes. Thus Swahili and Zulu both belong to the family of "Bantu" languages, a term which when used in a grammatical or linguistic sense is not insulting as some might suppose. However, there is great resistance to it when used as a political designation for certain blacks in Southern Africa. Certainly, in a linguistic context it is preferable to the broad, all encompassing term, "African" languages, which would include, inter alia, various West African, Saharan, Sudanic, Pygmy, Arabic, Semitic and Indian languages (besides Afrikaans which is now also a language of Africa). The term "black" languages is also not as definitive as "Bantu" because although the San and Indians might be considered "blacks" in the Southern African political spectrum, nobody could legitimately argue that they speak a "Bantu" language. Yet, notwithstanding this, "Bantu" languages are officially known as "African" languages in South Africa today. Although, for the aforementioned reasons, this term is not as definitive as "Bantu", it is probably considered less insulting to blacks generally.

Professor Werner errs in her observation that the

✓ Inland Bantu tribes.....have nothing which we may call a system of versification. (loc.cit.)

There also appears to be much confused or contradictory thinking on the part of earlier critics. Werner's opinion that

Their chants.....may consist of one or two phrases repeated ad infinitum, and perhaps interspersed with a string of meaningless syllables. (loc. cit.)

is one shared by Vilakazi who wrote

I believe that no perfect poet composes with a view to conscious communication of his emotions..... Great poets had not the impulse to communicate anything to others, but they shaped certain things to make immortality for their own sakes.

(Vilakazi, 1938, p. 123).

H.I.E. Dhlomo, another famous Zulu poet held the very opposite views to Vilakazi and said of music and poetry that

✓ They reveal the deepest thoughts, feelings and aspirations of the artist himself, and reflect the mind, belief and actions of the people and the age.

(Dhlomo, 1948, p. 86).

Werner's and Vilakazi's views directly contrasted with that of Van Warmelo who is quoted by Van Zyl as stating that

what at first appears to be so much incoherent nonsense then becomes, upon closer examination, intricate and subtle humour and allusion.

(Van Zyl, 1941, p. 120)

Van Zyl, perhaps influenced by his quotation of Van Warmelo, wrote that

lines that obviously seem to have no sense are actually loaded with utmost meaning and value.

(Van Zyl, 1941, loc.cit.).

Perhaps one could add a different perspective to Werner's observation that izibongo are

interspersed with a string of meaningless syllables (loc. cit.)

and argue that although white critics, the black audience, or even the reciter himself might not be able to give an exact translation of the words, to dismiss them as totally meaningless implies a misinterpretation of the multifaceted art of the imbongi. "Borrowing" takes place extensively in izibongo and it is suggested that such words or syllables were probably not meaningless to the original composer who would have been able to give an adequate explanation of them. One could go even further and distinguish between two levels of meaning and suggest that although a black audience might not be able to give a coldly, logical, precise, or exact "dictionary" translation, the audience certainly attaches significance to the words because, like ideophones, they are evocative of the rhythm, sound, sense or fury that the poet is striving for. If not definitive, the words are at least apposite.

It is common knowledge that a critic must strive for objectivity in his assessment, yet subjectivity always seems to creep into the work of certain critics, particularly those with a different cultural perspective to that of the artist whose work is under discussion. Thus one finds statements such as those of Professor Lestrade, who like Werner, was Head of Department in a prestigious university.

..... the explanation of these poems is more difficult still, partly on account of the archaic and obscure nature of the language employed in them, partly on account of the peculiar working of the Bantu mind, which is not analytical and not direct, and which often has great difficulty in grasping that the European mind wants an analytical and direct approach to questions of text-rendition.

(Lestrade, 1935, pp. 7-8, my underlining).

Very unfortunately such thinking is not uncommon. Therefore one is not surprised to read the views of Rev. Döhne, an early lexicographer who produced one of the first "Zulu-Kafir" dictionaries.

Some have expected to find much poetry among the Zulu-Kafirs, but there is, in fact, none

✓ But nothing like poetry or song exists - no metre, no rhyme, nothing that interests or soothes the feeling or arrests the passions - no admiration of the heavenly bodies, or taste for the beauties of creation. We miss the cultivated mind which delights in seizing on these subjects and embodying them in suitable language.

(Döhne, 1857, Introduction to his Zulu-Kafir Dictionary).

It is necessary to comment on some of the Rev. Döhne's terminology and state in his defence that his use of the word "Kafir" would not have elicited the outcry it would today. Adopted from Arabic, it originally meant "a heathen, an infidel or unbeliever (in Christianity)." It was only at a later stage that "Kafir" came to refer more specifically to Xhosa-speakers, particularly of the Ciskei, hence the name Kaffraria (from "Kaffir Area"). A century ago whites distinguished between the Zulu and the Xhosa (who they called Kaffirs). Today, of course, the word is extremely insulting to all blacks, some Nguni incorrectly attributing its origin to ukukhafula (to spit).

Unbeknown to Döhne there were indeed many "cultivated minds" which could compose on a multiplicity of subjects "in a suitable language" (loc.cit.) Döhne's oversight was as a result of a rigidly inflexible concept of Western poetry which made him fail to recognize another poetic form in a different culture. This pitfall was one recognized by Iyasere who maintained that

✓ To assess a work by standards that are alien to it is to judge one system of values by another, which inevitably leads to a mutilation of the art.

(Iyasere, 1975, p. 109).

Again, in his defence, Döhne might be excused for failing to find poetry delighting in "the beauties of creation" or "admiration of the heavenly bodies" (loc. cit.) because even today there is controversy as to whether imbongi of that era treated such topics. Ironically, it was possibly only after Döhne's death that twentieth century poets did so. Raymond Kunene hypothesized that such poetizing also took place in the pre-Shakan era

This era extends from the mid-15th Century to about the early 19th Century.

(Kunene, 1962, p. 51)

Cope (1968, p.50) comments on Kunene's postulation concerning the three periods of Zulu poetry; being pre-Shakan, Shakan and post-Shakan. I believe that it is dangerous to speculate, as Kunene does, concerning the "mid-15th Century" poetry (loc. cit.) because very little Zulu poetry from this era remains (with the possible exception of fragmentary remnants of Ndaba's praises).

Concurring with Cope and probably influenced by him, C.T. Msimang (1979, p.1), also states that the pre-Shakan era was from 1750-1800.

Nonetheless, Kunene postulated that during the mid-fifteenth until the nineteenth centuries

Nature images are frequent.

(Kunene, 1962, p. 57).

Thus, if Kunene is correct, then lyricism and eulogy of subject drawn from nature, also occurred before Döhne's time. At best, though, only fragmentary snatches of "mid-15th Century" oral poetry remain and in the absence of any evidence to either prove or disprove Kunene's postulation, it must remain largely speculative and hypothetical.

Döhne's reasoning that this supposed dearth of natural images in oral poetry directly contrasted "the cultivated" white mind with that of the "Zulu-Kaffir" was paralleled nearly a century later by Van Zyl who wrote

Vision is the main characteristic of praises and the praise-poems supply an interesting study of the Native's ability to observe the hard facts about an object and not so much the colourful beauty of a sky at sunset or the musical sound of flowing water, or the awakening of nature at spring, or the sombre colours of autumn as does the European. Beauty does not make something praiseworthy.

(Van Zyl, 1941, p.124).

Van Zyl's comments can be contrasted with those of Taljaard.

Die verheerliking van skoonheid en prag is kultureel vreemd aan die Zulu, maar verskeie voorbeelde van ekstatische beskrywings van natuurskoon kom voor.

(Taljaard, 1979, p.9).

The glorification of beauty and splendour is (something) culturally strange to the Zulu, yet various examples of ecstatic descriptions of nature's beauty are evidenced.

✓ Van Zyl was wrong in his assessment of the "Native's ability" because for the Zulu and Xhosa beauty does "make something praiseworthy". Possibly, it was as a result of pandering to the unfortunately still very prevalent stereotype of blacks as a "savage and warlike" race that prevented critics from attributing to a "Native mind" the capacity for such eulogies.

On the eve of one of the bloodiest periods in Southern African history, Senzangakhona, the father of Shaka, was praised for his beauty - moreover, these praises being both composed and recited by one male member of a "warrior" race to another male member !

Ozithebe zihle uMjokwane,
Ozithebe zihle zidel' amanxasakazi.

He whose eating mats are beautiful, Mjokwane,

Whose beautiful mats are eaten from by womenfolk.

(Cope, 1968, pp. 74-75, lines 6-8).

In the second line of the following passage of Cope's anthology there appears the typographical error zidel' which is correctly cited as zidlel' by Rev. Grant in file 37 of the Stuart Papers of the Killie Campbell Africana Museum.

Ibhicongo elimzimba buthaka.
Obemzimba muhle nangendlal' enkulu:
Obebuso bungenandawo yokusolwa,
Obemehlo engenandawo yokusolwa,
Obemlomo ungenandawo yokusolwa,
Obesifuba singenandawo yokusolwa,
Obenyawo zingenandawo yokusolwa,
Obezitho zingenandawo yokusolwa,
Obemathanga engenandawo yokusolwa,
Obemadolo engenandawo yokusolwa,
Obemazinyo engenandawo yokusolwa,
Obendlebe zingenandawo yokusolwa,
Obesiphundu singenandawo yokusolwa

Tree with fragile trunk;
 He whose body was beautiful even in the great famine:
 Whose face had no fault,
 Whose eyes had no flaw,
 Whose mouth was perfect
 Whose hands were without defect;
 A chest which had no blemish,
 Whose feet were faultless,
 And whose limbs were perfect;
 Thighs also that were perfect,
 And knees which could not be criticized;
 Whose teeth had no spot,
 Whose ears could not be bettered,
 And whose head had a noble carriage.

(Cope, 1968, pp. 76-77, lines 16-29)

A question could, with certain justification, be posed whether the above excerpt is really poetry, and a ready rejoinder could be that it is undeniably an excerpt from a lengthy praise poem; it has been incorporated in Cope's and Nyembezi's anthologies of praise poetry and furthermore, were it not poetry what should one classify it as? Is it to be regarded as a passage of heightened and animated prose within a praise

poem declamation ? If we are to regard it as poetry, then it is possibly one of the worst examples of Nguni poetry. It certainly is an interesting, if controversial, excerpt and, in fact, only an oral bard could get away with it. One must remember that oral poetry is always a performance and what is effective as a performance need not be effective in writing. This phenomenon is not limited to the Zulus. Indeed, an extremely similar type of "reduplication poetry" is to be found in the izibongo of Sarili, the son of Hintsa, the Xhosa chief.

UZonk'izinto zindongamele:

Ubukhulu bundongamele,

Nokuduma kundongamele,

Nobukhosi bundongamele,

Nokulamba kundongamele,

Nobuhle bundongamele,

He who is surrounded by everything:

Nobility surrounds him,

Fame surrounds him,

Kingship surrounds him,

Famine surrounds him,

Beauty surrounds him,

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.102)

In this regard the question "What is poetry?" will be treated in greater depth in Chapter 2.

This somewhat unique excerpt has twelve consecutive lines ending on exactly the same word, and in each of these lines the ante-penultimate words are almost identical (all sharing the same root) and the twelve words starting each line are all nouns indicating parts of the body.
 ✓ This exemplifies the repetitive structure of praise poetry but does little to enhance the general poetic effect. (Repetition, considered by some literary critics as a sine qua non of oral poetry, is commented on in greater depth later in this work. The very free English translation rendered by Malcolm (and edited by Cope) is in fact more "readable" poetry than the original. In a footnote Cope implied that he would not have taken the liberty of varying the translations as Malcolm did but

would rather have retained the original repetitions in translation.) However, as has already been stated in this work, one must avoid judging oral poetry by "written" standards (and certainly from standards of a different cultural perspective). This poetry was not originally intended to be read and the repetitive structure, although aesthetically displeasing in this instance, was in all probability a mnemonic aid for the declaimer.

In contrast to Van Zyl's aforementioned observation that beauty does not "make something praiseworthy", one Zulu critic, in a paper entitled "Factors that influence the composition of a praise-poem in Zulu" was moved to make the facile statement that

Thirdly, it is unfair to say that the features did not affect history, for they most certainly did. In the David-versus Solomon dispute, one faction of the Zulu's preferred Prince David to Prince Solomon simply because the latter was very fair in complexion and was too good looking for a man.

(Msimang, 1979, p. 3, my
underlining).

Surely, men's loyalties are commanded for reasons more cogent than this !

An overriding conceit appears to be an embarrassing legacy of our cultural perception of the art of another people. One critic, for example, commenting on the method of delivery of Northern Sotho praise poetry, decreed in royal fashion that

We are not completely in favour of it

(Van Zyl, 1941, p.125)

Whereupon he suggested "improvements" such as

The traditional speed must be maintained but at the same time words must be uttered distinctly Exclamations and onomatopoeitic (sic) sounds must be said very clearly and impressively Rests occur according to our punctuations We have experienced that if the praises are said in this manner the delivery is both impressive and "natively" effective.

(Van Zyl, 1941, p. 125).

It is surprising that this selfsame critic did not detect the implicit contradiction of his own suggested "improvements" because in a complete volte face he wrote that "the present original beauty and underlying perfection of the poetry" would only be harmed were "Native poets" to imitate the European mode of poetry.

Modern forms of external perfection will challenge our Native poets; they will despise their "classics", and we are convinced that the coming desire to follow the European also in this respect, is bound to harm the present original beauty and underlying perfection.

(Van Zyl, 1941, p. 123).

But then the work of this critic has more than one irreconcilable statement. Consider the following statements concerning oral declamation.

There are not even stops

(Van Zyl, 1941, p. 123).

When the performer stops, he stops for quite five seconds.

(Van Zyl, 1941, p. 125).

Yet whereas one can now treat with a certain scepticism his suggestions to the effect that

the author advocates a few alterations in the above antique method of delivery

(Van Zyl, 1941, p. 125).

there are also other, certainly more eminent men, who felt that black poets were lacking in some respects. The undisputedly foremost modern Zulu poet, the late B. W. Vilakazi, the first black to obtain a doctorate in literature in South Africa, was also not beyond making facile, deprecating statements about his nation's poets, hence the following excerpt from his dissertation for a Master's degree.

Here I wonder if those people blessed with training and the acquisition of scientific knowledge do not expect too much from the untampered mind of a primitive Bantu man, who has all his knowledge in his head and not on book-shelves This may be the mental make-up of a Bantu poet's mind, which fails to conceive of the demands and desires of the superior mind, will be the task of the field worker (sic).

(Vilakazi, 1938, p. 109).

Whereas self-criticism on the part of any poet is commendable, he is unduly harsh on the supposedly inferior "mental make-up of a Bantu poet's mind" which "fails to conceive" the concepts of a "superior" mind. His concern about "the stooping of the superior mind" (of the presumably white field-worker) has convoluted implications. On the one hand a passive observer and recorder of a poet's skill is juxtaposed with the talents of a creator declaiming a highly talented art, yet it is the observer who is credited as being intellectually superior !

There is an unfortunate tendency among some critics who, not content merely to describe the poetic form as it is, insist on "correcting" it, and consequently poorly qualified teachers barely more educated than their charges, are given the unenviable task of teaching recitation at primary schools. Their insistence upon the superiority of the European tradition has had disastrous consequences on modern poetry because from their formative years

Among our students we have some who are already so much influenced by the orthodox method of reciting English poems (which, by the way, has also become

lamentably poor) that they insist upon saying Sotho praises in the same way.

(Van Zyl, 1941, p. 125).

✓ This is particularly noticeable when traditional poetry (printed and bound in anthologies) is recited in the Western mode. Naturally, what is inculcated in the impressionable childhood years can be carried over into adulthood. Consequently, a few schooled Xhosa miners recited some of S.E.K. Mqhayi's traditional poetry in a way that the author (the most prominent Xhosa imbongi) surely never intended. Very fortunately, such insistence on the "correct" European method of delivery was not very prevalent among the adult Xhosa mineworkers with whom I carried out much of my research.

There is also lack of agreement about the extent of praising, whether everybody in Nguni society can compose and recite poetry or whether it is the privilege of the gifted few. Ngubane remarks

The king, who was obviously one of the most highly educated citizens of the Zulu state, could naturally compose poetry of some sort.

(Ngubane, 1951, p. 4, my underlining).

It has been pointed out that Henry VIII could also compose poetry. He was a trained musician and some of his hymns are still sung today. ✓ Yet, as we see in Nguni society, one's level of formal education has little or nothing to do with one's ability to compose oral poetry. Ngubane's statement that the Zulu king could "naturally compose poetry" is juxtaposed with that of Chapman (who quoted by Schapera) said

Native chiefs are everywhere so fond of flattery that they pay for it.

(Schapera, 1965, p. 5).

Certainly among the rural Xhosa and Zulu every male with the gift of speech can recite a few lines of poetry, be it traditional clan or personal praises. Naturally, the articulate specialist soon gains prominence among the people and eventually even wears the distinctive regalia signifying his (and very less frequently, her) special status. Urbanized blacks, however, are fast losing this gift and appear somewhat embarrassed if asked whether they can bonga, saying that it is something indulged in by less sophisticated country folk.

Ngubane did not share Chapman's concept of financially rewarded "flattery" and was of the opinion that the poetry was "virtually the king's biography".

Since the poet relied on his memory for the reproduction of what was virtually the king's biography, he had to make his verses short, avoiding all unnecessary detail. Each theme was treated briefly in each stanza.

(Ngubane, 1951, p. 3).

Any historian would be at his wit's end attempting to unravel a "biography" from the verses which were very often not short at all but elaborated, flowery allusion which paid scant regard to "avoiding all unnecessary detail". His assumption that stanza length is due to the poetry having to be memorised, is inconsistent with his own statement that stanza length is attributable to "dramatic action" (and thus obviously mutually exclusive of memory).

The intensity of the dramatic action influenced, if it did not determine, the length of each stanza.

(Ngubane, 1951, p. 3).

Perhaps, were the imbongi to run about or at least move very fast from one spot to another, one could accept that "dramatic action" would "influence" or "determine" stanza length. Whereas iimbongi do indeed

praise while in a state of heightened emotion and whereas to all outward appearances they often appear agitated, for the most part they do not run about or become breathless due to physical exertion. Thus, body actions on the part of the poet do not have much to do with verse structure, particularly since certain poets did and still do remain relatively still in any declamation. Unfortunately his ideas on chronological sequence were also incorrect.

These events happened in time and,
consequently, the stanzas in which they were recorded had
to follow one another consecutively in the whole poem.

(Ngubane, 1951, p. 3).

Although one might logically assume that a chronological account of historical episodes would jog a reciter's memory, poets could and did leapfrog across time barriers.

Concerning structure, he was of the opinion that

Each praise-poem is made up of stanzas.
Each verse, in turn, is a short essay on an
interesting unit in the annals of the Zulus.

(Ngubane, 1951, p. 3).

Both traditional and modern poems are not necessarily structured in rigid stanzas. In a previous dissertation (Wainwright, 1979, p.89), it was shown ~~that~~ [✓] much modern oral poetry among Xhosa miners consisted of staccato lines, each of which were semantically unrelated to those preceding or succeeding them. Consequently such verses could not possibly be regarded as "a short essay" commenting on aspects in the annals of the people. There is a close relationship between traditional poetry and good modern poetry. Nonetheless, modern poetry, unlike its traditional counterpart, has a fixed form, being as it is, the written

word. Ngubane errs in his assumption that traditional deliveries had the fixity of the written word.

In some of these, the stanzas have been preserved intact and have not been affected by being passed down from generation to generation.

(Ngubane, 1951, p. 4).

Only the omniscient can claim to know the exact wording of original oral compositions so as to be in a position to state whether they remain unaltered when passed verbally through succeeding generations. It is a fact well known by oral folklorists that it is extremely unlikely that any two (even present day) recitals are exactly the same. Factors such as the context, composition of the audience (whether adult, inclusive of children or exclusively one sex) as well as many other factors, play an important part in the recital. The fallacy of Ngubane's statement (and he is not alone in this regard) can easily be tested by asking any imbongi to re-recite any poem that he has rendered.

Ngubane's statement can be compared with that of Bird who, in discussing probably the most famous work on oral literature, namely The Singer of Tales writes

Lord stresses that the epic singer does not memorize his work, and this claim is illustrated by the differences between any two performances of the same work by the same singer.

(Bird, 1972, p. 282, my underlining).

Ngcongwane has recognized the mutability of the poetry and his viewpoint is diametrically opposed to that of Ngubane.

✓ Nothing is absolutely fixed, and everybody is free to add new lines to known songs and poems to suit his own circumstances.

(Ngcongwane, No date, p.1).

Yet Ngubane (1951, p. 6) possibly contradicts himself when he writes that it was the poet Mshongweni who fixed "the form of the stanzas" and "divided it into three parts". How could Mshongweni have done so if the "stanzas have been preserved intact" from "generation to generation"? Perhaps a more likely interpretation could be that Ngubane was specifically referring to that poetry composed by Mshongweni himself and he was not suggesting that Mshongweni reorganised already existent poetry.

There is even confusion regarding the identity of some of the composers of historic poetry. The following line of poetry, an excerpt from the very famous uTeku praise, is according to Ngubane, the work of

Mshongweni, Shaka's great Court Poet

(Ngubane, 1951, p. 4).

whereas Cope (1968, p.53) has correctly identified Shaka's poet as Magolwane. Yet, it is very likely that a man of Shaka's stature would have had more than one imbongi and as will be discussed later in this work, "plagiarism" (as understood by Western, literate poets) did not exist; and it would be very difficult therefore for any of us to state with certainty who actually did - as opposed to who was reputed to - compose and recite the aforementioned famous stanza. Translations of the poetry itself can also be very free. For example, the aforementioned line

Betekula behlezi emlovini

has been variously translated as

Basking in the sun, they scoffed

(Ngubane, 1951, p. 5).

Joking as they sat in a sheltered spot

(Cope, 1968, p. 90).

Whom they joked with when they were at Emlovini

(Lestrade, 1935, p. 6).

and

(They) made sport by sitting at their
ease.

(Doke and Vilakazi, 1958,
p. 465)

One can also find that a critic (and in this case, a poet-cum-lexicographer, to boot) can give two totally different translations of the same line. For example, Vilakazi in an article based on his dissertation for a Master's degree, translates

Zinomland' omkhulu lezo-nkomo

as

Their owners' sins have thereby marked them mine

(Vilakazi, 1938, p. 120).

whereas in the dictionary that he and Doke compiled, he translates the same line as

Those cattle have a long history behind them.

(Doke and Vilakazi, 1958,
p. 120).

Again in the same article, within the space of four lines, Vilakazi contradicts his translation of the line

Mgudugudu, we mabengwane,

by rendering it as

All of a sudden, they shout at me

and

Suddenly, I answer, Yes, Mabengwane!

(Vilakazi, 1938, p. 122).

The problem of translation is not peculiar to traditional poetry because as Lestrade has correctly stated

But even quite modern poems are difficult enough in their language, since the poets imitate the old models, and employ expressions and constructions whose significance they themselves do not fully understand.

(Lestrade, 1935, p. 6).

✓ Lestrade considers the use of "expressions and constructions" from traditional poetry to be imitation. Perhaps it would have been more accurate to have termed it "borrowing" because Opland, in his Doctoral thesis, is of the opinion that anything a poet composes would be intelligible to him.

✓ Moreover, the imbongi's language is obscure, as Lestrade attests, but not to himself, for he explains his puzzling statements consequently.

(Opland, 1973, p. 54, his underlining).

The poet certainly does not facilitate understanding or explain "his puzzling statements" within his recitation but I have found that if questioned afterwards, he can attach meaning to words that are difficult for other Xhosa-speakers to understand. But this is so only if the poet improvises and does not "borrow", because when pressed to explain the meaning of such "borrowed" phrases one can be answered with the stock reply

Yizibongo nje.

"They are just praises".

✶ Furthermore, if praise poetry were merely memorized renderings from a past tradition, it would be a dying art. However, new izibongo and their logical extension, new modern poetry, are continually being composed.

There can be a very close relationship between modern, written poetry and praise poetry because some poets who originally started as iimbongi later became so prominent that they recorded their work in writing. S.E.K. Mqhayi, the most famous of all the Xhosa oral bards, is an obvious example. Although it is widely recognised that much modern poetry is built on oral tradition with poets even "borrowing" (unacknowledged) lines therefrom, Ntuli correctly noted that

✓ An interesting feature is found in the new compositions in which Vilakazi makes additions to the izibongo of people who are already dead.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.viii).

That Ntuli highlighted these "additions" is illuminating because it tends to confirm that izibongo are a malleable entity, not something passed down immutable in form to succeeding generations. In this sense modern Nguni poets evidence a different cultural and psychological perspective to that of their Western counterparts who saw another's composition as sacrosanct, certainly not something to which one might make additions or even alterations and definitely not without acknowledging one's supposed "improvements" on the original.

This, then, brings one to the questions whether modern Nguni poetry can or should be assessed against modern Western ~~poetry~~ or only in terms of its own traditional background. Taljaard correctly concludes that the answer lies in a synthesis of both, but with a bias toward the former.

Die antwoord lê blykbaar in 'n sintese van bogenoemde, maar die tradisionele sal in sommige opsigte meer prominent wees, veral aangesien baie van die moderne digters van die tradisionele vorme en voorbeeld gebruik maak.

(Taljaard, 1979, p.8).

The answer apparently lies in a synthesis of the abovementioned, but the traditional will be more

✓ prominent in certain instances, especially when considering that many of the modern poets make use of the traditional forms and examples.

This synthesis was also recognised by Friedman who commented on the more powerful traditional influence.

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 unmistakeable Zulu flavour

(Friedman, 1973, p.XI, my underlining).

That the traditional Nguni base had a stronger influence should not be surprising because what is inculcated in the formative, impressionable years and not what is taught later in formal schooling, is what remains strongest. Ntuli, however, does not agree with this assessment.

✓ Although Vilakazi's poetry has traditional traces, it is essentially patterned according to Western styles. The poet himself was brought up in the Western way of education.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.16).

✓ Certainly, modern Nguni poets did have the advantage of drawing on both the old and the new and of creating an exciting symbiosis thereby. Bang was one of those who pointed out that izibongo do have limitations.

The innermost feelings of sorrow, joy, love, hate and ecstasy do not find expression in the izibongo (sic) nor are social conditions criticised or praised. Scenic nature is never eulogised.

(Bang, 1951, p.523).

✓ It was thus only in modern Nguni poetry that poets found a suitable vehicle for the expression of these innermost emotions and sentiments and in this sense the individual psyche of the protagonist can sometimes be

detected in a poem. In traditional izibongo the poet himself is more impersonal, somewhat distanced from his art - never mirrored in it. In this respect Taljaard's observation concerning the purported "objectivity" of izibongo is rather interesting.

Die individualiteit van die imbongi as digter moet egter nie verwar word met subjektiwiteit van die inhoud wat hy weergee nie, want in die izibongo is dit grotendeels objektief.

(Taljaard, 1979, p.16, my underlining).

The individuality of the imbongi as a poet must not be confused here with the subjectivity of the content that he reflects because in the izibongo it is largely objective

Praise poetry, being exactly what its name implies, is poetry eulogistic in intent and it is seldom objective. It is common cause that izibongo are heavily biased toward praise and that generally speaking, inadequacies of the subject are glossed over, if mentioned at all. Even when individual poets do comment on such weaknesses in their subject's personality, this is done with due circumspection and consequently such poetry, far from being objective, is subjective both in nature and intent. Yet this is a point which Taljaard himself readily concedes because in a discussion on izibongo and religion he wrote

Verder kom die 'onderliggende motiewe' tog ook onvermydelik in die inhoudelike gegewe tevoorskyn en is daar ook hier ooreenkomste : lofuitinge en verheerliking van 'n figuur

(Taljaard, 1979. p.17).

Furthermore the "underlying motives" appear unavoidably in the content and here, too, there are similarities : praise declamations and eulogy of a person.

Furthermore, as Bang correctly observed in his aforementioned quotation concerning izibongo

Scenic nature is never eulogised.

(Bang, 1951, p. 523).

When modern poets wished to eulogise "scenic nature" they had a field day in the imitation (and sometimes literal translation) of the Romantics. Ntuli commented on this Romantic influence.

This discussion of the examples of isolated lines and ideas used by Vilakazi from Keats and Shelley shows that the similarity between them is very superficial.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.48, my underlining).

However, it is my own contention that the similarity of content and ideas in this poem and in those that virtually constitute a direct translation of another poet's work, bear more than a "very superficial" resemblance to the original. For example, D. Mck. Malcolm was one who recognized this when in the introduction to F.L. Friedman's Zulu Horizons he wrote

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 on him At first he strove to model his poetry on the English style . . .

(Friedman, 1973, p.XIV.)

This profound influence of the English Romantics was commonly acknowledged by critics such as Friedman.

Vilakazi (was) deeply influenced by the great English Romantic poets.

(Friedman, 1973, p. XI).

Much comment has also been made on the "obscure" and "allusive" nature of izibongo and elsewhere in this work more attention will be paid to this aspect. However, it is not only traditional poetry that is

criticised for being "vague". R. Kunene, in criticising one of Vilakazi's modern poems, Impophoma yeVictoria, said of it that

After reading the poem we still have no idea of the waterfall, except in a vague sort of way.

(Kunene, 1962, p. 206).

As will be pointed out in Chapter 3, no poetry, neither modern nor traditional, is meant to be prosaic and the obscurities can often be a result of a critic's own lack of understanding rather than a weakness on the part of the poet. Sometimes however, the "obscurities" can be occasioned by lack of clarity concerning poetic terms themselves. Most critics of modern poetry readily understand what is meant by concepts such as symbolism, imagery, rhyme, metre and the like. However, in traditional literature, probably because it is a more recent field of study, (even if an older art form), a fair amount of confusion exists. Ntuli quotes an example of what Cope calls "final linking"

UMahlom' ehlathini onjengohlanya
Uhlanya olusemehlweni amadoda

He who armed in the forest, who is like a madman.
The madman who is in full view of the
men.

(Cope, 1968, p.42).

and says of it that

We prefer not to regard this as final linking

(Ntuli, 1978, p. 228).

This is what Cope calls final linking. Groenewald (p. 74) and Mzolo (p. 100) calls (sic) it cross-linking.

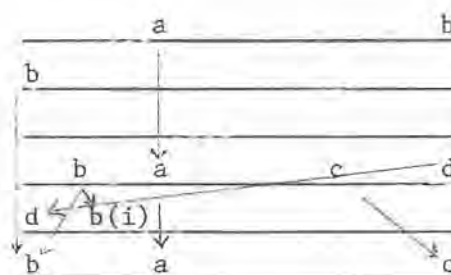
(Ntuli, 1978, p. 231).

D. Kunene (p. 75) refers to this phenomenon as "cross line repetition" and if a single feature is so variously called, little wonder that confusion exists ! Yet because "cross-linking" can occur at any point in a line, I suggest that a better term for this particular

aspect would be "final-initial linking". Whatever name critics refer to it by, it does nonetheless emphasise that greater consistency in terminology is necessary when referring to traditional elements and features. Perhaps the picture is not as bad when reference is made to modern poetry, again this being a result of greater emphasis having been placed on written poetry by many critics the world over.

In the fourth chapter attention will be paid to works such as R. M. Kunene's Master's dissertation and to B.W. Vilakazi's Doctoral thesis in a discussion on the emergence of modern Nguni poetry.

Certain modern critics of Nguni poetry also seem, unlike their predecessors, to use arrows to indicate the recurrence of certain words within a passage. For example, the following pattern is one depicted by Ntuli.



(Ntuli, 1978, p.235).

It is accepted that besides Ntuli there are other critics who have drawn similar schematic outlines. There are two philosophical approaches to such literary criticism. On the one hand it could be argued that such patterns do little to further one's appreciation of a poem that was essentially meant to be heard or read and those who hold this viewpoint will argue that Nguni poets did not compose to illustrate symmetries of arrow-patterning. They were, on the contrary, composing poetry with

scant regard to structural diagrams and other supposedly extraneous structural inferences that are seen in poetry by some critics. It is argued by those who hold this viewpoint that the poet was in all probability largely unaware of what the critics might find in his poetry. Of course, it is not such a simple dichotomy of black and white, but generally speaking there is another viewpoint espoused by latter day critics who maintain that certain poets do consciously strive for such effects. One has only to look at the poetry of E.E.Cummings or to see Jakobson's treatment of the English sonnet to see that their argument is plausible. Concerning the structure of Nguni written poetry and praise poetry, this will be investigated in greater depth in Chapter 5.

1.6 Conclusion

Having discussed the source material for this work, the nature and breadth of scope of the matter to be discussed in the thesis; having commented on the distinction between traditional and modern poetry and finally, having questioned the adequacy of the term, "Nguni", this chapter has largely concentrated on an objective assessment (as far as that is possible) of previous research findings concerning Nguni poetry.

Generally speaking, one can say that although certain researchers made somewhat spurious, even racist remarks in their interpretation of a foreign culture's art, a certain leniency must needs be exercised when we, in turn, judge their work because we could view it merely as a product both of the age they lived in and of their remote (Western) upbringing and environment. It is only within recent decades that oral poetry enjoyed any modicum of the acclaim it undoubtedly deserved earlier. Yet, even allowing for the misperceptions of those from a different cultural background, somewhat bizarre insights about African poetry have been highlighted by prominent African critics supposedly

immersed in their own culture, (this statement having been made while aware of the contentious viewpoint that only a native speaker can appreciate the art of his people).

For example, one black critic was moved to write that the gift of reciting praise poetry is not the sole prerogative of mankind.

✓ And even God praises himself thereby, he explains his ways, origin, majesty, form, omnipresence, goodness, peace, truth, life and similar things by means of praises.

(Lekgothoana, 1938, p. 191).

It is even averred that both praiser and praised can transcend into a trance because

A man whilst praising or being praised can walk over thorns, which cannot pierce his flesh which has become impenetrable

(Lekgothoana, 1938, p. 191).

Obviously then, the study of Nguni poetry has been considered a worthy pastime, so much so that H.I.E. Dhlomo, a well known poet and critic was moved to make the rather incomprehensible statement that praise poems "are regarded as God Himself" by the Zulus and

That is why the praise-poems which, as we have seen, are regarded as God Himself, are given to sticks and stones (for these are the manifestation if not the actual breath of God)

(Dhlomo, 1948, p. 84).

The identity of God and exalted language is not unusual however, (cf. "In the beginning was the word"). The identity of praise poems and the amadlozi (ancestral shades) is also close because propitiation can be made to the shades through the medium of praise poetry.

Nonetheless, whatever Dhlomo might have meant, the poetry certain
does merit a further, even if more secular study.

2.1 The nature of poetry

Were one to have the opportunity of asking one hundred people what they consider to be the nature of poetry, one might anticipate a hundred different responses. Yet it is not often that one can literally pose such a question to a number of people. In 1978 I had the privilege of doing just that while conducting research on praise poetry on various gold mines. Whereas today a researcher would encounter suspicion and possible hostility while walking about with a tape recorder attempting to solicit views from strangers, I was in the extremely fortunate situation of having access both to various gold mines and its employees - all with the approval of both employees and employers on those mines.

To obtain as broad a cross-section as possible for the survey, interviews were conducted with one hundred Xhosa-speaking migrant miners employed on different mines and coming from different home areas. Once a certain rapport had been established they were invited, inter alia, to give their perceptions about izibongo.

Xhosa oral poetry was perceived as having numerous characteristics. ✓ Some considered it to be a verbalization or crystallization of public opinion, mainly of praise but including elements of criticism. Others conceptualized poetry as a vehicle for encouraging rulers, providing informal censure, mediation, mobilizing public opinion and for entertaining an audience. Others saw the poetry as a means of enlivening aggrieved emotions at funerals and on the opposite end of the scale, of providing amusement through the use of extremely salacious humour. Poetry was seen as a positive entity, something that could re-enforce norms and values and promote social harmony. It was thought

that through such poetry a wise ruler could moderate his edicts or behaviour by taking cognizance of elements of criticism as expressed in the poetry. The nature of the poetry was perceived as supportive, not intended to overthrow or depose a ruler. It was considered useful in indicating perceived digressions from an expected norm. Its potential characteristics included the capacity for encouraging people to forget tribal differences yet, conversely, it was also viewed as being very capable of instilling national pride through the conveyance of sentiments and references to incidents of national prestige. It was considered useful for pronouncing moral norms and directives. One respondent believed that the composition of poetry was restrained and influenced by the nature of the audience because a poet was viewed as having to follow a certain line to retain the favour of his listeners. Others saw poetry as the ability to pithily and succinctly pull together in a phrase or two a variety of ill-defined emotions felt by those not imbued with the gift of poetry. It is interesting that most of these responses highlight the functional nature of poetry and as such they parallel the classical perception of poetry as dulce et utile, something sweet and useful.

Now if we are to accept Coleridge's averment (Simpson, 1970, p.11) that the answer to "What is poetry?" is tantamount to asking what a poet is; then the concept of a poet's identity has certainly changed among the Nguni. Traditionally, the poet belonged to a specific class, wore a distinctive regalia which identified him as someone "special", formed part of a notable's entourage and sometimes even depended on him for subsistence. While accepting that

✓ there is a continuity between oral and written literature which has never been interrupted.

(Wellek and Warren, 1954, p.39).

the case of a modern poet is quite different in most, if not all, of these aspects. For a start, modern poets are dependent on their readers for their financial support and this naturally affects the composition ✓ of their poetry. They also wear no distinctive clothing, could be employed as teachers or whatever and do not form part of an entourage.

Whereas it is now commonly accepted that oral renditions can differ appreciably from performance to performance, the characteristics of some oral poetry can change dramatically within a single declamation. For example, oral bards to the north of the Nguni may start by publicly reciting poetry eulogistic in nature, but this trend will change once the anticipated rewards are not forthcoming from the one to whom the poem is addressed. The spirit and mood of the poetry then changes, almost imperceptibly initially, but progressively thereafter through the addition of barbed comments until finally, if this has not elicited the desired response, the poetry will become downright abusive - at this point still being something utile (useful) but certainly not dulce (sweet). Examples of where this occurs are given by Gidley in his article entitled "Roko: A Hausa praise crier's account of his craft."

No patron would think of taking a crier to court for adverse 'praise' in those days, for if he did so, it would only further advertise his own meanness to the community. The criers could perhaps then be regarded as performing a kind of public service - that of public commendation and remonstrance - at a time when there were no local newspapers or, if there were, they were not widely read.

(Gidley, 1975, p.102)

Gidley notes that with the impact of politics in Northern Nigeria in about 1949

There were even occasions when the circumstances were such that the Nigeria Police considered the performance to be conduct likely

to cause a breach of the peace, and advised a crier not to repeat it.

(Gidley, 1975, p.102)

Gidley (1975, p.103) wrote that as a result, in 1954 a law was passed whereby no praise crier was allowed to perform without a valid permit - which was usually issued at the nearest police station and which cost one pound.

This practice of "adverse" praising was confirmed by Smith who, in an article entitled "The social functions and meaning of Hausa praise-singing", wrote

Moreover, unlike other Hausa craft products, roko does not usually depend on voluntary agreement between the craftsman and his customer..... At other levels the producer may indeed inflict his attention on persons against their wish.

(Smith, 1957, p.27)

Thus the relationship between the poet and the subject of the poetry can intimately affect the very nature of the poetry itself. Taken a step further, this is true too for other contexts and other types of poetry such as love poems, funeral orations and elegies.

✓ One must of necessity adopt a holistic exegis of oral and written poetry and not construe the one as being separate from the other. The latter is only a continuation of the former, for as Shelley has written

✓ every great poet must inevitably innovate upon the example of his predecessors in the exact structure of his peculiar versification.

(Sitwell, 1943, p.27).

Such a statement is useful both in assessing the characteristics of poetry generally and in tracing the relationship between oral and

written poetry in Zulu and Xhosa. In looking at the nature of written Nguni poetry it must be borne in mind that in this context the nearest synonym to "written" is "modern" but at the same time one must avoid thinking of modern Nguni poetry as that which might popularly be conceived of a "modern" poetry elsewhere which

conjures up poetry with no apparent rules so abstract, obscure or eccentric in conception and phraseology that we fail to gather either meaning or emotion.

(Armstrong, 1973, p.32).

Furthermore, in the Nguni context, the viewing of modern poetry as an entity so distinct from traditional poetry that ne'er the twain shall meet, is misleading. Much creative, new poetry is based, whether consciously or otherwise, on an assimilation of what preceded it. In this connection, the following viewpoint is also pertinent for Nguni poetry.

We can estimate the value of variation only when we know the norm from which the innovation is a departure. There are countless examples of poets considered revolutionary in technique who have based their own daring experiments on the most thorough study and practice of the poetic conventions and formal devices of their predecessors' art.

(Burton and Chacksfield, 1979, p.88)

In an assessment of the nature of poetry the words "sensitive" or "sensitivity" appear to be almost inevitable. Poetry is often conceptualized as a sensitive portrayal of emotion even if, on occasion, it is violent emotion. The poet requires insight to adequately portray such human inner conflict. Naturally, a certain sensitivity on the part of the reader will also add immeasurably to an appreciation of the poetry because for a start, without it poetry wouldn't be recognized as such. However, a lack of sensitivity on the part of the reader

obviously cannot negate the value of the poetry but merely heightens the probability of its true worth not being acknowledged.

Sometimes to ask a person to describe the nature of poetry is to elicit a response so imprecise, vague or nebulous that one wonders whether one is considering the same entity. The difficulty is compounded in that if one asks what the constituents of a cake are, for example, it is easy to identify household commodities such as eggs, milk, and butter. Obviously one cannot with the same ease identify physical components and say those are what constitute poetry. In tutorial class discussions with fellow students this very question concerning the nature of poetry would often be addressed. A student might, for example, state that a poem is that which has formal constituents such as rhyme, rhythm and metre yet such "formal" definitions of poetry are quite inadequate because they only encompass one aspect of a complex whole. One might with justification say that a poem is a sonnet because it has fourteen lines or go further and identify it as a particular type of sonnet (i.e. Shakespearean or Italian) because of a certain rhyme-scheme, but all such definitions of poetry are only partial definitions in that some poems might have none of these features, yet still remain poetry. Conversely some purported poetry might have all these features yet still not be poetry because it lacks a flair of creative genius, or spirit, or is dull and artificially contrived. Such contrived artificiality may be the result of a slavish adherence to formal structure and in this regard it is worth noting that form itself is merely a means to an end - a vehicle for the mechanism of poetry - and is not the end itself. The overriding aim of poetry is spirit, not mechanics.

Others might state that poetry is that which is conceived in moments of rare inspiration such as when one becomes almost possessed

with an uncommon flash of creative genius, only part of which can be captured on paper before it evanesces. Yet a friend of mine who is a poet has consciously worked at each of his anthologies, as you or I might at a work desk. The hours for his work are always of a Saturday morning, without fail, and no interference in the form of visitors or telephone calls is tolerated. Such poetry would obviously beg the definition of sudden inspirational flashes, unless of course, such brilliance comes at precise and regular intervals which is highly unlikely. The work of this poet, and no doubt of many others, is the result of dogged, disciplined determination. When I put this very issue to him, he pointed out that by deliberately cutting himself off from all extraneous interruptions for a few hours every week, he was consciously creating the physical conditions conducive to the sparking of intellectual creativity. Such a set routine for conscientious composition is naturally nothing unique and other poets, too, set aside specific hours every day because to be a good poet requires a great deal of hard work over and above a talented disposition. In this regard Alexander Pope's couplet is also relevant.

True ease in writing comes from art, not
chance,
As those move easiest who have learn'd to
dance.

(Phythian, 1970, p.120).

Apparently, if Cecil Day Lewis, no mean poet himself, is correct, the perception of poetry requires as much effort on the part of the reader as on the creator.

The learning to read poetry takes as much
patience and concentration as the learning to
write it.

(Burton and Chacksfield, 1979, p.7).

I dare say that the popular conception on the part of most people would be that they would have much less difficulty in reading and appreciating a poem than in trying to compose their own. Nonetheless having read a good poem one is endowed with a new and deepened awareness, something that stimulates some or all of our senses and not just the commonplace senses of sight, smell, taste and touch. Poetry is the distillation and quintessence of all these and much more. One of the features of poetry is its "memorability" because one can find ✓ phrases and lines of poetry reverberating through the canyons of one's mind in a way that prose seldom, if ever, can.

Through both different continents and centuries, there have been numerous ideas about the nature and composition of poetry, particularly that good poetry is composed as a result of divine inspiration while in some trance-like state. Plato is quoted as having written that

✓ All good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems, not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed the lyric poets are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains they are simply inspired to that to which the Muse impels them.

(Simpson, 1970, p.387).

Thomas Blackburn described how he used to compose. Although for him a poem would "suddenly arrive", this was only after much work which didn't end on the poem's "arrival".

I get an idea, a sort of germ comes, and if that comes I know the poem will be finished. But it may take me weeks and weeks of brooding and thinking about this exciting idea, and then suddenly the poem will arrive; but it takes a long period of gestation; then once that birthpoint has been reached the thing is written quickly; but then comes the working over and that's a long process.

(Phythian, 1970, p.122).

In a poem such as Vilakazi's KwaDedangendlale (The Valley of a Thousand Hills) the persona actively solicits such supernatural intervention.

Ngiph' indaw' enjenga lena
Wena Thongo likababa,
Lapho ngiyoba namandla
Ngiqoq' umqondo kaZulu
Ngiwuvalel' embizeni.
Ngihay' amahub' enkondlo
UShaka ayihay' enqoba,

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.20).

Give me a place like this
 You, Ancestral Shade of my father
 There where I can get strength
 And gather the wisdom of the Zulu nation
 And preserve it in a pot
 And sing the song of praises
 Which Shaka sang when he became victorious,

Of course, the preservation of the wisdom of the Zulu nation in "a pot", is a metaphorical allusion to a poetical anthology.

Vilakazi would have agreed with Plato that

they are simply inspired to that
 to which the Muse impels them,

(loc. cit.)

because in his poem, Imbongi, the persona asks

Olukaban' ulim' olukhuluma

Olwembong' ebongel' abangekho

Konje ngaba yim' engikhulumayo ?
Noma ngabe nguwe Thongo likaMbongi?

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.2)

Whose voice is it speaking ?

 It is that of the imbongi praising the
 deceased.

 But now is it me who is speaking
 Or is it you, Ancestral Spirit of the Imbongi ?

Similarly, in Uggozi (Power of inspiration) the persona is impelled to speak by a Spirit

Kwangen' emakhalen' am' iphunga,
Kwakhany' engqondweni yam' efiphele

.....
Namhla kangikwaz' ukuthula

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.1).

A scent entered my nostrils
Something stimulated my intelligence

.....
Today I cannot be silent

Such a trance can be induced either through drugs, as in Coleridge's "Kubla Khan", or alternatively through religious fervour.

There is also little doubt in my mind that the nature of poetry is violated in translation, however good that translation might be. One cannot even shift the position of a word or a line within a poem without violating its structure, but to actually make abridgements is ruinous because this desecrates the very soul of a poem. In this connection the following philosophy is therefore pertinent.

in the present stage in which the literate Bantu are mainly the younger folk, a Bantu translator might be well advised to make his own abridgements, recognising (sic) the limited background for whom he is translating.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.369).

While accepting that such comments were made forty years ago, I believe they are equally disputable in any age, poetic tradition, or culture. Even if a generation is considered to be of a "limited background" - and by this one assumes from a Western education aspect - there is no need to destroy poetry for future generations simply because of the disadvantaged background of the present. Even if a poem's readership is ill-equipped to fully appreciate a poem, the possibility of their (and other generations) enjoying it at a later stage should

never be negated. To believe that one is "well advised" to make such abridgements is tantamount to amputating perfectly healthy limbs, and more so if this is done to lyrical or rhythmical poetry. And yet political and religious zealots have and will tamper with the integrity of a poem without realizing that of poetry

Its prime and chief function is fidelity to its own nature.

(Wellek and Warren, 1954, p.28).

2.2 Poetry and "Truth".

Coleridge is said to have written that a poem

is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, in proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth;

(Simpson, 1970, p.3).

The misconception that poetry must be a didactic vehicle for the giving of instruction is one that has endured through succeeding generations. Baudelaire pointed out the fallacy concerning poetry and truth.

Poetry cannot, under penalty of death or failure, be assimilated to science or morality; it does not have Truth as its object, it has only Itself. The means for demonstrating truth are other and are elsewhere. Truth has nothing to do with songs.

(Simpson, 1970, p.14).

Coleridge touched on the true nature of poetry with

✓ What is Poetry ? is so nearly the question with what is a poet? that the answer to the one is involved in the solution of the other.

(Simpson, 1970, p.11).

Coleridge's rhetorical question can be compared with Qangule's, the Xhosa poet's, averment that



Isibongo sisithunywa sezimvo
Eziduda kwinkundla yamava

Poetry is the messenger of ideas
Dancing in the courtyard of experience

(Qangule, 1970, p.1).

Coleridge's statement has often been misunderstood, particularly by those critics who look to the personality and lifestyle of a poet in attempting a literary criticism of his work. Perhaps this is done without the knowledge that the poem itself should always be the focus of attention - all else being merely incidental to it. As Eliot pithily observed, a poem should be viewed

primarily as poetry and not another thing.

(Abrams, 1957, p.109).

John Crowe Ramsom, in similar view to Eliot, stated that a critic must recognise

the autonomy of the work as existing for its own sake.

(Abrams, 1957, p.109).

Yet for all that, it would also be incorrect to assume that a knowledge of the poet's circumstances and the social milieu within which a poem was composed, would detract from one's enjoyment and appreciation of a poem. On the contrary, one can for example, more readily appreciate William Butler Yeats's work through having an insight to what precipitated his poem, "Easter, 1916." Again, by having some knowledge of the tragedy that inspired S.E.K. Mqhayi's Ukushona kukaMendi, one might appreciate the pathos all the more. Such "occasional poetry" -

written as it is to commemorate a particular episode or moment in time - is often better appreciated through some foreknowledge of the background. But, and this is the crucial point, the poem itself should be the object of a critic's scrutiny. All else is an incidental, even if interesting, adjunct thereto.

Poetry, more often than not, has little or nothing to do with "truth". In the preface to Vilakazi's Inkondlo kaZulu, I.B. Gumedé quoted what Vilakazi wrote concerning the nature of his own poetry, which was

Zinjengezinkanyezi
Ziland' ubusuk' ikhwezi
Elibik' ukusa

(Vilakazi, 1962, p. VIII).

(The poetry) is just like the stars
Waiting for night (and) the morning star
Which reports the advent of dawn

The Xhosa poet, St. J. Page Yako, echoed this sentiment in the opening line of his preface to his anthology, Ikhwezi (The morning star).

Le nkwenkwezi iliKhwezi iyinto
enkulu kumaXhosa ithetha ukuthi
kuyasa.

(Yako, 1967, p. iii).

This star, the Morning Star, is something
of great significance to the Xhosa
because it proclaims the advent of dawn.

The Greek word for a poem was poeima, "something made" and their word for a poet was derived from poiein, meaning "to make". What then, was the poet making ?

There are a plethora of different answers to this question, just as there are a multiplicity of ideas about the nature of poetry.

Aristotle, for one, saw poetry as an "imitation" and by this he meant that poetry imitated any subject in words. Later, "imitation" in poetry came to mean something quite different - the copying of a master - such an imitation naturally lacking that inimitable attribute - originality.

Horace believed that

the poet who mixes the sweet with the
useful has everybody's approval.

(Simpson, 1970, p.388.)

This same idea was taken up by Scaliger, one and a half millenia later,

The end (of poetry) is the giving of
instruction in pleasurable form, for poetry
teaches and does not simply amuse, as some used
to think.

(Simpson, 1970, p. 388.)

Horace's and Scaliger's ideas on the nature of poetry would not find universal acceptance, particularly among latterday critics. Consider an established poet-cum-critic, Louis Simpson, who wrote that

moralizing poems are bad poetry, and that the
aim of poetry is not to teach a lesson

(Simpson, 1970, p.16).

Simpson, on the strength of this quotation, would certainly have taken exception to K.E. Masinga's Zulu poem Izibongo zoBambiswano (Bantu Co-operative Movement) which was published in the newspaper, Ilanga on the 5th July, 1947. Extracts therefrom include

Yini yona uBambiswano na ? uBambiswano
Inyoniyamasi (Inyoni Enya Amasi) Abahlezi
ngaphansi kwayo badla bangaqedi
.....
Ozonda wena Mseleku nawe Bambiswano,
Uzonda ukufunza, uzonda ukugwinya,

Kuwe Sifamona esizonda uBambiswano sithi:-
Hayi Hobu Mawulele ! Isitha somuntu nguwe,
Luya phambili u Bambiswano

What then is the Co-operative? The Co-operative is the Amasi-Bird (The Bird which defecates Curdled Milk). Those seated beneath it eat forever

.
 He who hates Mseleku and you, Co-operative,
 Hates to feed, hates to eat (literally, "to swallow")
 To you, Dying-of-Jealousy, hating the Co-op, we say:
 "No, poor person, if you are asleep (to the facts)!
 The enemy of the people is you ! "
 Forward with the Co-operative !

The concluding quartet of the above poem would also ensure that it does not quite match up to Scaliger's aforementioned expectation of

the giving of instruction in pleasurable form.

(Simpson, 1970, p.388)

The "Aesthetic School" of nineteenth-century Europe correctly observed that art should not be the vehicle for the propagation of social norms or be of utilitarian value, hence the catch-phrase, "art for art's sake." This aesthetic school was probably an inevitable reaction to poetry which had even been used to teach people how to run a farm! (Vide Virgil's "Georgics".) Imaginative or "mimetic" art was in direct contrast to the didactic literature of the neoclassic school whose catch-phrase might be summed up for them as "art for man's sake." It is also not to say that poetry cannot be the vehicle for instruction; it can, but very often the poetry itself suffers as a result. The didacticism of such poetry can in turn be forced to face instruction at the hands of satirists who will parody its contents. It was Dryden who correctly observed that

A satirical poet is the check of the layman on bad priests.

(Simpson , 1970, p.16).

Baudelaire was yet another who criticised the over-propagation of "truth" and "morality" through the medium of poetry

✓ I say that, if the poet has a moral aim, he has diminished his poetic force; and it is not rash to wager that his work will be bad. Poetry cannot, under penalty of death or failure, be assimilated to science or morality; it does not have Truth as its object, it has only Itself. The means of demonstrating Truth are other and elsewhere. Truth has nothing to do with songs.

(Simpson , 1970, p.14).

Whereas the above quotation can be considered true for most poetry, it does not take into account those occasions when an Nguni imbongi, in a praise-poem (which as the name implies, is biased towards praise), also mentions less pleasant aspects of "truth". Many hardly welcome facts have been extolled before Nguni rulers who have been told how their subjects view certain actions of this dominion. Naturally, such truth, being as it is, constructive criticism, has been administered with all the circumspection and discretion that bards elsewhere (such as a jester of a Shakespearean court) were wont to administer.

The last word of the foregoing quotation, namely "songs," gives us yet another clue as to the nature of poetry and/or song. A sometimes overlooked fact is that the word "bard" originally signified a Celtic minstrel-poet who sang about heroic deeds. Only later did the word come to mean what recent generations understand as a "poet".

Of course, man's views concerning the nature of poetry have changed throughout the course of history. Abrams considers there to have been three separate phases, being firstly, pragmatic criticism where

a poem was regarded mainly as a deployment of artistic means for achieving effects upon a reader or audience.

(Abrams, 1957, p.148).

Thereafter in the early nineteenth century there were

expressive theories of literature (which conceive of a work primarily as the expression of feelings, temperament and mental powers of the author himself), followed by the dominance, beginning in the 1920s, of objective theories of literature (which maintain that a work must be considered an object in itself, independently of the mental qualities of the author and the responses of a reader)

(Abrams, 1957, p.148).

It is rather puzzling that such an objective philosophy concerning the nature of literature should have evolved as late as the twentieth century. Although the objective theory now enjoys widespread following, for centuries critics have harboured diverse (sometime even spurious) views on the nature of poetry - such views serving to re-emphasize that there is no facile, single, yet all-encompassing definition of poetry.

2.3 Conditions for the composition of poetry

In the preface to one of the various anthologies that C.L.S. Nyembezi collated on the modern poetry of other Zulu poets, he gave his views concerning the reason why they composed

Bonke baqhutshwa luthando
lokuphakamisa indlu yakwabo, uZulu.
Basuswe wugqozi olungabavumeli
ukuba badlule bengayishiyanga
induku ebandla, badlule
bengaliphonsanga itshe esivivaneni

(Nyembezi, Preface to
Imisebe Yelanga 4, No date).

All are imbued with the ideal of uplifting the House of Zulu, which is theirs. They are moved by the power of inspiration that does not allow them to pass by without leaving a fighting stick at the assembly, (nor) to pass by without having tossed a pebble in the cairn.

In this beautiful passage redolent with poetic allusion Nyembezi was only stating what Nguni poets elsewhere had written in forewords to their anthologies. Nyembezi found this highly pleasing

Iyatuseka kakhulu Zulu lento
ngoba isizwe singeke sithuthukiswe
ngezinye izizwe. Kufuneka
sizithuthukise thina ngokwethu.

(loc. cit.)

Zulu people, this state of affairs is very encouraging because (our) nation will never be advanced by other nations. It is essential that we progress through our own endeavour.

An anthology such as the one he had compiled was seen to be a result of a burning desire for progress.

Lencwadi-ke Zulu iwubufakazi
bomdlandla wamadodana
namadodakazi kaZulu ashisekela
intuthuko yesizwe ngokuhlabana
ngepeni

(loc. cit.)

This book, Zulu people, is evidence of the enthusiasm of the young Zulu men and women who were burning with desire for advancement by getting laurels of achievement through the pen.

It was considered auspicious that they elected to compose because

Kukhona abanomqondo wokuthi
abantu abaNsundu abalukhathalele
ulimi lwabo, abaluthandi,
balushaya indiva.

(loc. cit.)

There are those who are of the opinion that black people do not care

for their language; that they
do not like it and they treat
it with scant respect.

Nyembezi considered such a standpoint to be erroneous and stated
that the poetry was testimony to the contrary.

Umqondo onjalo uliphutha elikhulu
Imisebenzi yabalobi abaNsundu
enjengalena evezwe kulamabhuku
iyimpendulo egcweleyo, engenakuphikiswa,
ebonakalisa uthando lwabantu
abaNsundu ngolimi lwabo.

(loc. cit.)

Such a viewpoint is extremely fallacious . . .
The works of black writers such as
these evidenced in these books
is sufficient answer. It is irrefutable
and shows the love of black people for
their language.

Such then were some of the factors that motivated Nguni poets to
compose poetry. This was expressed in the beautiful cattle imagery of
the Xhosa poet, L.T. Manyase in the preface to his anthology,
Umlu KaPhalo.

Nantso ke mzi kaPhalo inkabi endikade ndiyalusa
. . . . Izitshetshe azizi kuvela kum, zezenu.

(Manyase, 1960, Preface).

There then, House of Phalo, is the ox I have
been herding for such a long time
The knives (i.e. for slaughtering it) will not
come from me. They are yours.

* A philosophy of religion was another factor which motivated the
composition of Nguni poetry. In previous research on this topic, when
recording oral izibongo declaimed on the gold mines by Xhosa miners, I
found that some Xhosa used oral poetry as a means of communicating with
* the ancestral shades. Thus, a man could recite his clan praises and
thereafter call on his ancestral shades for propitiation, a safe journey
home, or for protection for his sons when they also came to work on the

mines. One imbongi even ended his oration with Bawo ondizalayo ! (my father who is my progenitor; literally, "who gave birth to me"). Opland has noted this condition for the composition of poetry.

✱ A man may, on ritual occasions in the cattle kraal, recite the memorized izibongo of his ancestors, in order to conjure their presence.

(Opland, 1973, p.69)

Just as some of the poetry that I collected was recited almost as a prayer for a safe journey home for a migrant mineworker, Opland (1973, p.71) cites the example of a man who praised his (Opland's) car and thereafter asserted that this would ensure Opland's safe return to his home.

Finnegan (1970, pp.167-205), in her monumental work on oral literature has highlighted various occasions where poetry can be the vehicle for religious incantation. Again, poetry as a religious medium, is centuries old.

For example, Plato is quoted as having written that

God takes away the mind of poets and uses them as his ministers, as he also uses diviners and holy prophets, in order that we who hear them may know them to be speaking not of themselves who utter these priceless words in a state of unconsciousness, but that God himself (sic) is speaker, and that through them He is conversing with us.

(Simpson, 1970, p. 387).

Of the latter day Western poets, Blake is one who readily springs to mind as a poet-visionary. While it may be true that being emotionally moved can help to create poetry, I cannot agree with Maritain's postulation that "a strain of madness" is a prerequisite for a certain category of poets.

We are similarly enabled correctly to understand the distinction made by John Keble, on the basis of Aristotle, between the two classes of poets (if there is any sense in looking for categories of poets) whom he designated as ecstatic and euplastic poets. In the "ecstatic", or those endowed with a strain of madness, we would have mainly inspiration fully unfolded or as all-pervading motion. In the "euplastic", or those endowed with a happy gift of nature, we would have mainly inspiration in its primary seed or as poetic intuition. Of course a "Euplastic" poet may be a greater poet, and truer to imagination, than an "ecstatic" one. But those who lack both kinds of inspiration are no poets at all.

(Maritain, 1958, p. 181).

One need be neither mad nor have a "happy gift of nature" (whatever that might mean) to write good poetry. Would Maritain, Keble and Aristotle argue that Alexander Pope was in one of these states of mind when he wrote his satirical verse ? Whereas his often bitter parody might deny his claim to having a "happy gift of nature", he was nonetheless not mad ! The same could be said for countless other poets. But then poetry, not being something tangible and easily described in flat, unemotive terms, has sometimes been lavishly decorated with hyperbole. The following quotation illustrates some of the all-encompassing claims made for the nature of poetry.

There is poetry involved in the work of all great mathematicians. Secret poetic intuition was at work in the primary philosophical insights of Heraclitus and Plato, Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, Plotinus, Spinoza, or Hegel; without the help of poetry Aristotle could not have extracted from experience the diamond of his fundamental definitions; in the background of all the ideological violence of Thomas Hobbes there was something which poetry taught him, his awareness that he was the twin brother of Fear. Poetry helped Frances of Assisi, and Columbus, and Napoleon, and Cagliostro.

(Maritain, 1958, pp. 175-176).

Such claims appear rather extravagant and require little further comment.

2.4 What is oral poetry?

Whereas oral poetry has always been esteemed in Europe, it has only been in the last few decades that African oral poetry has enjoyed a modicum of esteem in the eyes of Westerners. Paradoxically enough, in previous centuries African culture and institutions were more appreciated than during the 19th century colonial era. It is comparatively recently (c. 1800 - 1950) that Europeans developed their superior and arrogant attitudes towards people of other continents and cultures. These developed possibly as a prerequisite to the spreading of Christianity (the concept of people who dwell in darkness). Fortunately, however, the mistake of a facile dismissal of African oral poetry has been fairly widely recognised and to a lesser degree rectified, and need have little more added here. As was earlier commented on, this misperception essentially emanated as a result of a total failure to appreciate that illiterate peoples anywhere could produce anything of literary merit. Again, poetry did not have to be written to merit the designation, poetry. Perhaps it was because there were so many divergent forms of oral poetry throughout the world that researchers failed to recognize Bantu oral declamations as being poetic both in form and content.

There are many differences between oral and written poetry, the most obvious of which can be seen in the terms themselves, "written" and "oral". Leading from this, the only way (except for a recording) that an oral poem can survive is for it to be often repeated after its original composer's death. The oral genre can and does change with

subsequent renditions but the written word has a fixity of black letters on a white page. In oral poetry, improvisation can occur and a poem is often changed because of the fallible nature of the reciter's memory or because he chooses to omit phrases that might be embarrassing before children or offensive to superiors. Again, he might wish to incorporate new phrases or to dedicate the poem to somebody in authority. For example, in research conducted for a previous dissertation, (Wainwright, 1979, p.53), it was found that Xhosa miners could praise themselves by saying

NguJujuju, umaqekw' amdaka!

It is Jujuju, the dark ponies !

Yet such praises are commonly recognized as being of a train. By this they implied that they were as large (i.e. fat) as a train !

Thus, certainly in Nguni oral poetry, one can never say with absolute certainty which "lines" are the original author's and which have subsequently been added by another. By this I am not concurring with Cope's statement that the poetry is communal.

Traditional literature differs from modern literature not only in that it is oral but also in that it is essentially the product of communal activity, whereas a work of modern literature is the result of individual effort and bears the stamp of its author.

(Cope, 1968, p. 24).

I do not agree with Cope's interpretation of the communal nature of oral literature. This viewpoint which enjoys great popularity among other researchers as well, negates the creativity of the individual composer and also (totally unintentionally and unwittingly in this case)

imputes a certain lack of individual skill to anything literary in a "primitive" society. Nonetheless, once a poem has been composed, or a folktale told, in any repeat performance thereof by another, embellishment and additions (as well as omissions) can occur. Yet it can also be argued with great justification that poetry in the form of praising is universal in Zulu and Xhosa society, whereas in Western society a poet is something of a rarity. Furthermore, Nguni praising follows a tradition whereas certain Western poets are constantly trying to break with tradition. Similarly with folktales: if they do not follow tradition with its stock characteristics or "formulas", they would not be regarded as folktales at all. In the sense then, both folktales and izibongo are communally composed and commonly appreciated, otherwise they would not be recognized.

One might naturally assume that with frequent, subsequent renditions of the original poem, the less chance there is of parts of the original version being lost or distorted. This is only true to a degree because a frequent rendition of an abridged or even a corrupted version can have more of a distortional effect than a less frequent yet more accurate re-recitation. The poet as a separate, identifiable creator is a facet often overlooked. Concerning the court praiser, the cream of Zulu oral bards, Cope says

Even he, however, is a specialist in collecting and committing to memory and particularly in reciting the praises, rather than in composing them, and the praises he composes also follow the established style.

(Cope, 1968, p. 24).

This idea Cope elaborated on again, writing that the imbongi

has to memorise so perfectly that on occasions of tribal importance they pour forth in a continuous stream or torrent He commits them to memory as he hears them, even if they are meaningless to him.

(Cope, 1968, pp. 27-28).

If, then, the court praiser is a specialist in "collecting and committing to memory", "rather than in composing", this detracts heavily from his genius as a creative composer. But who then is deemed to compose the poetry? Is it the common people assembled together? This is not the case because true Nguni bards can after a few minutes' deliberation, recite poetry in praise of virtually any new, yet laudable entity. Opland, in his Doctoral thesis, states that

Secondly, many a tribesman, especially in the rural areas, has the ability to compose poetry spontaneously, on the inspiration of the moment.

(Opland, 1973, p.66)

Yet it must also be stated that Opland was writing about the Xhosa whereas Cope was commenting on the Zulu, and it has now come to be accepted that there are indeed significant differences between the two traditions. In defence of Cope, however, it must be stated that oral poets nonetheless have to compose in the traditional manner determined by the community. They are not free to experiment so widely, drastically and sometimes disastrously as some modern poets (black as well as white) who write "modern poetry".

Lord, in his masterpiece, The Singer of Tales, takes an interesting stand mid-way between original, individual creativity and communal effort. Such a standpoint can be confusing, if not contradictory.

In a sense each performance is "an" original if not "the" original It follows, then, that we cannot correctly speak of a "variant", since there is no "original" to be varied It seems to me highly significant that the words "author" and "original" have either no meaning at all in oral tradition or a

meaning quite different from the one usually assigned to them A performance is unique; it is a creation, not a reproduction, and it can therefore have only one author.

(Lord, 1960, pp. 101-102).

Thus, one can safely cover the broadest possible spectrum in assessing oral poetry by regarding it as having an "original composer" or as being the product of "communal activity" or as being both !

✓ The model of written literature with its emphasis on the text, the original and correct version, has for long bedevilled study of oral literature, and led researchers into unfruitful and misleading questions in an attempt to impose a similar model on oral literature.

(Finnegan, 1977, p. 69, her underlining).

For my own part, I see the communal activity as being only that part of the poetic tradition in which the poet finds his grounding. Naturally, in his (or her) formative years, the poet is influenced by what is considered as poetic by his peers, but later when adult and having subconsciously (or alternatively, through conscientious study) assimilated all these norms, what he then produces is still something original. Original - but based on a poetic tradition. To take any other viewpoint is tantamount to saying that there is nothing new under the sun, that every thought or emotion has been experienced before, or as it was phrased by James Joyce's leading character in "Ulysses"

Dead breaths I living breathe, tread dead dust,
devour a urinous offal from all dead.

(Joyce, 1969, p.55).

2.5 Conclusion

In any discussion on the nature of poetry one will inevitably conclude that there are almost as many definitions of poetry as there are people discussing the subject. Yet some tend to err in not concentrating on the poem itself as the only focus of attention. Certain critics have been inclined to see the poet in his work and whereas a knowledge of the poet or the circumstances surrounding a poem's composition might be of interest, essentially it is the poem alone that remains the subject of the critic's appraisal and scrutiny, all else being irrelevant, even if it excites curiosity.

Ideas on the nature of poetry altered through the course of centuries, Aristotle considering poetry to be an "imitation" of any subject in words. Later "imitation" in poetry came to mean something somewhat opprobrious, akin to plagiarism. Some of the earliest critics viewed poetry as a teaching mechanism; a philosophy totally rejected by modern critics who contend that didactic, moralizing platitudes should not be conveyed through the medium of art. In Nguni praise poetry, many iimbongi in poems heavily biased towards praise, nonetheless incorporate "truth" in the form of mild censure in a manner calculated to admonish a ruler and give him insight to what his people consider to be socially approved

A wise chief moderates his edicts in response
to his praise poet's subtle criticism

.....

The poet encourages the authority figure to
adhere to the prescribed norm. Perceived
deficiencies are publicly announced in the hope
that they will be remedied.

(Wainwright, 1979, pp. 164-165).

It is also a fairly common assumption that poets, particularly oral poets, can only compose poetry while enthralled in some type of mystical

trance whether it be induced by a drug or by religious fervour. Indeed, many poets have composed and recited poetry under these conditions (some believing that they provide a link in articulating a divine message), but on the other hand much written poetry has also been the product of unromantic writing, revision and the re-writing of a piece until it assumes a polished aspect.

Unlike in the fixity of the printed page, improvisation and change (depending on context and audience) can occur in oral poetry. There has also been some difficulty in attributing due recognition and accolade to the original author not only because he might pass into obscurity with the passing of generations but because some believe that his work is merely the product of "communal activity" - not that of a single, very talented and gifted individual. My own conclusion is that the "communal activity," being part of an oral poet's heritage, merely forms a basic grounding for him. Obviously influenced to a large degree by what is considered poetic by his people, and building on what he has learnt either unconsciously or by dint of hard application, what the oral poet composes cannot be seen as the product of a joint, communal effort but is essentially an original work; based on a poetic tradition.

CHAPTER 3

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAISE POETRY AS AN ORAL GENRE

3.1 The widespread occurrence of praise poetry in Africa

Praise poetry as an oral genre has been in existence for centuries in Africa. In its various forms, with differences in style of oration, occasion and applicability, it has been fairly widespread, being found virtually across the entire Southern half of Africa. Researchers have recorded and documented the oral art of groups as diverse as the Yoruba, Wolof, Somali, Zulu, Xhosa, Hausa, Bahima, Shona, Ndebele, Swahili, Sotho, Nkondo and Igbo, to name but a few.

The praise poet among these people has operated under several different appellations. Among the Hausa he is known as a maroki, the Sotho as a seroki, the Wolof as a griot and so forth. (Whereas the domain of praise poetry in Nguni society is almost exclusively male, female praisers in Nguni and in other African societies are also encountered).

Concerning the extensive examples of praise poetry that are to be found in Africa, a parallel can be drawn with the epic poetry of Europe. In Europe epic poetry as delivered by court bards has been common for centuries, but unlike Africa, where the tradition of praise poetry still flourishes with varying degrees of strength, such European court poetry is to all intents and purposes extinct. Although praise poets are encountered in numerous parts of Africa, where today would one find a practising Anglo-Saxon scop?

3.2 Previous hypotheses concerning the development of praise poetry as an oral genre

When and how did the oral genre of ukubonga develop among the Zulu and Xhosa? Although certain hypotheses have been published, some of these might well be unsubstantiated guess-work without academic merit. February is of the opinion that

The most primitive and uncomplicated type of praise consisted of a mere collection of praises. Praise poems to chiefs however contained some alliteration and parallelisms. Royal praise poems of the 18th Century were in couplet or in triplet form, while those of the 19th Century were made up of stanzas.

(February, 1970, p.282).

Very unfortunately there is only a scanty body of 18th Century Nguni praise poetry available for scrutiny and of that, only isolated snatches (of different poems) remain. This, then, could account for February's dismissal of 18th Century poetry as being of poorly developed stanza structure. A further point is that emanating from February's somewhat derogatory perception of "primitive" praises as being "a mere collection of praises" (loc. cit.) he suggests that only the praise poems of chiefs showed sufficient development to incorporate poetic features such as alliteration and parallelism. This of course, is not true and as has been shown in a previous study of praise poetry recited by commoners in praise of themselves or others in mine hostels, commoners' poetry certainly does evidence this poetic development.

In an assessment of the poetry of individual Xhosa mine iimbongi

In all his recitals, be they of mine personnel, clan or personal praises, he effectively

utilizes such a great array of poetic devices including puns, metaphors, parallelism, various types of eulogies, linking, personification and symbolism that his poetry must certainly rank among the foremost oral literatures of the world.

(Wainwright, 1979, p.167).

I therefore suggest that contrary to February's hypotheses concerning eighteenth century praise poetry, it was even then well developed as viable oral genre. Naturally, subsequent to this time further developments took place but this only tends to support the argument propagated earlier in this work that change is one of the most operative features of oral poetry. Of course, the concept of change in oral declamations is one not accepted by quite a number of students of African languages. For example,

Here we see songs that have their origin in Zululand about 200 years ago remaining unchanged despite the absence of all Zulu influence and literary recording, proving the great importance of language in the diffusion or continuity of culture.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.8, my underlining).

Unfortunately, the relegation of pre-Shakan praise poetry to the lowly status bestowed on it by researchers such as February, has been based on tenuous and totally non-literary grounds. For example,

The pre-Shakan era has, accordingly, been divided into two phases. The first phase in which social and political organisation was of a very simple type (sic). As an expression of these conditions the poetry of this era is relatively simple. Nature images are frequent. People spent their leisure dancing, feasting and love-making.

(Kunene, 1962, p.57).

By Kunene's own definition, his pre-Shakan era extends

to about the early 19th Century

(Kunene, 1962, p.51).

and it is perhaps presumptuous to write about the Zulu nation of this time as one having a "very simple" social and political organisation, with a poetic system only marginally better, being deemed "relatively simple" because leisure activities evolved solely around "dancing, feasting and love-making". Only when and if further oral poetry from the pre-Shakan era becomes more readily available - and with the advent of time the likelihood thereof diminishes commensurably - can we make any definite assessment of this poetry. Moreover, that which was recorded was often reliant upon the fallible memory of very old informants. Kunene was of the opinion that pre-Shakan poetry, in contradistinction to Shakan poetry, was "mainly erotic and sensual" because

People loved and took loving seriously.
There was nothing more important than love ...
 The truth is that Zulu poets in the Pre-Shakan era expressed attitudes to sex which did not necessarily coincide with the practise (sic)

Whereas Pre-Shakan poets mainly composed poetry that was erotic and sensual, Shakan poets diverted their poetical energies to subjects of national importance.

(Kunene, 1962, p.67, my underlining).

Such comments should be considered as being more hypothetical than categorical. Furthermore, such "erotic and sensual poetry" was not the prerogative of pre-Shakan poets alone because much bawdy post-Shakan poetry of the oral genre is to be found - sometimes partially or wholly excised due to editorial censorship when submitted for publication. In izibongo, erotic elements or lack thereof, are dependent not so much on the era but on the context, the composition of the audience, ambience, social milieu and setting.

Both Raymond and Daniel Kunene have made very valuable contributions of academic merit to further our understanding of praise

poetry in general and particularly of the izibongo and dithoko of the Zulu and Sotho, respectively. Therefore, accepting his good intentions in postulating his thesis about the various developmental stages of praise poetry as an oral genre, Raymond Kunene was unfortunately not against making a few disquieting generalisations. These include

The tribal Zulu was a practical man.
He would have unhesitatingly embraced
Hegel's idea of anthropocentrism.

(Kunene, 1962, p.71).

and

Most of the images in Pre-Shakan poetry are
decorative rather than functional

(Kunene, 1962, p. 79).

as well as strange sentiments such as

He (Macingwane) is one of the greatest, if not
the greatest, of the Chunu rulers. He
systematically killed his own children as soon
as they attained man's state (sic) lest they
should murder him.

(Kunene, 1962, p.93).

Concerning a sub-phase of his pre-Shakan period he wrote that

The poetry of this period is fragmentary.
It is on the whole weak and sounds uninspired
...
Frequently there are obscurities which
indicate the lack of poetic ability

(Kunene, 1962. p.86, my underlining).

In all probability it was the failure to recognize these as "fragmentary" remnants of what were once certainly much longer poems, that caused critics such as Kunene to err in their assessment thereof. It was probably only the memory of the aforementioned, usually aged and querulous informants that was "on the whole weak" and "uninspired", a point possibly subconsciously taken by Kunene when he unwittingly used the operative word "sounds" in the above quotation and when he wrote

Parts of this (the pre-Shakan) era lack the sure touch of the Shakan era, the voice of the poet trembles with uncertainty. The poetry for the most part is uninspired.

(Kunene, 1962, p.98, my underlining).

The "obscurities" of the poetry which he condemns are a feature of poetry anywhere in the world because profound philosophy is often not immediately comprehensible. Moreover, were the poets themselves alive today they might argue with some justification that "obscurities" are possibly as much attributable to a critic's lack of understanding as to a creative artist's imprecision.

It is unfortunate that the poetry is dismissed with statements such as

Mean and disagreeable metaphors are found in abundance in Pre-Shakan poetry. This further lowers the general standard of Pre-Shakan poetry.

(Kunene, 1962, p.99).

Kunene's work has often shed invaluable light on the nature of Zulu poetry but certain postulations have remained largely unquestioned, surprisingly enough even at the hands of discerning critics such as Cope. I believe that we cannot dismiss this poetry as being of a "lowered standard", "uninspired" and "relatively simple."

3.3 The long established, popular appeal of praise poetry.

Judging by present day popularity and prolificity, (notwithstanding the inroads of "civilization"), ukubonga, the pinnacle of Nguni poetic endeavour, has been a developed genre for centuries. Mention has been made of aged informants who could only remember the briefest stanzas of

the praises of long dead notables. The fact that they remembered anything at all is at least indicative of the established nature of ukubonga at the time. What will hopefully preserve the art for a few more generations is the fact that it has enjoyed so much popular appeal not only among the Nguni people, but among many peoples of Africa. Again, contrary to what many critics have written, praising is not the sole prerogative of the specialists. Certainly, brilliantly creative artists did much to instil the attributes of good poetry, but what has enjoyed little recognition is that were it not for its tremendously popular appeal among rank and file laymen, it would have died a natural death. If praise poetry does die out among the Nguni it will possibly be because of the society's change from traditional to Western norms. Traditionally, however,

Herd boys praise their clay oxen, the live animals in their care, or their friends; a ploughman praises his lead ox or a hunter his dogs; a father may praise one of his children or his homestead, a wife her husband, and so on. Each clan has a set of praises, and these are used on ritual occasions to invoke the ancestors. Individuals, too, have praises and praise names, often mentioning some personal quality or recalling a past experience.

(Wainwright, 1979, p.7).

This tradition of the praises of birds as recited by herdboys will be discussed in greater depth at another stage of this work.

3.4 The interrelationship between praising and the complex cattle culture.

The widespread nature of praising among traditional Nguni has already been commented on, nonetheless the question still remains as to how praising maintained its popular appeal and enjoyed continued

proliferation through the course of numerous generations. Two answers spring readily to mind. The first concerns the interrelationship between praising and the social structure. Firstly, there is a functional link between the praiser and the chief. Secondly, there could be yet another reference to the "communal activity" of "primitive" folk who had difficulty in fashioning anything of individual creativity. On the contrary, I believe that even children, whether in small groups or singly, could in traditional society recite short verses of memorized lines. In rural Nguni society cattle are indispensable, fulfilling many diverse roles from being a symbol of wealth to providing a link with the ancestral shades during sacrificial rites when the praises of the ancestors might be recited or when the ancestors would be called upon for supplication. The complex cattle culture of the Nguni has been documented in great detail elsewhere but what is of relevance to us for two totally unrelated reasons are firstly, the very simple one being that cattle have to have herders and secondly, that the language of any people reflects its culture.

Let us treat the second point first. The importance of cattle was revealed in an imbongi's declamation when he said

Umntu ongenankomo uyinja ebantwini!

A person who has no cow is a dog amongst people!

(Wainwright, 1979, p.47).

And

✓ The use of cattle imagery is very common in praise poems, a factor that is significant in view of the traditionally high value placed on cattle in Nguni society.

(Wainwright, 1979, p.47).

Obviously then, cattle, being highly prized, are tended with due care, hence the reference to their having herders. Traditionally it has been the role of men and male youths (never women) to look after the

cattle but with the advent of industrialization and the lure of employment in the cities, the responsibility of cattle herding has fallen on increasingly younger shoulders.

Cattle raiding, (itself the subject of praise poetry, if one studies the dithoko of Moshweshwe, the Sotho king) has been a very frequent pastime among Bantu-speaking people, indeed among virtually every cattle-rearing people that has set foot in Africa, and men and youths of an arms' bearing age would be expected to repel raiders. Young boys, too, could assist by acting as look-outs. While thus tending their charges for days on end, with the resultant occasionally concomitant boredom, young herders became very keen observers of nature. Almost every species of bird would be known by name and most boys became rather clever mimics, imitating bird cries and more important, verbalizing these cries. It is extremely important to realise that the implicit, underlying psychological assumption is not that they were praising birds but that they were merely articulating the bird calls which were considered to be their izibongo. The birds were literally deemed to be singing their own praises, a perfectly socially sanctioned and acceptable pastime, and herders were merely rendering these praises in somewhat modified and a certainly more intelligible format. (Of course, in cold reality the opposite was true. Nonetheless, such verbalization of bird cries afforded a young boy an excellent opportunity for composing poetry).

3.5 The extensive incidence of ukubonga among children

There is a very informative little book entitled "Bird-lore of the Eastern Cape Province" which while being of interest to ornithologists, has largely been overlooked by students of African

languages. It was compiled by a missionary, Robert Godfrey, who listed the Xhosa bird names and praises of species as given to him by Xhosa children.

In tracing the incidence of praising among children, extensive reference will be made to bird calls and bird names (a very small and specialised source); the reason being that young cattle herders were likely to hear such praises more often than they would, for example, hear the praises of deceased ancestors recited on ritual occasions. This then accounts for the bias toward these particular praises.

All the bird names and praises discussed in this chapter have been taken from Godfrey's ornithologist-orientated book. With a few exceptions (to further clarity); the at times, obsolete orthography used is that of Godfrey's, but the translation of the praises, the interpretations drawn and hypotheses deduced therefrom are entirely my own responsibility. The arrangement of these praises into lines to illustrate linguistic and literary devices, and the comments on poetic features such as parallelism, imagery and the use of ideophones, is also my own work. Through studying these praises and birdnames, very valuable insight to the nature of praise poetry is given. Godfrey's informants were small boys who were already very knowledgeable about the art of praising birds. The hypothesis posed is that if the art is so firmly inculcated and entrenched at so impressionable an age, this would ensure its continued propagation for at least one further generation. The fact that the young boys knew these well-established, traditional praises indicates that the concept of ukubonga was instilled during formative years, so much so that with the subsequent onset of adolescence, boys, often guided by those more accomplished in the art, could with increasing confidence and expertise venture to compose their

own personal praises and indeed, by adulthood, would be expected to at least be able to recite their clan's praises on ritual occasions.

In this regard Opland's reiterated research findings about the Xhosa are rather surprising

I have not found any contemporary tribesman who can recite a list of "the praises of" a chief.

(Opland, 1973, p.67)

I have not met any Xhosa who can recite for me memorized izibongo about chiefs of past days.

(Opland, 1973, p.71)

It was my finding that on gold mines many Xhosa "tribesmen" who had come to work for a few months as migrant labourers were able not only to recite their own praises but those of their clans and of their chiefs - both past and present.

In fact, among the Sotho, there was an active process of instilling the art of praising in all male youths. Guma has commented on the practice among the Sotho where adolescent youths undergoing rites de passage in initiation lodges, "were required to compose praises for themselves".

Before the advent of Europeans and missionaries in Basutoland, all Basotho boys had to undergo initiation. During this period, they were required to compose praises for themselves, which they would recite in public on the day they returned home. The weaker ones, who were incapable of such oral compositions, were assisted by the mosuwe (teacher), who did most of the composition for them.

(Guma, 1967, p.136).

Such socially sanctioned pressure, serving as the "spur to prick the sides of their intent", must surely have been positive reinforcement in the propagation of the art.

3.6 The stages of ukubonga

The most rudimentary step in the evolution of izibongo is giving the subject a praise name. As is customary in Nguni praising, this praise name will shed light on some feature, characteristic or personal idiosyncrasy for which the subject is supposedly habitually noted.

Having given a praise name, a simple progression would entail the explication of elementary praises. These praises can be elaborated on until finally they abound in highly poetic, literary devices and are recognised as fully-fledged praise poetry.

Consequently, herdboys can give birds praise names - some of these names being well established - having been heard from men who in turn were herders in their youth; while other names could be original compositions. For example, the praise names of certain birds could allude to their eating habits and interestingly enough a large proportion of such praise nomenclature refers to predatory birds. Herdboys would refer to the bateleur as an indlanyoni (Eater of birds), the fiscal as udl'ezinye (Eater of other i.e. birds), and the kite alternatively as umdlampuku (Eater of mice) or unoxwil' impuku (Catcher of mice i.e. to eat).

Certain researchers have maintained that the subject is only praised for attributes possessed; weaknesses are glossed over or else not mentioned. Others have written that one is never lauded for

imagined qualities, or alternatively that a man may only incorporate factual data in his personal praises. Guma was one of these

the fact that they were recited in public, in the presence of a man's comrade in arms, ensured that their authenticity could be proved and verified.

(Guma, 1967, p.181).

This, of course, is not always the case and some of the wildest imagery imaginable has been utilized by men reciting their personal praises. I have numerous recordings of Xhosa men whose praises are neither "authentic" nor could the remotest possibility of their being "verified" be entertained.

Similarly, the hapless swallow and its close relative the swift, have been bestowed with bizarre attributes such as

	<u>uDl'ihhashe</u>	(Eater of horses)
and	<u>iHlabankomo</u>	(Stabber of cattle)
or alternatively,	<u>iJiyankomo</u>	(Crippler of cattle).

Again, incipient praisers have given full vent to their creative imagination and consequently birds have been endowed with long established nomenclature such as

<u>uHlala-nyathi</u>	(Sitter on buffaloes)	"the oxpecker"
<u>intak' embila</u>	(Bird of the conies)	"the puffbill"
<u>uNomtan' ofayo</u>	(The dying child)	"the black cuckoo"
<u>uNozalingwenya</u>	(Giver of birth to crocodiles)	"the goliath heron"
<u>uMasengakhoth' idolo</u>	(Milker who can lick his knee)	"the jacana"

An interesting facet of this initial stage of bird praising is that certain of these praise names show remarkable insight to "the similarity

of dissimilars", a poetic milestone. For example, uJobela, the name conferred upon the long-tailed widow-bird, is also cited in the dictionary as

"a dark-coloured long-tail coat"

(Kropf, 1915, p.172).

Similarly, a present day brand of alcohol is known as uMajazana among the Zulu because its label depicts a man with long coat tails!

For the Zulu, Cope (1968, p.26), has shown that males can give themselves praise names, and some Xhosa parents give their children names redolent with poetic qualities. Thus, literally thousands of male names such as the following, given by parents to their sons, are to be found :

	<u>Mandlenkosi</u>	(Strength of a chief)
	<u>Jongilanga</u>	(Starer at the sun)
	<u>Dalingozi</u>	(Creator of danger)
and	<u>Thandisizwe</u>	(Lover of the nation)

Women, too, have names with similar structure and such traditional conferring of names which has permeated Nguni society, flourishes to this very day.

On ceremonial and ritual occasions such as burial rites, or when propitiation is made to the shades, children can hear their clan's praises being recited and consequently, to a fertile imagination, even birds must surely recite clan praises on occasions! Thus, the black-collared barbet, known as the isinagogo among the Xhosa, is heard to say the Hlubi clan praises

Radebe! Mashwabadi! Mthimkhulu! Nosele!

and in doing so highlights the psychological approach of traditional poets to the question of "plagiarism" - or to phrase it more correctly, lack thereof - in Nguni society. It is quite acceptable for birds which naturally cannot fashion their own clan praises, to "borrow" those of humans, even if such borrowing is, in actuality, that of the people reciting praises which they themselves heard recited elsewhere on less secular occasions! The use of metaphorical imagery is evidenced in the "praises" of the kestrel, the intambanane, a bird renowned in folklore for its dancing ability.

Ntambanane! ndim lowo! Ndandazela, ntambanane
Ngonyam' egqumayo!

Kestrel! That's me!
Dance, kestrel!
Lion that roars!

Such metaphorical eulogy as "Lion that roars" is extremely common in all types of izibongo in Nguni society and serve yet again to exemplify the point made earlier that praises need be neither "authentic" nor "verifiable". Examples of metaphorical eulogy in Zulu are to be found in the praises of Senzangakhona who is described as a gate-post (of the kraal).

uthi lwempundu

(Cope, 1968, p.39)

Shaka is metaphorically alluded to as the fire of the long grass

umlilo wethathe

(Cope, 1968, p.39)

and alternatively as the wind of the south

ummoya womzansi

(Cope, 1968, p.39)

whereas Cetshwayo is described as a black forest.

ihlathi elimnyama

(Cope, 1968, p.39)

Related to the kestrel is the kite, untloyiya, which is also steeped in Nguni folklore, being the equivalent of the Western European folklore's "mouse" which takes children's teeth put out for it: hence its praises which evidence a simple parallelism both of form and meaning in "take - bring", "your - my" and "old - new".



Ntloyiya! Ntloyiya!
Thabatha izinyo lakho elidala
Uzise elam elitsha!

Kite! Kite!
 Take your old tooth
 ↓ ↓ ↓
 (and) Bring my new one

Such bird calls, which cannot be considered true praises, do not even remotely approximate to the sound of the bird's cry. However, certain birds which have rudimentary praises can have these rendered more "accurately", the sound approximating as closely as possible to the original but with a very significant loss in meaning for the human audience. An example of such, only partially translatable praises, is that of the redwing partridge, known among the Zulu and the Xhosa as the intendele.

Nkwenkwe, yinja!
Thafa lenkciyo!
Gaga lenkciyo!
Eli thafa lenkciyo!
Dadadethu!
Gogo lenqilo! nqilo! nqilo!
Gogo lenqilo!

It is common knowledge that bird calls are very repetitive; thus when these calls are rendered as "praises", they too are consequently uninspiring poetically: yet for all that they do serve to illustrate an intermediary stage in the development from simple praise names to fully developed izibongo.

The praise names, having firstly been coined and secondly, the sound of the birds' songs having been enunciated; in the third and final developmental phase in the composition of izibongo there is some very creative poetry - again, due cognizance having been taken of the possibility that such oral compositions are largely the products of amateurs. Certainly, they do not evidence the complete mastery of the professional iimbongi of chiefs and royalty. For example, the following short excerpt from the praises of the blue crane, (known as indwe among the Xhosa and indwa among the Zulu), exemplifies fully developed praise poetry.

Ugaga kaMzeya,
Intaka ehlonitshwa ngumthinjana

Gaga, progeny of Mzeya,
The bird revered by the maidens!

The praises of birds and the use of bird imagery can even be utilised by professional praisers, as in the following excerpt from the praises of Ngangelizwe, a Xhosa chief.

Hayi! Hayi! ke mna ukuswel' amaphiko,
Ndindandazele ndixel' amahobe,
Ngumahob' azizantanta ngenxa yokhozi.

Alas for me who lacks wings!
(Having them) I would fly and tell the doves.
It is the doves that are fluttering because of
the eagle!

✓ Similarly, the black crested-cuckoo, known by the Xhosa as ilunga legwaba and alternatively (by metathesis) as igwabelungu; is referred to in Sarili's praises in the line:

Lilunga - legwaba lika Hintsa!

It is the black crested cuckoo, (son) of
Hintsa!

The raven is referred to in Sandile's, another Xhosa chief's, izibongo as

Ndibuzen' amathongo ndiwaxele,
Ndiphuph' ikhwababa lihlel' endlwini,
Ikhwabab' elimhlophe amaphiko

Ask of me the ancestral shades that I may tell
 them,
 I dreamt of a raven sitting on a hut -
 A white-winged raven

Again, reference is made to the raven in the izibongo of Sigcawu ka
 Mqikela.

Wena mnqayi ka-Hoza,
Wena gula ethembisa,
Wena mahlungul' adlani kweziya ntaba?
Adl' ihashe lika Joyi lo mnta ka Manqhinyana.

You, mnqayi of Hoza.
 You, promising calabash.
 You, crows eating what manner of thing on those
 mountains?
 They are eating Joyi's horse, the child of
 Manqhinyana.

(It should be reiterated that the orthography in this and other examples
 is that of the original text - in this instance, of Godfrey's work. I
 have deliberately avoided tampering with any original text, even where
 such quotations do not conform to the present day orthography).

Godfrey cites the "raven's song" (i.e. izibongo) which he in turn
 got from

Damoyi, a boy of Pirie, in 1909
 This "Raven-song" is a fragment
 only of a Native nursery-rhyme heard
 throughout Kafraria. In some of its
versions it has undergone so much corruption
that the original allusions have been lost; ...

(Godfrey, 1941, p.82, my
 underlining).

Of interest is that even in 1909 the original version was deemed to be so "corrupted" that the "original allusion" was "lost", indicating the very long existence of these praises of the raven.

Sahlangana namahlungulu
Elel' onke ngakwelaa tyholo
Lathe elinye, "Ma sivuke!"
"Sivuke njani?"
Sitshayiwe nje
Ngala makhwenkwe akwaTabitemni
Angaxheliyo le nkabi yawo
Side sinqunquthe ngezi zandlana zimboxwana."

We met up with ravens
 All of them sleeping in that bush over there,
 One of them said, "Let's wake up!"
 "How can we awake?
 Beaten as we have been
 By those boys of Tabitemni
 Who never slaughter one of their oxen
 That at length we tried to crunch
 With these beaky little hands."

Although this excerpt represents only that which could be remembered by the boy, Damoyi, it nonetheless undoubtedly evidences qualities of literary merit. For example, in the opening line there is ✓the alliterative effect of the "hl" (a voiceless fricative) - as well as a deliberate choice of the word "hlangana". Were he so to choose, the composer could easily have substituted it with "dibana" - a word of equivalent meaning but with a resultant loss of poetic effect. Also of interest is the hlonipha (respectful avoidance) of the word sibethiwe which is replaced by sitshayiwe, both of which in this context mean "We having been beaten."

The supposed social interaction between ravens in this genre of poetry is fairly common, as in this excerpt from the composition of

a Pondomise girl, Lena Botya.

(Godfrey, 1941, p.84).

(Inja) Yadibana namakwababa amabini,
Lathe elinye : Vuk' uvuthele
Lathe elinye : Ndakuvuthela njani na
Ndixholiwe nje ngamakwenkwe
Akwa Sabe-sabe?
Sabe - sabe, xhel' inkabi le
Sinqunquthe"

(A dog) met up with two ravens.
 The one (raven) said, "Wake up and fan the fire".
 The other replied, "What can I fan it with, I having been so closely examined by the boys of Sabe-sabe ?
 Sabe-sabe, slaughter this ox,
 So that we chew on it"

There is a rather humorous juxtaposition of roles in this little poem in that the dog is relegated to an observer's status while the two ravens chew on the bones of the ox ! Such praises of birds are often assimilated and incorporated in the personal praises of commoners today. From izibongo that I collected, the following lines (some of them undoubtedly oral formulae) were encountered time and again in the praises of Xhosa migrant workers - men who it can safely be assumed were cattle herders at some stage of their lives - being recruited as they were from predominantly rural areas. The random lines today constitute portion of the personal praises of miners.

'S'khova siyagubha, siyakhwezela.
'Sangxa siyahula, siya kwamakhulu amahlathi !
Ncede, unamandla ngoba ulal' ehlathini;
Ungenangubo, ungenantonga!
Ndikhaphe, nonqanqa, ndiye le phezulu

The owl grinds meals, it kindles fire.
 The steppe-buzzard glides off the way, heading towards large forests !
 Grass-warbler, you are strong because you sleep in the forest
 without blankets, and without fighting sticks !
 Accompany me, fantail warbler, so that I can go up into heaven

It is not suggested that bird praises, as such, represent a distinct "phase" in the development of praise poetry. What is being suggested is that when such bird praises are "borrowed" and incorporated in the izibongo of adult men, one can appreciate their recognition and acceptance as fully developed praise poetry. As such these bird/human praises are learnt (either unconsciously or by dint of conscientious application) by youthful imitators of adult praisers and this serves to reinforce and further propagate the art of ukubonga among the Nguni.

3.7 The structural development of Xhosa clan praises

The structural development of Xhosa clan praises has been dealt with at some length in a previous study (Wainwright, 1979, p p. 60-66).

✓ This study showed how the simplest type of clan praises consists merely of a recital of the patrilineal lineage. For example, Ziphathe Musa, a Xhosa mineworker from Libode, rendered his clan praises simply as the names

Baskidi ! Musa ! Mhlatshana !
Sicede ! Nonzaba ! Bimbi ! Xesibe !

(Wainwright, 1979, p.60)

A structural development in the explication of praises such as these was the addition of one or two lines of praise immediately after the invocation of the ancestral lineage. An example of this is found in the praises of Mashapula Matiwana, a Mpondo from Flagstaff who hinted at his sexual prowess

✓ Zulu ! Khalimeshe ! Matyholo !
Umntwana oyintombazana akakwazi kuhla,
Uyafedulela !

Zulu ! Khalimeshe ! Matyholo !
(Literally :) The child who is a girl
cannot squat without opening her thighs !

(Wainwright, 1979, p.61)

A third stage in the structural development of Xhosa clan praises

is when the reciter declaims the standard praise lines of the clan which are known to the community at large.

(loc. cit.)

An example of this is to be found in the praises of Ndumiso Njozela, a Xhosa from Engcobo who recited these praises on a gold mine eight years ago

✓ URadebe ! Mthimkulu ! UBhungane !
uMashwabada owashwabadela inkomo neempondo !
Umafuz' afulele njengefula lemvula !
Undleb' entle zombini!

Radebe ! Mthimkhulu ! Bhungane !
 Mashwabada ! Swallower-of-a-cow horns and all !
 Resembler of a parent who thatches roofs
 Just like a cloud of rain !
 (He of) the two beautiful ears !

(Wainwright, 1979, p.62)

The final structural sequence in the development of Xhosa clan praises

is when the imbongi can recite the ancestral lineage, give the standard formulaic eulogistic epithets of the clan and then go on to recite that what might not have been heard before by the community. Such iimbongi are the true oral poets, the innovators who ensure that izibongo are never a static and fixed art.

(Wainwright, 1979, pp. 62-63)

Cope, in discussing the development of the stanza of Zulu izibongo, states that

The most primitive type of praise-poem is simply a collection of praises consisting for the most part of single lines or verses.

(Cope, 1968, p.51)

In this respect both Zulu and Xhosa izibongo have something in common. Cope elaborates on this "most primitive type of praise-poem".

The praises in praise-poems of this type seldom undergo development, and there is certainly no such unit as a stanza.

(loc. cit.)

Concerning the Zulu genre, Cope has already very adequately both discussed and illustrated factors such as how

In the pre-Shakan praise-poem the simple praise undergoes development by way of an extension to the statement.

(Cope, 1968, p.51)

We describe the structure of pre-Shakan type of praise as statement plus extension.

(Cope, 1968, p.52)

and finally concludes with what is of as much relevance to the Xhosa genre as it is to the Zulu.

✓ All praise-poems contain the characteristic feature of earlier types.

(Cope, 1968, p.53)

An analysis of the abovementioned work, based as it is on a very detailed study which is Cope's hallmark, leads one to the conclusion that there are no appreciable differences in the structure of Xhosa clan praises and Zulu izibongo.

3.8 The development of clan praises among the Zulu

In his Master's dissertation, Mzolo states that

In addition to the clan name, isibongo, there is the isithakazelo, an address name or praise name.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.10).

and he continues by immediately quoting the following extract from Bryant.

common to every member of the clan, which was usually the personal name of some ancient celebrity thereof and is now applied - to any clansman who, by being called after him, felt participator in his glory.

(Bryant, 1965, p.15).

The passages quoted above illustrate the development of personal and clan praises among the Zulu and show that it is almost as though by a process of assimilation that a man can tack onto his own praises, those of another clan member.

The close linguistic and cultural affinity of the Zulu and Xhosa has already been commented on in this work. It is therefore not surprising to find certain Zulu, Xhosa and Hlubi clans sharing the same praises. For example, the Hadebe, a Zulu clan, have the izithakazelo

Bhungane ! Mthimkhulu !

which are exactly the same praises of the Xhosa clan, the Rhadebe (articulated with a glottal fricative in the initial consonant). In this connection

It is interesting to note that there are Hlubi, Zulu and Xhosa who claim Mthimkhulu and Bhungane as forefathers. Bhungane, the son of Sele, a Hlubi chief, was also the father of Mthimkhulu.

(Wainwright, 1979, p.73).

A Zulu man with the isibongo, Hadebe, could be referred to by either of the izithakazelo "Bhungane" or "Mthimkhulu" or even by his isibongo, Hadebe, itself. However, this last mentioned mode of address would not be as polite as either of the former. Furthermore, he could be called by his regimental or even by his praise name coined either by himself or by his iintanga (age-mates). Mzolo has shown (1977,p.11) that izithakazelo can even be adopted and become a man's surname, replacing the isibongo that he already has. Thus a Zulu man can have his name "extended" and added to in a variety of ways, but one of which is the fact that

married women never address their husbands by their personal, or clan names, but instead they use the isithakazelo, or even that regimental name, e.g. uFelaphakathi or uNqabayembube.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.13).

Mzolo has also shown that for the Zulu the addition of izithakazelo need not be the names of ancestors, but be gleaned from historical incidents. He cites the example of the Ngidi who had the izithakazelo "Hlomuka" and "Bophela" which were derived from

hlomuka meaning to break away and bophela meaning to climb an ascent following the leader.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.16).

Even in an industrial setting (obviously to a far lesser extent) a man can take on additional praises which could even be the form of a pun on his name. For example, in a company where I once worked there is an extremely popular Zulu personnel clerk named Malcolm Sokhela, who in a joking relationship I often used to refer to as

Nguwe ozakhela ngamatshe
Abanye bazakhela ngodaka

You who build (a house) for yourself with stone
(Whereas) others build for themselves with mud.

This caught on among his Zulu colleagues, who often when in Sokhela's and my presence used to call out to him, in this fashion, possibly as a joke in the whiteman's company; but it nonetheless exemplifies what can and does take place to a far greater extent in traditional society. This type of "punning" praise will be elaborated on in greater depth in this same chapter.

In reviewing the relationship between oral and written poetry, Mzolo states that

Finnegan seems to imply that there does not seem to be pure oral art form uninfluenced by literary forms, but Zulu praise-poetry comes very close to such an art form.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.26).

Whereas this may be true for the Zulu's of yesteryear, it is debatable whether Zulu praise poetry composed today is uninfluenced. Certainly this is not so among the Xhosa. In my previous dissertation (1979, pp. 43 - 46) it was shown how Xhosa miners, a few of whom with some schooling, composed their poetry with Western-style verses.

Under a sub-heading of "Personal Praises" Mzolo writes that -

These praises are an accumulation of his praises, some of which are self composed and others composed in the early days of his childhood by his mother and later by any other person such as his age-mates (intanga).

(Mzolo, 1977, p.29).

If one compares the origin of Zulu and Xhosa personal praises, the above quotation evidences both a similarity and a divergence. Indeed, a Xhosa woman might also praise her offspring. In 1976 while working in a remote outpost for the Chamber of Mines, I witnessed an incident where a mother who had accompanied her migrant-worker son to collect deferred

pay sent to his home village from the gold mines, broke out into his praises ; well deserved in that he had performed a manly act of leaving his home for months on end to earn money for his family. Unlike the Zulu where one's izintanga would recite another's praises, Xhosa mineworkers did not appear to know the praises of their fellows and less still, compose praises for them. Although willing to recite their own praises, or those of their lineage, chief, prize oxen or whatever; when asked to recite those of their colleagues the stock response was

Andizazi ezabanye

I do not know those of others

In this connection Mzolo's following observation is pertinent.

✓ All the clansmen know their clan praises or are expected to know them as part of their culture and heritage, whereas with the personal praises, nobody is obliged to know them except the professional bard or the individual concerned.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.73).

Continuing immediately from the aforementioned quotation, concerning the development of a man's personal praises Mzolo writes that

In his later life these praises cover the entire life history of a person as a record of his achievement up to the time of his retirement from public social life.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.29).

This is a very popular viewpoint among researchers of izibongo yet I wonder if it is absolutely correct. Accepting that there are definite differences between the practice of ukubonga among the Zulu and the Xhosa, for the latter at least, personal praises do not

cover the entire life history of a person as a record of his achievement.

(loc. cit.)

In a section entitled "Are personal praises consistent with reality?" (Wainwright, 1979, p.52), it has been shown that Xhosa personal praises are not a historical chronicle of a man's life events because

The praiser praises himself for any characteristic, be it real or imagined.

(Wainwright, 1979, p.52).

Xhosa praises that I recorded, such as

NdinguKhetshane okhwazwa ephindelela
UKhozi olumaphiko abanzi
Ndiyinkunzi emnyama kakhetshe.
NdinguHlohl' esakhe; esomntwana
siyabonwa ngunina!

I am the Hawk that is driven away time and again
 The Eagle with broad wings
 I am the black bull, (son of) the hawk.
 I am the filler of his own stomach; that of the child is the mother's concern!

are of no historical value whatsoever. Thus if Mzolo and others are correct, the praises of the Zulu and the Xhosa appear to differ in this respect.

However, whereas the praises of Xhosa commoners have little or no historical data, the longer izibongo of their chiefs often incorporate details of historical significance. For example, Sarili's praises record that

Zindingenil'izizwe zade zaxelelana.
Zindingenil'izizwe zade zacel'umlungu.
Ukuze zithi nje zakulil' izinandile,
Abizw'uFulele kuthwe "Wayek' amaMfengu"
kub' ohlwaywa nguyise,
O wawafak' ekhwapheni mhlana afika.
Kukuze lixole ngoNgca-yechibi,
Isizwe siwel' uMbashe.

The clans hesitated to go against me and took counsel.
 The clans feared me and asked for the white man's help.
 As a result, when the guns sounded

Veldman was summoned, and it was said, "Leave the Fingoes alone," for they were chastized by his father who (in fact) embraced them the day they arrived. And so it was that the hostilities of the Ngcayechibi War were ended. Then the nation crossed the Bashe River.

(Kuse, 1979, p. 220).

Cope (1968, p p. 32 - 33) has already shown the extent which the praises of Zulu chiefs incorporate historical detail. Concerning both the Zulu and the Xhosa, what is true of the izibongo of commoners and chiefs alike, is the registering of their genealogy. For example, the Xhosa chief, Silimela, was eulogised with

Inkosi yam ngumnta' kaNdluzodaka
Yindod' ezalwa ngabantu ababini
Izalwa nguMakinana noNopasi.
UNopasi yintombi kaMon'
uMhlophe kaNtshunqe,
UMhlophe kaNtshunqe kwaBomvana
NguLuhad'igama lakhe:

My lord is the child of Ndluzodaka.
 He is a man born of two people;
 Born of Makinana and Nopasi,
 Nopasi is the daughter of Moni,
 Light-complected one of Ntshunqe,
 Light-complected one (son) of Ntsunge at
 Bomvanaland
 He is Luhadi (musical instrument, organ) by
 name:

(Kuse, 1979, pp.220-221).

However, a distinct difference between the praises of the Zulu and the Xhosa is that whereas both Cope (1968, p.27) and Mzolo (1977, p.30) have shown that for the Zulu a young man can have his praises recited for him by his age-mates; seldom, if ever, does this happen among the Xhosa.

This work deals in some detail with the incidence of bird praises as recited by Xhosa herders. On parallel lines, concerning the praising of cattle by Zulu herders Mzolo writes -

Naturally when two bulls meet there is a tendency for a fight to ensue. As the one bull approaches the other, they each begin to roar until the two bulls come close to each other where they now roar with a low rumbling sound. It is at this stage that the herdboys start reciting the praises If the bull was (sic) victorious, more praises would be added.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.33).

The postulated stage at which "the herdboys start reciting" is contradicted a few pages later within the same dissertation. Otherwise the aforementioned quotation is virtually repeated in

As the herdboy approaches his family bull he may start reciting its praises. The reaction of the bull is to begin to roar as if it is appreciating in response (sic) to its praises. In the presence of a bull of another herd it will roar still the more, scratching the ground with its front hoofs while its praises are being recited.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.48).

What is more pertinent, however, are his remarks that before an imbongi commences his performance

he prepares his audience first
He creates an appropriate atmosphere.
The audience has to be orientated to this event

+

(Mzolo, 1977, p.41).

This is true for both the Zulu and Xhosa. At the Transkeian Independence Celebrations in October 1976, I heard an imbongi inform both the subject of his attention, Kaiser Daliwonga Matanzima, as well as his audience, that he was about to commence praising. He did so by repeating

Aa ! Daliwonga ! Aa ! Daliwonga !

whereupon the hubbub quickly subsided into relative quiescence and the praiser could begin. In this sense then, Mzolo's "orientation" was for the Xhosa a mere salutation, being a repetition of the praised's name. Similarly, for the Zulu, when King Goodwill Zwelithini was "enthroned" just over a decade ago, the imbongi shouted

Wena weNdlovu ! Wena weNdlovu !

meaning "You of the Elephant! You of the Elephant!" and continued doing so until he was satisfied that he would be heard should he commence praising.

Because the development of poetry must logically and ultimately also include a conclusion, it is interesting to read Mzolo's ideas on the subject.

To end the performance the imbongi does not arrive at the conclusion abruptly. He makes an indication that he is now about to come to an end.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.46).

Mzolo then quotes the following three lined refrain that Magolwane, the Zulu poet, was said to utter.

Yaminza - ke indlovu
Ulibinda Zulu eliphezulu,
Ulibinda Ndlovu enkulu !

The elephant drowns
You are mute, sky that is above
You are mute great elephant

(Mzolo, 1977, p.46).

Cope (1968,p.29) has noted that the Zulu's "indication" of termination of praises is exaggerated final cadence. However, among the Xhosa there is sometimes neither a concluding formula nor exaggerated

final cadence. In this respect, at least, the structure and development of Zulu and Xhosa oral poetry sometimes differ.

Concerning which tense (i.e. whether it is in the past, present or future tense) that praises are rendered in, Mzolo notes that

the animal is praised in the present time and
when it dies, its praises end.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.49).

Among the Xhosa, as has been shown in this work, the lark, raven or whatever species of bird has a set of praises which when the bird dies remain and are used for another live bird of the same species. In this way they do not "end" but are evocative of what are possibly the most beautiful lines in Nguni poetry, being taken from Dingane's izibongo.

Kuyofa abantu kusale izibongo,
Yizona eziyosala zibalilela emanxiweni,

People will die and their praises remain,
It is these that will be left to mourn
for them in their deserted homes.

(Cope, 1968, p.67).

Among the Xhosa, animals are not only praised in the past tense but the praises of cattle, horses and dogs often recall incidents from their past. For example, one Xhosa miner in reciting his horses praises recalled the commonplace incident.

Hashe lam elakhaba umntu ...

Horse of mine that kicked a person . . .

Mzolo also notes that in the Zulu praises of animals

All these praise-poems are in the form of
addresses and the nouns used are in the
vocative
Here lies the difference in individual
praise-poems between personal praises and the
praises of animals and objects.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.52).

The praises of the Xhosa have developed somewhat differently. Personal praises, too, use the vocative case and this case is not reserved solely for the praises of animals. However, the use of the vocative case for animal praises is, just as for the Zulu, very frequent with numerous examples of Xhosa cattle praises such as the following to be encountered.

Wena zulu lakwaMboma
Eladl' umuntu lingenambane !
Wena samblela selanga
'Mthunzi wam wokuphumla !

You sky of Mboma
 That killed a person, there being no lightning!
 You umbrella against the sun
 My shade in which to rest !

The last couplet of the above poetry is very reminiscent of the shield and buckler imagery of the Biblical psalm. The allusive "sky of Mboma" imagery is difficult to explain and is possibly a pun on the verb -bhoma which means "to scold" (i.e. by thundering).

Mzolo writes that Zulu personal praises are in the third person, a feature different from many Xhosa personal praises.

This reflects the fact that,
 clan praises are an address to
 an audience in the second person,
 whereas personal praises are a reference to a
 person in the third person.

(Mzolo, 1977, p. 111).

Many personal praises in Xhosa are in the first person simply because most personal praises are recited by someone in praise of himself, (and except for professional iimbongi), are not in praise of another as among the Zulu. Hence, lines such as the following are extremely common.

NdinguMacham' enxanxasini
Ndiyimali kaPewula eyaliwa ngaBelungu

I am the Urinator in the waterfall
 I am the Kruger Sovereigns refused by
 whites.

Again, concerning the development of changes within Zulu clan praises, Mzolo correctly notes that

They evidently do change over years, but
it is not clear who is directly responsible
for the change.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.74, my
 underlining).

The fact that oral poetry is not immutable is mutually true for both Zulu and Xhosa clan praises (and true of oral poetry anywhere in the world) but what is puzzling is Mzolo's puzzlement at

who is directly responsible for the change.
 (loc. cit.)

The development of oral poetry is such that anything transmitted verbally through the years and through succeeding generations must inevitably undergo some mutation whether it be by dint of conscious will or otherwise on the part of subsequent narrators. Oral praise poetry is a dynamic, living art and additions, innovations and recent noteworthy incidents (thereby necessitating the formulation of new praises) are all quite common.

In view of the above and noting Mzolo's aforementioned quotation, it is rather strange therefore to find Mzolo apparently contradicting himself with

Clan praises do not change but are simply
 transmitted by word of mouth from one
 generation to another.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.110).

Should the above be considered true, how then did recent Zulu clan praises such as these referring to whites (Mzolo, 1977, p.100), those mentioning Johannesburg (Mzolo, 1977, p.76), and those with references to Christianity and the Bible (Mzolo, 1977, p.75) ever come into being ?

Certain Xhosa miners prefaced their praises with the names of deceased ancestors and this structure is evident among the Zulu as well

In fact clan praises are a continuation of izithakazelo. Therefore to avoid ambiguity it is advisable to ask a clansman to supply you with izithakazelo nezibongo, i.e. praise-names and praises.

(Mzolo, 1977, pp. 76-77).

It is perhaps advisable to be wary of interpreting praises, essentially an art form, too literally and thereby impute unintended connotations to them. On the basis of literary art in the form such as that of the Mchunu clan praises, Mzolo states that

The Mchunus are an aggressive people.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.105).

Similarly the Chiya clan, (which incidentally, has a praise commonly found among the Nguni) is praised as

✓ Abakwahlamba ngentusi
Abanye behlamba ngamanzi

They who wash with milk
While others wash with water

(Mzolo, 1977, p.141).

and they have the following assumption made about them.

Here the Chiya clan is more specific by mentioning the purpose, for which they reared cattle.

(Mzolo, 1977, pp. 141-142).

It is hardly likely that the Chiya, (as well as other Nguni clans who shared this praise) literally reared cattle for this purpose.

There is no gainsaying that Mzolo made a very sizeable contribution to the study of Nguni clan praises yet in his Master's dissertation he also made a few interesting but highly controversial statements which bear re-appraisal here, if only to clarify what are considered to be misperceptions. For example, a somewhat bizarre postulation was that

there appears a peculiar custom adopted
by some clans.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.143).

This "custom" was supposedly evidenced in the praises of the Mkhize clan.

Lilala, elalala nomunwe engquza
Lavuka ekusen (sic) lawufaka emlonyeni
Lakhomba ilanga

The Lala person who slept with a finger stuck
in the anus
And got up in the morning, put it in the mouth
And pointed at the sun.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.143).

Likewise, the Ngcobo clan (p.143), the Shelembe clan (p.144) and the Myeza clan (p.144) were said to enact a similar performance which was deemed fairly widespread because

Many clans of Lala origin
appear to share this peculiar custom.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.144).

What Mzolo probably meant was that he was merely recording information as elicited from rural informants because it is quite inconceivable that this could have been the personal conviction of a scholar of his reputation. Furthermore, concerning the disparaging

remarks made about certain clans, it must be borne in mind that these are not necessarily based on scientific truth. Some of them are based on prejudice, but are accepted as peculiar practices of certain clans. Mzolo, to his credit, did not shirk from commenting on bawdier aspects within praise poetry and in this regard can be contrasted with Vilakazi, (1945, p.101) who occasionally saw fit to excise such elements from the work of other poets.

It is my contention that such praises developed merely through a punning or a play on words, just as the following Xhosa praises did that I collected:

Zulubuya, buya nezulu
'Zulu liyaduduma

Zulubuya, return with the sky
The sky is thundering.

An Nguni reader would understand the play on the name Zulubuya, which if articulated in another way could be interpreted as Zulu buya (Sky return). Similarly, there is implicit punning in the development of the following Xhosa poetry:

Malal' ngokuvika
Avuk' evikile

He who sleeps protecting himself
And awakens having done so

The play is on the verbal radicals lal - (sleep) and vuk - (awaken) as well as vuk - (awaken) and vik - (protect).

It is therefore postulated that many such praises developed not as a historical record of "peculiar customs" supposedly practised, but are merely an indication of verbal artistry.

Possibly as a result of not recognising such poetical development, the Khusi clan are considered capable of

Sly or deceitful action

(Mzolo, 1977, p.129).

Fortunately, however, the Khusi are not regarded as Zulu !

The Kusi clan is not Zulu, but Phondo (sic)
a Nguni group

(Mzolo, 1977, p.133).

The Sisoka clan, whose name readily lends itself to rhyming with inyoka (a snake), are considered to have a "cunning nature" with an ability

to deceive or outwit others.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.130).

Another example of the development of such "punning" praises is found in the praises of the Sibiya clan, whose name readily lends itself to a pun on the Zulu verb biya (to fence).

Sibiya ngankomo
Abanye bebiya ngamahlahla

Sibiya who fences with cattle
While others fence with tree branches

(Mzolo, 1977, p.140).

It is also suggested that to appreciate the pun more fully the first line of the praise could be more accurately translated as

We fence with cattle

It is because of similar oversight that the Ntuli clan, (which has produced one of the most gifted Zulu poets alive today,) are credited with cannibalism

They used to hide underground and only when they felt there was meat being roasted then they came above the ground. Their sense of smell was highly developed.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.146).

However, their propensity for meat was common for

The Mncwango people also like meat.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.146).

but then it can be argued that there are very few Nguni clans indeed who do not "like meat" !

Based on an interpretation of the Ngcobo clan praises which are

✓ Mashiya amahle angathi azosumayela (sic)
Amavula nkungu kuvele ilanga

Nice eyebrows as if one is going to preach to people

The clearer of mist so that the sun appears

(Mzolo, 1977, p.126).

Mzolo is moved to make the following assertion

To the Ngcobo clan their facial beauty is determined by means of eyebrows, and the beauty of the face is such that it clears the mist and allows the sun to shine i.e. they claim to be the most beautiful people under the reflection of the sun.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.126).

Based on such tenuous grounds, it would be interesting to read his assessment of the development of the Magubane praises and the consequent reflection on the people themselves since, according to Mzolo they had the praises

. . . . Owempahla emhlophe
. . . . Of the white private parts of a
woman

(Mzolo, 1977, p. 124).

Contrary to what has been averred, it is my contention that Zulu clan praises did not develop through "peculiar customs".

3.9 CONCLUSION

Praise poetry, in a variety of forms and appellations, is found almost throughout the whole of Southern Africa and although a few in-depth studies of poetry from certain languages have been made, many more can and need be conducted. Fortunately, however, even though the in-roads of Westernization have taken their toll, there is still time for such research to be undertaken - unlike in Europe where time appears to have run out; court poetry (the nearest equivalent to African praise poetry) being all but extinct. Concerning the Nguni tradition, many critics have taken the view that it is only a recent phenomenon and that poetry as late as that of the previous two centuries was only "fragmentary" and "primitive" - in any event undoubtedly inferior to that encountered today. The thrust of such arguments is possibly misdirected because such "fragmentary" relics of eighteenth century poetry are probably but remnants of a much more sophisticated art form, a point not taken by some observers who made superficial and disparaging remarks about the supposedly "very simple" nature of these praises. Alternatively, it has been erroneously suggested that it was only the praises of ancient chiefs that had any poetic merit; but while it is not gainsayed that such chiefs and royalty did in fact enjoy the benefit of compositions of those most proficient in the art, what has possibly been overlooked is that everyday men and women too, could compose poetry and it is suggested that it was the efforts of these "ordinary" folk that has ensured the widespread appeal and propagation of the art. Even today such men (and to a far lesser degree, women) compose poetry of artistic merit and this art is still practised by the most unlikely of

all people - miners - surprisingly enough even in one of the bleakest and most austere of all institutions - mine compounds.

Certain generalizations about the early nature of Zulu poetry have also led to a spurious appraisal of the "very simple type" of "social and political organisation" of the people - institutions that have little or nothing to do with poetry. For decades it has automatically been assumed by literates that only technologically advanced nations were capable of artistic expression through the medium of poetry. As a result of such misconceptions, pre-Shakan poetry has been criticised for being "erotic" but without taking cognizance of the fact that such eroticism is also found in present day poetry and that such eroticism is dependant not so much upon the era as upon the context and composition of the audience.

Again, earlier poetry has been roundly condemned for being "obscure" yet it is quite likely that such "obscurities" were not as apparent when recited within the context of the entire poem and at a time when such allusions had greater relevance to the audience.

Interestingly enough the composition of oral poetry has also been passed off rather glibly as the product of a "communal mind" yet its counterpart, written poetry, has been considered a result of an individual working in seclusion. This communal aspect of traditional literature is one accepted by even a few discerning critics who elsewhere made astute and perceptive observations about the nature of oral poetry.

In this work comment has been made on the hypothesis that traditional izibongo are only composed by many adults acting in concert. However, it is suggested here that even adolescent youths, copying the

example of their peers, have been able to recite rudimentary forms of poetry. Having heard adults reciting the praises of birds, cattle, chiefs et al; and as Godfrey's essayists have so aptly demonstrated - having learnt and remembered certain of these praises - from such early beginnings cattle-herders and other youths were introduced to and imbued with the art. Later they would learn to fashion their own, individual praises and ultimately as adults and parents they would be expected to recite clan praises on occasions of religious significance.

Among certain people of Africa, adolescent youths were actively encouraged to praise by "teachers" or initiation-lodge leaders entrusted with instilling the acceptable and desired mores in the future adults of the nation. The most elementary step in the development of praise poetry as an oral genre was the coining of a praise name; one redolent with some real or imagined attribute of its owner. Thereafter, a simple explication of praises would be appended, which praises could be amended or polished with a multiplicity of literary embellishments until finally a true poem had been composed. It has been tentatively suggested that the three stages in the evolution of such poetry were firstly, the coining of a praise name, secondly, the addition of simple praise images and finally, the polished product; but naturally such a dichotomy is somewhat arbitrary and it would be naive and simplistic to even assume that the composers themselves were ever aware that they were within a particular sequential or developmental phase while in the throes of composition. Unfortunately, when looking at a final product of intellectual endeavour one can only hypothesize about the unconscious, intermediate phases in the composition thereof - and such postulations must of necessity remain largely speculative.

CHAPTER 4

ORIGINS OF MODERN NGUNI POETRY4.1 Conflicting sentiments about the emergence of modern Nguni poetry.

Undoubtedly, much more research needs to be conducted in the field of Nguni poetry and certain accepted viewpoints need to be critically re-examined. Modern Zulu poetry is said to have the following characteristic -

✓ Ideas associated with serious subjects are usually expressed with closed vowels and those associated with light subjects are expressed with open vowels.

(Kunene, 1962, Appendix p.7).

Unfortunately Kunene did not give any examples to substantiate this avowal and because no other researchers have either commented on this issue or led any evidence in support of Kunene's postulation, it is suggested that one must be wary of accepting it unreservedly.

Elsewhere Kunene, one of the few scholars both of traditional and modern Zulu poetry, correctly observed that

Modern Zulu poetry heralds a new era in Zulu poetry. In making a criticism of it, one must be very tolerant. ...

(Kunene, 1962, p.227).

Nonetheless such tolerance was not much in evidence when in an assessment of the poetry of his namesake, (A.S. Kunene), he wrote -

He is, indeed, the extreme example of a poet who would be ridiculous if only to get form.

(Kunene, 1962, p. 224).

and

Some of his poems are even scarcely worth the name . . .

(Kunene, 1962, p. 225).

Vilakazi was another who had fairly harsh comments concerning some of his colleagues. In his Doctoral thesis he maintains that (other?) modern poets, by virtue of their education, evinced "retardation of thought" and were intellectually inferior to oral bards.

To me it seems that the stream of thought is deeper in the mind of a primitive man than in that of the African poet who has become educated and gained a democratic outlook. Retardation of thought is caused by writing; acceleration is impelled by oral expression directly from the heart's feelings.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p. 122, my underlining).

Strangely enough a "democratic outlook" is equated with the "retardation of thought (which) is caused by writing." Fortunately, non-literate poets did not have to concern themselves with tortuous hypotheses ! If, as Vilakazi averred, "retardation of thought is caused by writing" then one can be excused for wondering why he chose to write at all. Equally as ambiguous is his statement that "acceleration is impelled by oral expression directly from the heart's feelings."

In discussing the relationship between oral and written poetry in Zulu and Xhosa, such statements must be commented on, if only to dispel misperceptions. Contrary to "oral expression" necessarily being superior to "written poetry", it could also be argued that written poetry could in fact be the more polished product because a "writing" poet has had more occasion to phrase, rephrase and distil the essence of his thoughts into a crystallised form whereas should the oral bard in

any recitation choose to rephrase clumsy syntax, such errors are obvious and very audible.

Vilakazi was also somewhat disparaging about "the Xhosa (who) are so emotional and credulously religious":

To see the same tribes reciting under primitive or christian (sic) rites is an interesting psychological study. For instance the Xhosa are so emotional and credulously religious that the episode of Nongqawuse tends to repeat itself even in present day history.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p. VI).

Disregarding the deprecatory remarks, what Vilakazi omitted from the end of his last quoted sentence were the words "and in present day Zulu literature" because he, too, was not above writing a poem about Nongqawuse. It is questionable whether his broad generalizations about the psychology of the Xhosa nation are in keeping with the tenor of an academic dissertation on poetry and furthermore, "the episode of Nongqawuse" might well be expected to command widespread interest because thousands upon thousands of people died during that tragic period. From the Xhosa viewpoint it was particularly momentous in that it effectively broke the back of Xhosa resistance to colonialism.

Vilakazi believed that poets have to "live the life of a hermit" and "practise continually . . . austere asceticism." While romantically prevalent, such sentiments are not necessarily true.

the poet is less regimented and pre-occupied than the rest of us and hence he touches life at more and diversified points. It is necessary for the poet to live in continuous retirement from other people and live the life of a hermit or to practise continually the austere asceticism of the art of poetry.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.26).

In contradiction to what is averred by Vilakazi, it is my contention that far from being "less pre-occupied" with life than the rest of us, he is more intensely aware of "the similarity of dissimilars" discussed elsewhere in this work. The poet can compose poetry on topics that to the layman appear trite or mundane. Moreover, the earthy poetry of the fun-loving Robbie Burns tends to dispute the "living the life of a hermit" theory espoused by Vilakazi.

Vilakazi was of the opinion that a poet's nature and more especially a poet's mood, were indicative of the structure of his poetry.

It is when the reader comes to such a gap, which breaks through the continuity of the poetic mood, that he arrives at the end of one and the beginning of another stanza. It has been noticed already, in the poems quoted above, that some of the stanzas are long and some short, according to the mood of the poet as he reflects a poetic fash of mind.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.42).

Poetic mood is not necessarily a determinant of stanza length. As has already been discussed, a good memory in an oral poet was very important and in this connection Vilakazi was also incorrect about the "permanency of structure" of nursery songs.

nursery songs had the effect of permanency of structure.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.10).

Is it uncharitable to assume that at least some of Vilakazi's criticism was obtuse ? Concerning the Nguni poet

In covering the whole round of beauty, conveyed by his poem which is composed metaphorically even categorically, he must needs include beauty of sound which can be achieved by a clear pronounciation of words, and their component syllables and consonants, in all the

variations of tone to effect emotive experience, without which poetry would be ineffectual.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.43).

Although the Nguni poets were writing in some of the Nguni languages, Jahn mistakenly believed that expatriate poets represented the sole body of South African poets. Commenting on what he considered "The tragedy of Southern Bantu Literature" he opined that

Since the end of World War II the voice of South Africa rings out only from the literature of its emigrants, written in English.

(Jahn, 1967, p.44).

That he could not have been more wrong was born out by the vernacular work of both Ntulis, Nyembezi, a multitude of subscribers to the local newspapers and various other, more accomplished and widely recognised poets.

Writing specifically about emergent modern Zulu poetry, Jahn observed of Vilakazi that

His essay on the development of Zulu poetry is the only significant paper on literary theory in South Africa.

(Jahn, 1967, p.49).

Writing in 1967, Jahn was incorrect in his assumption because by then there were already quite a few "significant paper(s) on literary theory in South Africa" having been produced by both black and white critics.

A statement similar to that of Jahn was expressed by Lestrade, albeit a few decades earlier and consequently much nearer the mark. Considering the "European influences upon the development of Bantu Language and Literature" he noted that

It is to be regretted that the natives themselves have made relatively so few contributions to the printed literature of their people, which is apt to be overweighted with the products of European minds writing for the Bantu, and to contain but relatively little written by the Bantu for themselves.

(Lestrade, 1934, pp. 123-124).

One can only hope and assume that with better education an increasing number of literate blacks will compose and thereby record their own heritage.

Various unnecessary excuses have been made about the composers of Nguni poetry, for example

It must be remembered, the composers of izibongo were not professional poets; in most cases they had little to do with the art of versification.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.32).

It can be argued, and with justification that "the composers of izibongo" had a great deal to do with the art of versification because it was they who were widely acclaimed as accomplished and skilled specialists. Whereas some, admittedly, were amateurs, there were many who were indeed "professional poets."

Again it was assumed that

The poet in primitive society never composed with a view to conscious communication of his own emotions, nor had he the impulse to communicate anything to others.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.32).

Were this the case, why had countless imbongi declaimed in public and why have their declamations been received with a wide range of human emotions ?

If they lacked "the impulse to communicate anything to others", perceptive black critics such as Mafeje could never have found cause to write on topics such as "The role of the bard in a contemporary African community." In this article which was published in the Journal of African Languages in 1967, he discussed the imbongi's role as a mediator.

Fortunately, with the advent of time and better education there has been less of the self-righteous "correction" of modern poetry than that which took place in the late 1930's and early 1940's. In discussing a supposedly inferior Ngoni poet Vilakazi wrote that

The same poem would reach the Zulu standard if remodelled as follows
Of course such reconstruction cannot be carried out with every case of Ngoni poetry from the North. Reference may be made to the reconstruction attempted by H.I.E. Dlomo (sic) of the poem "Mcyi the daughter of Vuma".
Dlomo's (sic) method of reconstructing the poem, setting it in dramatic dialogue, is a very fine attempt to deal with this particular poem.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p. 94, my
underlining).

In this passage one finds the tacit assumption that "the Zulu standard" is supreme and there is more than a hint of implicit arrogance in the attempts of both poets in their "reconstruction" of the original. Fortunately, such attitudes advocating the tampering with traditional poetry in this fashion, would no longer find acceptance.

Besides taking exception to the aforementioned Ngoni poetry, Vilakazi also considered the izibongo of Xhosa chiefs to be marred by vulgarity, apparently unaware that the izibongo of some Zulu chiefs also had similar elements of vulgarity.

In the records of Dr. W.B. Rubusana are to be found the izibongo of Sarili, son of Hintsa, the

Xhosa King. The Xhosa izibongo on chiefs and heroes are often marred, however, by obscene language, carelessly thrown into their poetry, thereby detracting from their value as poetic compositions and preventing them from being included as a whole among the works of art. In poetry of any age or civilization, true artists should guard against vulgarity.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p. 101).

Whereas it is anyone's prerogative to have his own views on morality, what is inexcusable is the excision of any excerpt of poetry "from being included as a whole".

In evaluating the verbal art of both the Zulu and the Xhosa it is pertinent to note Vilakazi's views

In some sections of the Nguni, as in Zululand the information is given generally more detailed (sic), whereas in others such as Xhosaland it is more meagre and lacking in detail. The reason for this is that Xhosa in part mixed considerably with Hottentot clans who probably infused material from their traditional tales into the Nguni mythology from the north (sic).

(Vilakazi, 1945, p. 143).

The bias toward the Zulu is quite evident, however, the "reason" being the Hottentot (i.e. Khoi) influence, which he incorrectly saw as a weakening of the art. This could alternatively be viewed as an addition or a cultural enrichment of the art.

Finally, there was the mistaken concept that Nguni poetry was the sole prerogative of the Nguni, unlike world class European literature which can be enjoyed by countless people of other nationalities.

Nguni art in poetry is laden with symbols intelligible only to the African, and to him these very symbols are a source of enjoyment.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p. 124).

It cannot be refuted that a poet's symbolism is probably most intelligible to his own people, particularly in a non-literate or semi-literate society, however to presume that Nguni poetry is "intelligible only to the African" takes little cognisance of the works of people such as Cope and Opland, among the most knowledgeable people alive today on the izibongo of the Zulu and the Xhosa respectively.

4.2 The Missionary Influence and the impact of Christianity on Nguni poetry

In various parts of the Third World, Islamic, Christian and other religious doctrines have had a profound impact on the indigenous population. Propagators of religion have been either lauded or condemned for their actions, often the cause of such accolades or censure being not so much related to the propagator's actions as to the political convictions of the assessor. Our immediate concern, however, is with the Christian influence on the Nguni and more particularly on their poetry.

Politicized radicals in South Africa have said with poetic parallelism, in obvious reference to white missionaries, that "When the whites came to this country the blacks had the land and the whites the Bibles. Now the blacks have the Bibles and the whites the land! " Such sentiments have tended to cloud the judgement of those who overlook the great work of an inestimably charitable nature carried out by missionary folk in poverty stricken, undeveloped areas.

Nonetheless, missionaries have also been criticised by some who maintain that they interfered with indigenous African folklore. They cite, for example, various initiation rites, circumcision ceremonies,

domba dances and the like which were considered heathen and unchristian and therefore were naturally opposed by certain religious orders. Notwithstanding this, Southern Africa can be emotionally indebted to the resolute folk who made great sacrifices to tend not only to the spiritual requirements of the people, but to their physical needs as well, thereby giving tangible proof of their well-directed concern. The role of the missionaries in colonialism in South Africa is a large and vexed subject, a detailed study of which is beyond the scope of this thesis. Their work should not be judged on the basis of personal experience alone - (being cognizant of this) I, as a child witnessed nuns of a certain religious order, riding on horseback to remote and almost inaccessible areas to provide succour for the sick, all this with little prospect of any material remuneration. Yet human nature being what it is, equally gratifying was the sight of peasant folk who weeks, even months later, would bring a clutch of eggs, a fowl or even a sheep as recompense to these kindly folk.

For all that, our immediate concern here lies not in the humanitarian work of missionaries, but in their earliest literary endeavours which largely influenced the course of modern poetry. It could, of course, be argued that without the physical wherewithal of humanitarian aid, the literary help would have been largely irrelevant. A poet, however talented he might be, cannot write without a pen, paper or adequate lighting facilities at night. Sadly however, political considerations have biased some people and precluded their recognition of the undoubtedly sound work done by missionaries in the educational and literary fields. It is safe to say that a great many modern poets such as B.W. Vilakazi were educated and developed, or else influenced either directly or indirectly, by missionary outposts or missionary-run educational establishments.

The missionaries were of various religious orders and were stationed at places such as Morija (for the Southern Sotho) and for the Nguni at Mariannhill, Tiger Kloof, Adams Mission and Lovedale. Whereas the publication of Biblical works took precedence, anthropological papers, histories, genealogies, riddles, rhymes, folklore and then finally, creative poetry was printed. It is in this last mentioned literary field that we must concern ourselves.

The missionaries were the first to introduce the Nguni to the concept of literacy. Although most would welcome such a momentous development in the field of modern poetry, not all have shared this enthusiasm for literacy. Bird, for one, foresaw dangers in the advent of literacy generally among oral poets.

There is, after all, a trend toward literacy in these areas, and literacy seems to ring the death knell for the continuation of a true epic tradition.

(Bird, 1972, p.293)

Whereas it has already been stressed earlier in this work that the written word can never adequately convey the full richness of a verbal performance, literacy in itself need not be seen as a "death knell" but could be more optimistically viewed as a giant step in opening new vistas, new themes and new poetic structures to oral poets.

Another critic, in assessing "Tendencies in Bantu Literature" was of the controversial viewpoint that

The Missionary Period is not of much importance to us here

(Mothoa, 1963, p.371)

Fortunately, however in a volte face he more correctly stated that

Its contribution towards the building up of a

separate Bantu literature cannot, however, be underestimated.

(Mothoa, 1963, p.371)

Mothoa was of the opinion that during the missionary period Bantu literature was produced for religious purposes by missionaries either to teach other whites the language or

for the use of the different congregations of the various churches

(Mothoa, 1963, p.371)

This appears quite feasible because as this work will bear out, much early written poetry and a great deal of written documentation of all genres of folklore was at the direct instigation and encouragement of missionaries who even printed it on their mission presses. Vilakazi was one of many taken under the aegis of a religious order at Mariannhill.

However, Mothoa treads on very dangerous ground by averring that

When the present regime took over Bantu Education from the Churches, laying emphasis on the importance of the Bantu languages as the medium of instruction in the schools, it ushered in a new era : The Golden Age of Bantu literature.

(Mothoa, 1963, p. 373, his underlining)

It was only thirteen years later that the so-called "Golden Age" resulted in a civil disturbance which was to set in motion actions which would irrevocably alter the concept of Bantu Education and also (more pertinently for the nature of the discussion here), naturally impinge upon the education received by incipient poets.

It cannot be gainsaid that a poor standard of education undoubtedly thwarted the origin and development of modern poetry in Nguni. Vilakazi describes how "at College" the class was made to recite Tennyson's "Half a League".

and the method of recitation instilled into his heart great hatred for the poem, and unwarranted suspicion for every work of Tennyson. The teacher did not attempt to instil into our hearts the historical background of the poem and the inspiration breathed into it by the poet. The result was disastrous because we cultivated a dislike for poetry in general.

(Vilakazi, 1938, p.126)

One can certainly commiserate with early Nguni poets, who in overcrowded classrooms and in the hands of teachers not very much more academically qualified than their charges, would learn by rote, poems such as "The Charge of the Light Brigade", hardly aware of what a "Light Brigade" might be.

Notwithstanding the poor quality of education, Mothoa has listed other factors which he considered "obstacles" to "the popularity of Bantu books". These were

- (i) The Bantu's traditional attitude towards a book;
- (ii) The limiting factor of language;
- (iii) The prejudice of our authors;
- (iv) The everchanging orthography for Bantu languages.


(Mothoa, 1963, p.374)

Naturally, if the above factors were true, such negative attitudes on the part of the "Bantu" readers would have had a definite effect on the origin of modern Nguni poetry. However, some of these statements are contentious. For example, vernacular languages were not a "limiting factor" and it is unclear what he meant by "the prejudice of our

authors". By this was he implying that the authors believed (as he did) that their home language was a "limiting factor" ? More telling is his comment that

Secondly, books were always regarded as things for school children.

(Mothoa, 1963, p.374)

This could be attributed to one of two factors, firstly the natural reticence of illiterate adults before literate schoolchildren where, in such situations adults might denigrate books as something suitable only for children, and secondly, and far more plausibly, was the question of finance. Poor people cannot afford the  luxury of books bought simply for leisure. However, assuming that Mothoa's statement is correct, the question then arises whether the poets themselves were not influenced by the consideration of their youthful reading public.

Mothoa has made some questionable remarks concerning the origin of modern poetry. For example

Authors who write with the intention of demonstrating the beauty and wealth of the vocabulary of the dialects have alienated themselves from the readers. Bantu in the urban areas have always found it very difficult to understand a book which is supposed to be written in their language.

(Mothoa, 1963, p.375)

How can poets "demonstrating the beauty and wealth of vocabulary alienate themselves from the readers " ? Accepting the addition of township terms, is communication in the same language by rural and urban folk "very difficult" ?

When considering the missionary influence on Nguni poetry, a monumental work is that of W.G. Bennie who collated a book, Imibengo,

which was published by the Lovedale Missionary Press. The book is subtitled "Titbits. An Anthology of Xhosa Prose and Poetry" and other than this, there is hardly any other English wording throughout the many articles and poems by the numerous contributors.

This work represents possibly the finest collection of earliest modern poetry in Nguni. The compiler, W.G. Bennie, was a grandson of Rev. John Bennie. John Bennie, sent to South Africa by the Glasgow Missionary Society, did not confine his energies to ecclesiastical work. For example, he compiled Xhosa - English word lists which were used in the second edition of Kropf's dictionary. Having been in the country but three years, he in conjunction with the Rev. John Ross, founded the Lovedale Mission in 1824 where, the famous "Lovedale Kafir Readers" were first published in 1839. The Lovedale Mission did more to encourage the growth of early vernacular literature among the Xhosa, than any other institution of the time. Given the missionary influence, it is no coincidence therefore to find that on the first page of W.G. Bennie's book there is a poem by Ntsikana entitled Elokudumisa u-Thixo (In praise of God). This poem and others throughout the book are rendered solely in the vernacular.

Unfortunately, whereas we are aware that the book was published in 1935, there is no indication when the various contributors wrote their work, except where certain more prominent poets have a brief resume of their life history appended in an essay after their poetry. One such poet was S.E.K. Mqhayi who wrote a religious poem entitled Aa! Mhle! Mhle! (Aa! Bounteous Sir). Below the title and before the commencement of the poem proper is a preface being a Biblical excerpt referred to only as "Isaya, vii 14" and which concerns the birth of

Emmanuel. In praising him in this nine-versed poem of exactly eight lines each (i.e. in imitation of the modern style), Mqhayi used traditional elements including the salutation implicit in the title

Aa ! Mhlekaazi Omhle
Aa ! Bounteous Sir

and

Wena, Nkulu yeminyanya
You, Great one of the ancestral shades

and

Sitsho kuWe, Nkulu yeminyanya
We say it to your very self, Great one of the
ancestral shades

On pages 108 and 109 is another poem entitled Ukubeka ilitye (The placing of a (memorial) stone) and this is prefaced with the words

Ngokufa kukam Fun. S. Mthimkhulu,
ngeye Thupha, 1885

(Bennie, ed. 1935, p.108).

On the death of Minister S. Mthimkhulu,
in June, 1885

Were it not for the date, this poem, written by William W. Gqoba in the previous century, could be mistaken for a modern elegy, not being in the traditional style of praising and having eight similarly structured verses each of four lines.

This book also served as a vehicle for the propagation of modern-type poetry such as that of F. Nomvethé entitled Mntwanana (Little child). This delightful poem consists of sixteen stanzas each of five lines, the first two stanzas being

'Themba likayise
Vuyo lukanina
Nkazimlo kayise
Thando lukanina
Lunguwe, mntwanana

Isazulu apho

Kuhlangana khona
'Ntliziyo ezimbini
'Ntliziyo zabazali
Singuwe, mntwanana

Father's hope
 Mother's joy
 Father's glory
 Mother's love
 That's you, my little child.

It is the centre
 Where there meet two hearts
 The hearts of the parents
 That's you, my little child.

Besides obvious poetry, a phenomenon characteristic of early Nguni literature such as articles, essays and novels is the incorporation within these of excerpts of poetry. Bennie's compilation is no exception. For example, on page 126, in an essay entitled Imiyolelo yowe 1931 Umyaka (The Blessings of the Year 1931), Mqhayi concludes his essay with the following poem :

Awu !!!
Ewe, kaloku kuya vakala.
Kuya vakal' ukuthetha kwendoda.
Isephi na indod' esayolelayo,
Esalubizayo usapho lwayo?
Basephi na oonyan' abasavumayo
Ukuzithwal' iinzima zooyise ?
Nakhal' izolo nomhla nisithi,
"Iminyaka mibi, ibukuqekile !"
Yaye iminyak' ilila, isithi,
"Oonyana bakaAdam babukuqekile".
Zilungisen' iindlela zenu, bantu,
Uphele umona nentle bendwana;
Liphele ikratshi nokuthand' amawonga.
Ngubani na oza kuphath' ihlabathi,
Aliphathe ngezandl' ezimsulwa?
Kuba ziphelelw' izikumkani,
Zingenelwe ngumhlwa nempehla.
Naango kambe ungena umnyaka -
Taruni, nto zakowethu !
Ncincilili !!!

Awu !
 Yes, of course it is discernible
 A man's speech is quite perceptible.
 Where is a perfect man
 Who still gives his family a name ?
 Where are the sons still willing
 To bear the burdens of their fathers ?
 Yesterday you complained, today you still say

"The years are bad, they are being destroyed!"
 And the years complained, saying
 "The sons of Adam are destroyed"
 Reconsider your ways, people
 Let there be an end
 To jealousy and back-biting talk.
 Let haughtiness cease and let there be an end
 To the love of grandeur
 Who can handle soil
 With spotless hands?
 Because they have lost all at the hands of
 dominions.
 That are not satisfied with destitute people
 There he is going into the year
 Pardon, my people
Ncincilili !

This sad poem bewailing, inter alia, the passing of traditional mores and values, was interestingly enough repeated on various gold mines nearly half a century later, and what is especially interesting is that excerpts thereof were incorporated in the everyday praises of Xhosa mineworkers. (Vide, Wainwright 1979, pp. 47-48). Izikumkani, translated as "dominions" in the text, is an interesting word in that it is rarely heard today and few Xhosa-speakers are able to even hazard an opinion as to its meaning. Kropf cites the singular, isikumkani as

a kingdom; kingship, dominion

(Kropf, 1915, p.201)

but the additional meaning of a "capitalist" or "wealthy person" has been tentatively suggested by a Xhosa-speaker.

This poem also has a homiletic tone, introducing something new in Xhosa izibongo, traceable to the influence of the sermon.

In Walker S. Gawe's folktale (pp.140 - 143 of Bennie's compilation) entitled U-Nto - Ziya - Thetha ; Idabi Leentaka Neenyoka (Inanimate things talk : The Fight between the Birds and the Snakes), the entire folktale is frequently interspersed with birds reciting poetry based on folktale songs. In the same book are two modern poems on new themes

(pp. 157 - 158). These are by one of the better known Xhosa poets, James J.R. Jolobe, entitled Inja Yakowethu (Our dog) and Ikati Yakowethu (Our cat). Traditional iimbongi were not given to praising mundane subjects such as "Our cat" ! Of course, it could be argued that they did praise cattle, but cattle have a cultural value and status quite distinct from cats. Bennie's compilation contains a wealth of valuable material and it is suggested that it would be well worthwhile for some researcher to translate the work in its entirety so that it could be better utilized and more widely analysed by scholars other than only those proficient in Xhosa. It certainly deserves a wider readership and ethnologists and anthropologists would certainly find a storehouse of data within its covers. Within one such article, a historical essay penned by Mqhayi (p.198), entitled Isithathu Sabafundisi (Three Ministers) there is poetry in praise of them. Mqhayi expounds on the religious ministrations of people such as uBulumeli (John Brownlee), uRene (John Bennie) and uLose (John Ross) and then spontaneously breaks into poetry extolling their virtues; something which no doubt greatly pleased the aforementioned missionaries (whose printing press subsequently published the poetry)!

Page S.W. Yako was another of the early poets who submitted his poetry (or had it submitted on his behalf) to Bennie for publication, and included in his work was a poem entitled Izibongo Zika J.W.D. Hughes, (The praises of J.W. Hughes) who incidentally was the first Commissioner of Agriculture in the Ciskei. The poet has divided his poem into stanzas of varying length, the concluding one being

Naantso ke ingoma entsha, mawethu
Ngathi xa senje nje, soba se sigqibile.
Vumani nonke,
Dumisani nonke,
Ngenxa yeentsikelelo namathamsanqa,
Lawo siwazuzileyo
Naaso ke isipho
Naantso ke ingoma yabaLimi

(Bennie, ed. 1935, p.251).

There, then, is the new song, my people
 When we do this, we will have already finished.
 Agree, all of you
 Praise, all of you
 On account of the blessings and good fortune
 That we have earned.
 There then is the gift
 There then is the song of the farmers.

With poetry permeating all aspects of society it appears quite logical and moreover, almost irresistible in the writings of early-century essayists. For example, in an article entitled Uhambo Luka - Gqoboka (Gqoboka's Journey), part one is subtitled Idabi Leenkunzi (The Fight of the Bulls). In this story of the bulls the author, in prose, describes a rustic scene at sunset with a young boy leading the cattle home and then

Kuthe kusenjalo, ndeva inkunzi yakowethu, uNgobiya,
ikhonya; kanti inxhamelene neyakwaMgudlwa. Kulapho ndabonwa
ndiphakama, ndiyithetha ndisithi:

Viyo, viyo, viyo, vi-i-yo !
Dad' elimnyama lemilambo,
Libonwa zizinja zikaMkhuhlane
Kuthe zakulileqa, lantyl' esizibeni
Nazo zantylwila, zilanda umkhondo.
Kwaduk idada, kwaduk' izinja
Nanamhla oku azikabonwa
Wamangal' uMkhuhlane lamhl' ityala

Viyo, viyo, viyo, vi-i-yo !
Madoda, ndiboleken' iqaqa ndikhwele:
Kuba ndiswel iqegu, nge ndilikhwela,
Ndihambe nemizi yonke
Ndiyibikele ngenkuz' uNgobiya

(Bennie, ed., 1935, p.253).

While it was so, I heard our bull, Ngobiya, bellowing; indeed, it was having a go at Mgudlwa's (bull). It was then that I was seen to arise, talking about it saying :

Viyo, viyo, viyo, vi-i-yo !
 Black duck of the rivers
 Which is spotted by the dogs of Mkhuhlane.
 As they were about to pounce on it,
 it dived into the pool.
 They too dived, following the trail.
 The duck got lost, the dogs got lost.

To this very day they have not been seen.
Mkhuhlane marvelled and lost the case.

Viyo, viyo, vi-i-yo !
Men, lend me a polecat so that I can mount it.
Because I lack a pack-ox to ride
And go with the entire household
Relating to it about the bull, Ngobiya ...

The page hints at an important psychological insight to the inspirational nature of poets who can have a sudden urge to simultaneously and spontaneously compose and declaim poetry.

It was then that I was seen to arise, talking
about it saying

(loc. cit.)

It is almost as though the poet was in a trance, unaware of his actions and it was only later that the nature of his actions was revealed to him. The narrative sense of the first three lines is indicative of the rambling style of early poets who it seemed, eschewed terse, clipped phraseology. After all, poetry was a gift to be cultivated. Other than as a source of entertainment, of what relevance is the discourse concerning Mkhuhlane's dogs, (the man's name meaning "Influenza") ? If one would excuse a mixed metaphor, it is simply a humorous and entertaining anecdote about two rapacious dogs hoist with their own petard at the hands of the underdog, in this case, the duck. It is a little story with which people anywhere in the world can identify.

The poet, Henry Masilo Ndawo, then goes on to proclaim the bizarre concept of mounting a creature as opprobrious as a polecat, which depending on context, was probably calculated to elicit a humorous response from the audience, before laconically warming to the theme of the poem, which was after all about Ngobiya, the bull all in

all demonstrating a felicitous marriage of the story-teller's art and poetry.

Again, in an early essay entitled Ingxoxo Yenyange (The wise old man's tale), Masilo after a few pages of prose writes the following paragraph

Ivakele ingwevu yaseNtla ithintha futhi
isikhohlela, kuba noko ngenxa
yokwaluphala, ibikholisa ngokuginya
into eninzi yamazwi kunye namathe;
iingcambu zolwimi zazise zishiywe
ngamandla azo. Ebudodaneni bayo
yayiyenye yeembongi eziphambili
kwiinkundla zakowayo, yatsho yathi :

(Bennie, ed. 1935, p.260).

An old man from the North was heard to cough.
 Because of old age he was accustomed to
 swallowing a lot of spittle with his words; the
 roots of his tongue having lost their strength.
 In the prime of his manhood he was one of the
 foremost iimbongi of his place, and he said :

At this point he breaks into poetry

IMFUDUKO

Sinje nje nje, siluhlanga lee
Siphum'entla kweli silimiyo

(Bennie, ed. 1935, p. 260)

THE MIGRATION

We are like this. We are the nation from
 yonder. We come from North of where we now
 stand.

and having concluded the poem, the poet/essayist continues in prose with

Uthe ukhokho, akugqiba ukuwathetha
la mazwi, wavakala elila kakhulu ...

Upon uttering these words, the old man
 was heard weeping bitterly . . .

Similarly, in a third essay by Ndawo, entitled Ukunduluka Ekhaya (To stream home), there are excerpts of poetry including a poem in its

entirety entitled uNozizwe (Nozizwe), this being a person's name. Yet whatever poetic merit such poetry, which is incorporated within essays, might have; H.M. Ndawo's most important work was probably his anthology entitled Iziduko ZamaHlubi (Clan Praises of the Hlubi) published in 1939, under the auspices of the Lovedale Mission Press.

Yet not everybody was enamoured with the result of missionary influence on the Nguni. Considering the influence of religious (Christian) poetry upon modern Zulu poetry, Kunene was of the opinion that "it destroys an otherwise good poem."

Amongst some poets the influence of religious poetry is so dominant that poetry seems to be clamped down by it. At times it destroys an otherwise good poem.

(Kunene, 1962, p.199)

In his Master's dissertation, under a sub-heading of "Trends in Zulu poetry" Kunene writes of the poems that

In most cases, as has been indicated, they are characterised by self-pity and some amount of religious sentimentalism.

(Kunene, 1962, p.229)

Naturally, the outcome could be anticipated to be disastrous

The result is that most of the works (i.e. in Zulu poetry) are immature.

(Kunene, 1962, p.231)

That Kunene had ambivalent feelings towards modern Zulu poetry, most of which he considered "immature", is borne out by the following

Although modern Zulu poetry is scarcely 25 years old, yet the poets have made remarkable contributions to African literature. It would be an exaggeration if one claimed that Zulu poets have already produced works of world class. Nonetheless, trends show that they

will soon produce some of the world's greatest master - pieces (sic).

(Kunene, 1962, pp. 227-228
my underlining)

Unlike Kunene, Vilakazi was very positive about the missionary influence.

Nguni literature is scarcely more than half a century old. The Lovedale Press has heroically sponsored the development of Xhosa literature, while for Zulu literature no Press has played so eminent a part.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.356)

However, while generally being negative about the influence of religious poetry Kunene conceded that

Whatever the case may be, there is no doubt that religious poetry did have some favourable influence on the development of Zulu poetry. It introduced a broader morality into Zulu poetry.

(Kunene, 1962, p.201,
my underlining).

Yet, conversely, it was this very "morality" that others objected to ! On the other hand many would have supported Kunene's argument because scholars such as Vilakazi saw fit to bowdlerize and even omit sections of poems that they were discussing and which they, with their self-imposed powers of censorship, objected to. In his Doctoral thesis (p.101) Vilakazi makes his views on this rather plain and refused to translate "immoral" sections of Xhosa poetry such as those in praise of Sarili. Yet whether or not "morality" is essential in poetry, modern poetry generally evidences fewer profanities than traditional praises. This could be as a result of many factors including editorial censorship, a change of perception due to having prescribed to a new and different religious doctrine, or even simply because of the relative

youth of the school-goers who were assumed would constitute the main body of the readers.

The erroneous concept that one could tamper with the original literary work was one espoused by Vilakazi. Concerning the translation of literature he wrote

in the present stage in which the literate Bantu are mainly the younger folk, a Bantu translator might be well advised to make his own abridgements, recognising the limited background for the people for whom he is translating.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.369)

Such thinking is total anathema to those concerned with the preservation of a cultural heritage. Even if a present generation (for whatever reason) is deemed to have a "limited (educational) background" and might not understand the work, why should it be tampered with and spoilt for those of present and future generations who could appreciate such subtleties ? Such short-sightedness resulted in Vilakazi and others excising according to the predilections of personal, arbitrary taste. Unfortunately, the missionaries themselves also exercised considerable influence on what was deemed worthy of publication and the question arises as to what impact these men, who also acted as the very first teachers, had on the new group of literate poets ?

Presupposing that one could study early missionary society minutes and correspondence, the letters between Nguni writers and publishers, and the written publishing policies (indeed, if any at all) of the different printing presses, one has little other way of assessing just how much early poetry survived unscathed.

Fortunately, like Bennie, another man who displayed remarkable foresight was Dr W.B. Rubusana who under the title of Zemk' inkomo

Magwalandini (Away go the cattle, you cowards), collected a wealth of anthropological, historical and ethnographical data including some of the earliest written poetry, such as the religious poem by M.K. Mtakatyi, which written in 1884, was in praise of God. Umqamlezo is a poem written in stanzas each of four lines, with some of the phraseology almost indistinguishable from that of traditional iimbongi. For example,

Qadi elikulu lasezulwini
Wen' omfemfe zingenakulandeka
Ramco elimehlo anjengesilwane ...

Great beam of heaven
 You, ways that cannot be traced
 Predator with eyes like a wild animal

Included within this same anthology is poetry not in praise of the Christian God (i.e. with no missionary influence) but which refers to the traditional worship of deceased ancestors. The longest izibongo in the anthology are those of Sandile kaNgqika, of which Vilakazi notes

The opening lines are great poetry, for they reveal something about the traditional praises of Xhosa heroes. They appeal to the spirits of the dead for succour, as the poet sees the white man encroaching on the black man's land:-

Ndibuzen' amatongo ndiwaxe!
Ndipup' ikwababa likwel' endlwini
Ikwababa elimhlop' amapiko

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.103)

Ask of me the ancestral shades that I may tell
 them !
 I dreamt of a raven sitting on a house
 A white-winged raven

Vilakazi was indeed correct that these lines concerning the ancestral shades are "great poetry". The impact of Christianity, too, had a profound effect on the people and naturally this was evidenced in their poetry. Wandile Kuse in his work Izibongo Zeenkosi (The Praises

of Kings): Aspects of Xhosa Heroic Poetry, comments on a poem about a man, Silimela, and says of him that

He is declaimed as a modern type of Ndlambe clansman. Before he was called to the Ndlambe chieftaincy, he had been a lay evangelist of the Presbyterian Church. A poem dedicated to him might be expected to register the clash or merging of two cultures and religious systems. It does. It invokes historical incidents whose recitation assumes epic proportions.

(Kuse, 1979, p. 238).

Thus one can see the influence of a new religious dispensation on poetry. There is the anomalous situation whereby on the one hand religious propagators stimulated poetry by encouraging literacy and later, literate poets to publish; and on the other hand it created terrible emotional upheaval and confusion such as that so eloquently expressed by Mqhayi who said of Great Britain, that her military might, brandy and religion left the Xhosa "shivering, benighted in the bright noonday sun." The original Xhosa text is to be found on pages 70-73 of Mqhayi's anthology Inzuzo (A Profit) which was published in 1974.

A different aspect of this "clash or merging of two cultures and religious systems" (Kuse, 1979, p.238) is seen in Silimela's praises. Here the starker, more readily discernible results are graphically portrayed.

Kwalil' ukuba abe seDrayibhoso,
Yavel' e yakwaNtsasan' ityeth' iintong' e
zinkone.
Kulapho yaqala khon' ukuganana.
Yatshay' impampili yasemlungwini;
Yatshay' impampili yasemXhoseni.
Yaw' imikhuthuka macal' o mabini.
Yarox' e kaNtsasana, yasinga kwaseQumra
Wee tyuu uNdlu-zodaka,
Waya kutsho kuNdanda, koVece, kuXesi-Magqagala

Having reached Draaisbosch (sic)
 Ntsasana (i.e., the white man's) forces
 appeared,
 colorfully uniformed (or armed to the teeth).
 It was there that the battle was joined.

The white man's repeater rifle smoked.
 The Xhosa repeater rifle smoked
 The bruised fell on both sides.
 The white man's forces retreated
 in the direction of Qumra.
 Ndluzodaka's forces were in hot pursuit
 Until they got to Nda, Vece,
 And even reached Xesi Magqagala (Ngqika).

(Kuse, 1979, p.223).

Kuse's translation of these lines is that the "white man's forces retreated and even reached Xesi Magqagala (Ngqika)." Perhaps more geographically explicit is Kropf's translation of iXesi, being:

The Keiskama river, i.e. the fourth river by the reckoning of the Kafirs and Hottentots, who agreed in former days, that the fourth river from the Kei should be their mutual boundary;

(Kropf, 1915, p.508)

Besides the literary work accomplished by the Church of Scotland at the Lovedale Institute, in other parts of South Africa other denominations were also very active. For example, the Kilnerton Institute was established by the Methodist Church near Pretoria, Wilberforce College was established by the American Methodist Episcopal Church at Evaton in the Transvaal, Adams College was established by the American Board of Foreign Missions near Amanzimtoti and Ohlange Institute was established by the Rev. J.L. Dube near Durban.

Men such as Callaway did much to preserve the cultural heritage of the Zulu and one has only to look at the circumstances of one man, Vilakazi, as a "case study" to realise how profound the missionary influence was among the Zulu. Vilakazi was born at the Groutville Mission Station which was founded by an American missionary, Aldan Grout, in 1836. He studied at the Mariannhill Mission Station, acted as secretary for Father Bernard Huss (who in turn was his mentor), published religious poetry such as Izinsimbi Zesonto (The Bells of the

Church) and had two of his novels Noma Nini ! and Nje Nempela! published by the Mariannhill Mission Press in 1935 and 1944, respectively.

Although the missionaries' primary interest in African languages was for the further propagation of their faith; they nonetheless encouraged the collection (and subsequent publication) of aspects of anthropology, folklore and finally, of creative poetry. Such then was the influence of missionaries who acted as mentors, educators, publishers and benefactors of the first Nguni poets.

4.3 Early Press Publications and the Killie Campbell Archives

In the yellowed pages of the Killie Campbell Archives are numerous examples of early Nguni poetry sent in for various reasons by ordinary laymen, women and children who with no linguistic, poetic or philological training wished their literary efforts to be afforded a modicum of recognition, or who alternatively wished the praises of their ancestors to be recorded for future scholars, or who possibly wrote poetry for just the same reasons as anyone anywhere in the world might. Some might have wished for an outlet to their creative talents, yet they realised that they had little chance of finding publishers willing to print their work - finance being an operative consideration. The most paramount question was whether an entire anthology and not just a single poem of a poet would sell. Many of their poems were merely published in local newspapers and were later diligently cut out and collated by dedicated staff members of the said museum. Consequently this entire section is devoted to an analysis of those compilations of early Nguni (mainly Zulu) poetry.

In them one finds poems about buses, mountains, cars, aeroplanes and concepts hitherto not praised by the traditional poets. Many poems were submitted by schoolchildren and in 1949 a composition by the "Students and Staff of St Chad's" was submitted in praise of a teacher, Miss J.E. Plaister who was termed

Indlondlokazi emehlo abukhali

Sharp-eyed female mamba

To a certain extent one has to suspend Western sensibilities in assessing such poetic imagery. In Europe such a line, even in a well-disposed poem, could be taken amiss; but in the aforementioned quotation it is actually meant as a compliment. A fair amount of creativity is shown in some of these compositions which are, after all, only the poetic pieces of schoolchildren. For example, a poem about a cat (an entirely new theme for Zulu poetry) is begun with

Nyawu Nyawu

Miaauw Miaauw

but is actually an onomatopaeic play on the word Nyawo (Foot).

Another epithet, so typical of Nguni poetry yet one possibly bizarre in Europe, is found in a poem by an unknown author which was published in Ilanga lase Natal on the 18th November, 1944. Mr S.T. Manzana, the subject of the poem, is praised as

Mfishane ongubo zinyathelwa abade

Short one whose clothes are stood on by tall people

a well meaning, yet pointed comment on his short stature !

Indeed, the Killie Campbell Museum became a repository for the poetic endeavours of all ages and intellects, an example of which is the poem, Izibongo Zamanzi (Praises of Water), submitted by a certain

May Khoza, Std 2, 10 years,
Loram Junior Sch. 80 Carlisle St. Dbn.

(loc. cit.)

There are numerous other examples of poems submitted by children that are to be found in the Killie Campbell Museum.

Ranged in contrast to such child poetry are some of the finest creative praise names to be found in Nguni poetry. For example, in a poem about Dingane, the poet describes the death of various Boers at the hands of Dingane, yet he was limited to only two names that he could recall, namely Piti (Piet) and Jana (Jan). However, in reciting about the other Boers who died at the same time, we hear of the creative and imaginary casualties being

Umazinyo antsatsa kuMabunu
Umhlatiwesibhamu (sic) setye
uNgalonkulu kuMabunu
Sifanso, Sismana, Jambuluka, uMlomonwencuncu
uGobiphiko

and most profound of all

uDubulangezimakhambili !

Long-toothed one of the Boers
Rifle's jaw-bone of stone
Large-armed man of the Boers
Sifanso, Sismana, Jambuluka,
Honeysucker-mouth Bent wing

and finally

Gun with two nostrils !

The aforementioned line is interesting because it evokes a parallel of the traditional Nguni custom of expelling nasal mucous (obviously without the aid of a handkerchief) and the (anachronistic) double-barrel shotguns that the modern day Zulu poet believed were used by the Boers.

Other "occasional" poetry (that written to commemorate a particular episode), is also meticulously recorded by the chroniclers of Killie Campbell. A six-and-half foolscap sized page on the death of Vilakazi was culled from the pages of the Ilanga lase Natal on the 8th November, 1947. In it is a clever punning on some of Vilakazi's qualifications - a "B.A." degree which is referred to in a pun on his initials "B.W".

Naye B.A. lowo ocinsa umlilo
ngemuva nangaphambili
uB.W. Vilakazi ufike wamchizela ukotshi

And it, the B.A. that extinguishes the fire
 behind and ahead
 B.W. Vilakazi arrived and showed superior airs.

Of interest, too, is an English poem entitled "Valediction" which was written by H.I.E. Dhlomo to commemorate the death of John Langalibalele Dube. On the 23rd February, 1946 this poem was published in Ilanga lase Natal (hereinafter referred to as Ilanga, as it subsequently became, and presently is, known). After approximately a hundred lines of English in this Zulu-language newspaper, the poet breaks into Zulu with

Wo ! lala Nsizw endala, lala !
Qa, Mame, nawe mntwana, mus' ukhala
Kay' fil' insizw' endala
Imile njengedwala

Oh ! sleep Old Man, sleep
 No, Mother, and you, child, don't cry !
 The (young) old man is not dead.
 He is alive, (standing) like a large rock.

The poet then continues for a further twenty two lines in Zulu.

Similarly, on the 19th August, 1944 the Xhosa poet laureate, S.E.K. Mqhayi, had his Xhosa poem on J.L. Dube published in the same Zulu language newspaper. It was a composition in the traditional style even with the traditional concluding formula Ncincilili ! Again, "Mafukuzela" as Dube was commonly known, was eulogised in a poem published on the 23rd February, 1946 by an unknown composer in Ilanga. In it are the following original lines which possibly represent the earliest written record of Black Theology.

Mahikhany (sic) imisebenzi yenu phambi kwabantu
Ukuze babone imisebenzi yenu emihle
Badumise uYihlo osezulwini
(Umvelinqangi wao (sic) Phunga no Mageba
hayi ka Jakobe no Yisaka)

Let your work so shine before people
 That they will see your good work
 And glorify your Father in heaven
 (The God of Phunga and Mageba,
 Not of Jacob and Isaac).

The first three lines represent an almost direct translation of a Biblical passage but the Black Theology philosophy is very explicit in the two concluding lines.

In the above rendition are examples of what today, with the latest orthography, would constitute spelling errors; however the cause of similar "mistakes" could also be attributed to white typists of the Killie Campbell Museum retyping some of the poems, only some of which were newscuttings, on sturdier paper.

The endeavours of early aspirant Nguni poets were much encouraged by the editor of Ilanga. For example, on the 16th September 1950 a fourteen year old boy in Std 2 submitted a poem entitled Izibongo zepeni lomsizi (The praises of a lead pencil). This the editor duly published together with the footnote

Umlobi lo yingane esafunda incwadi
yesibili (Std. 2) esikoleni, ineminyaka
eyi 14 ubudala kuphela. Siyabonga
otisha abakhthaza (sic) inzingane
ekulobeni "Ilanga" ngoba yizona
abaholi abezayo

This writer is a child studying his
Std 2 at school. He is only 14 years old.
We thank those teachers who
encourage children to write to Ilanga
because they are the leaders of the future

Similarly, when on the 18th June, 1949 Miriam Khenisa contributed
Izibongo ZikaLisho (The praises of a rickshaw), the editor appended the
footnote

Izibongo lezi zilotshwa yi Nkosazana
eneminyaka 12 ubudala, esafundayo esikoleni.
Siyawubonga umzamo ababazekayo (sic)
wayo - Some more please, Miss.

These praises have been written by a 12 year
old lady who is still studying at school. We
thank you for your most admirable effort - Some
more please, Miss.

Again, when 6 months later (on the 31st December, 1949) the editor
published her Izibongo Zesicathulo (The praises of shoes); he remembered
her previous endeavours and commended her poetry by writing

Lengane enekhono lokuqamba izibongo
yaqala ngezibongo zika-Lisho. Namuhla
seyilandelisa ngalesi. Akhe usiphe
isithombe sayo, tishela. Mhleli

The girl who wrote these praises began with
"The praises of a rickshaw". Today she has
continued with these lines. Please give us a
photograph, Teacher. Editor.

On the 28th August, 1948 an older contributor, A.H. Ngidi of King
Edward Hospital in Durban, submitted a poem to the same newspaper.
Entitled Isililo sikaFata Huss, C.M.M. (Ode to Father Huss C.M.M.), this
poem of twelve stanzas of varying length showed an interesting marriage

of traditional and modern poetry, of which part of the introductory stanza consisted of

Sengabonga nge Jubhili lakho
Namhla ngibhala isililo sakho,
Silomo, Baba, Mfundisi Hussi,
Sazi, Mqambhi, Nyanga yamaFusi
Mvusi, Mluleki, Mqondisi weAfrika
Ew' ivuka, yenyuka yehlika,
Wen' omhlophe ngebala wamnyama
Ngomoya nanhliziyo ungo-Jama (sic) ...

I have already praised your Jubilee
 Today I write your dirge
 Spokesman, Father, Preacher Hussi
 Knowledgeable, Creator, Doctor of the Fusi
 Awakener, Mediator, Enlightener of Africa,
 Who gets up as he falls, going up and down
 You, white one, with a black's complexion
 In heart and spirit you are Jama

The praise names in particular, and the third last line of the above, namely

Ew' ivuka, yenyuka yehlika

are all evocative of the very traditional elements within this modern day poem. This line is (probably totally unintentionally), reminiscent of

NguLuhad' igama lakhe:
UMbambo zemka zabuyela;
Ngaphantsi kwelitye kuyoyikeka,
Kuba zilaph' iinzwana namadikazi

(Kuse, 1979, p.221)

Luhadi is his name:
 He is Ribs that go back and forth;
 (What is happening) under the rock is fearsome,
 For the handsome men are there with the
 unattached females.

Kropf, although he compiled his dictionary as long ago as 1915, is still to this day the definitive item in Xhosa lexicography. He very correctly cites idikazi as "an unmarried female" but with commendable sensitivity adds that

It is difficult to define this word, as it is used very loosely To be in such condition is a great reproach People must be very careful in using this term.

(Kropf, 1915,p.76).

The second stanza of Ngidi's poem incorporates a detailing of rather prosaic, biographical data such as

Wawufike lapha usemncane
Wakhulela khon' eMhlatuzane.

You arrived here while still small
You grew up at Mhlatuzana.

Whereas the first stanza evidences numerous examples of traditional praises, the straightforward recounting of the protagonist's place of birth and childhood would be very strange in the often allusive lines of traditional izibongo. Furthermore, izibongo did not readily give a precise exposition of such historical facts.

Yet one poem which was inspired by a very pertinent and relevant historical factor was that about the South African Air Force. This was published on the 23rd August, 1941 and entitled Izibongo zeMikhosi yeQubula (literally, "The praises of the armies of the unquenchable fire"). On a similar theme, in the Ilanga of the 30th August, 1941 there appeared the praises of the Royal Navy. These were later transcribed from a press cutting by the Killie Campbell librarians and then later again, they were translated by H.C. Lugg, a well known Zulu linguist and regular visitor to the library. The poem is Izibongo zemikhosi yophondo lukaMathula (The praises of the King's Silent Horn), some of which was in the traditional style, yet treating a totally modern and hitherto unpraised topic. The "King's Silent Horn" was a metaphorical allusion to the Royal Navy. Very traditional images include the description of the devastation after battle when

The cow was left to wander with its calf
 And milk-vessels remained unfilled;
 Whilst even dogs raised sad unceasing howls
 Enduring to the end.

(H.C. Lugg's translation)

Cattle imagery is very prevalent in both modern and traditional poetry, but this is not surprising in view of the very high regard in which cattle have always been held in Nguni society. Thus in poetry one hears of people being likened to recalcitrant milk-cows refusing to be tethered for milking. Yet these lines about the Royal Navy would not have been out of place in a praise poem extolling the battle prowess of any Zulu king, be he pre-Shakan, Shakan or post Shakan. But when N.H. Mseleku wrote one of the many poems commemorating the life of Bhambatha (B. Vilakazi), his opening lines would have jarred were they to be transposed in traditional praises.

Ngeke ngisho ukuthi kawusekho
Ngoba igama lakho ulishiyile.

I could never say that you are no longer here
 Because you have left your name.

Absolom Vilakazi, a relative of B.W. Vilakazi, also wrote a modern, commemorative poem in honour of "Bhambatha" and this was published in Ilanga on the 30th March, 1946 together with the composer's preface to the effect that

The following is a poem in praise of Dr B.W. Vilakazi's achievements in the literary and academic fields. His poetic writings have not only inspired Zulu writers, but, according to Xhosa reviewers, have also influenced those who write in Xhosa. In University education his achievements have been outstanding. In assessing the greatness of his achievements, one wants to remember there were no scholarships in the history of his education.

(loc. cit., my underlining).

It is interesting that the word imbongi can be used interchangeably as "traditional praise poet" and as "(modern) poet." Thus, Vilakazi, the foremost modern Zulu poet, is referred to in the opening line of this two-stanza poem as

E, mbongi enkulu kaZulu !

Hey ! Great Zulu imbongi

In 1941 (on an unspecified date) the Killie Campbell archives record that the Rev. Mboneni J. Mpanza composed a Zulu poem about General Smuts just "before the fall of Addis Ababa." Apparently, the English translation by H.C. Lugg was published in a local newspaper "The Natal Mercury" sometime during the same year. Of interest in this fairly modern poem are the repetitive lines so reminiscent of traditional Shakan-type praises such as the following which were repeated until either the praiser, audience or both became satiated.

Wathi esadl' ezinye, wadl' ezinye

While killing some, he killed others

Lugg's translation illustrates this repetitive aspect in the lines

In Somaliland fell the shields of men
In Libya fell the shields of men
In Keren fell the shields of men
In Harar fell the shields of men
In Asmara fell the shields of men
In Diredwa fell the shields of men

Four years later, on a more political note, Obed S.D. Mooki published his 36 lined eulogy on "The African National Conference" in the Ilanga of the 29th September, 1945 and nearly 2 years later (the 5th July, 1947) K.E. Masinga published his Izibongo zo Bambiswano (Bantu Co-operative Movement). In this very lengthy, modern-type Zulu poem, Masinga depicted John Dube's voyage to America; whereupon on his return

Kwaphuma amazembe abukhali
Kanti lawamazembe ngu Khongolose (Congress)

There appeared sharpened battle-axes
 But these battle axes are the (African
 National) Congress.

The political comment also evidences a stylistic feature that was to become increasingly more common in Nguni poetry as Western concepts (which the Nguni language couldn't adequately convey) were given both in an anglicised version in the vernacular and appended in brackets in the English original.

In this poem the poet extols the work of Champion and Seme in the Congress and then asks and answers his own rhetorical question.

Yini yona uBambiswano na ? uBambiswano
Inyoniyamasi (Inyoni Enya Amasi) Abahlezi
ngaphansi kwayo badla bangaqedi

What then is the Co-operative ? The
 Co-operative is the Amasi-Bird (The Bird which
 defecates Curdled Milk) Those seated beneath it
 eat forever.

The imagery of the bird which defecates amasi (curdled milk) is one rather delicately translated here. In the original (obviously culled from the well-known folktale) it is bawdier and consequently of greater emotional impact. The bird imagery in this context is very appropriate because it alludes to the bird's bountiful nature in providing sustenance and this is paralleled with the work of the Co-operative. This allusion to something from traditional Nguni folktales is one which would be both readily understood and appreciated by modern readers. The poem itself, obviously extolling the concept of self sufficiency as manifest in self-help co-operatives, ends with

Ozonda wena Mseleku nawe Bambiswano,
Uzonda ukufunza, uzonda ukugwinya,
Kuwe Sifamona esizonda uBambiswano sithi:-
Hayi Hobu Mawulele ! Isitha somuntu nguwe,
Luya phambili uBambiswano !

He who hates Mseleku and you, Co-operative,
 Hates to feed, hates to eat (literally, "to
 swallow")
 To you, Dying-of-Jealousy, hating the Co-op, we
 say : No, poor person, if you are asleep (to
 the facts) ! The enemy of the people is you!
 Forward with the Co-operative !

In this poem which is redolent with concepts of African nationalism, it is not by chance that the poet quotes (albeit in somewhat modified form) the title of Dube's very famous book

| Isitha somuntu nguye uqobo lwakhe !
 | The enemy of the black person is his very self!

At this time there appeared other poems in Ilanga praising self-help schemes. One such poem, in Western style verses, was Izibongo Zama Khopolethivi (In praise of Co-operatives) written by J.P. Chibau and published on the 6th July, 1946. A number of (certainly not all) political poems were also published, but one example being Nyoni Matana's AbaNtwana e St. Helena, (The Princes at St. Helena). The poem is about Dinizulu and his two uncles, Ndabuko and Shingana, who were banished to the island in 1888 when Zululand was annexed to Natal. Unfortunately, there is no indication of either the poem's date or publisher and all one knows about it is that it is to be found on page 20 of S.A. Samuelson's "Newscutting Book" which is housed in the Killie Campbell archives. The following are three stanzas from this modern Zulu poem with a somewhat radical theme which represented a distinct departure from traditional izibongo. Although an example of a modern poem, the apparent spelling mistakes are merely a result of its having been written in what is today an obsolete orthography.

Abamhlophe babonani
Kwelakithi, laobaba ?
Ku amaxibana etu,
Apemb' inzondo leyo na?

Kwaku zinkomana zetu,
Ezavus' umona kubo?
Babefuna izwe letu,
Elaba selicinenene

Yek' abelungu ngati-ke
Ukwandisa ifa labo
Basiqede ngezinhlamvu
Basixotshe kwelakithi

What do the whites see
 In our country, that of our forefathers?
 (What is it) in our homesteads
 That fires that hatred ?

Is it our few cattle
 That wakens jealousy within them ?
 They wanted our country
 Which had already shrunk.

Just look at the whites, I said.
 To increase their wealth
 They have finished us with bullets
 And have driven us from our own (country.)

Such poetry requires no elaboration.

4.4 The European and Western Influence on early Nguni Poetry

A scholar, Rand Bishop, in commenting on "African Critics and the Western Literary Tradition" (the title of his article), stated that

↙ The analysis below indicates three major stances by Africans vis-a-vis the Western literary tradition : (1) reliance upon it, (2) avoidance of it, and (3) a synthesis of Western and African elements.

(Bishop, 1976, p.66)

Although Bishop was in fact referring to black writers far North of the Nguni, his observations are to a certain degree relevant for the Nguni as well. There is evidence (for example, the imitation of the

English Romantics) that Nguni poets did model their vernacular poetry on these lines. While it is still too early to say at present, it is possible they will temporarily eschew the Western tradition before finally accommodating better elements therefrom in Nguni poetry.

As Bishop points out, this has already occurred among scholars of African countries to the north of us.

And in his PhD dissertation, Romanus Egudu sanctioned the mixing of Western and African elements when he concluded of the poetry of Christopher Okigbo, J.P. Clark, George Awoonor - Williams (Kofi Awoonor) and Lensie Peters that

✓ These poets seem to believe (and this the author agrees) that while making use of their indigenous poetry (vernacular and colonial) and experiences for creating works of art, they can still tap foreign sources of experience, which are made accessible to them by their acquisition of a second language.

(Bishop, 1976, p.71)

The learning of English and other European languages and exposure to the Western way of life was viewed in two lights, both positive and negative, by the black poets. Certainly it did introduce them to concepts and ideas they hitherto were unaware of, and this new-found knowledge was reflected in the new themes that became evident in their poetry. However, not all African poets welcomed the Western influence and Bishop cites Ugirashebuja's denigration of European techniques in poetry.

✓ Some forms of Western poems seemed to him purely mechanical, child's play. How can one, without treachery, compress a true inspiration into fourteen verses, the grouping and rhymes of which are already fixed? The triumph of mathematics.

(Bishop, 1976, p.73)

Naturally, not everyone shared this view. Closer to home, a prominent Nguni scholar and critic, D.D.T. Jabavu, in an article entitled "The Influence of English on Bantu Literature" said of Vilakazi's Inkondlo kaZulu that it was

the one great book of poetry in Zulu that attains to the rank of a classic. It is English influence in excelsis, by reason of its outright imitation of English modes (metres long, short and common; all varieties of stanzas, elegaics, sonnets, rhymes, and even the heroic couplet, reminiscent of Pope and Dryden) all punctiliously observed. Even the titles remind one of Keats in disguising their subject, ensuring that they are ars artem celare est.

(Jabavu, 1948, p.11)

While acknowledging the influence of European poetry upon "Bantu poets", F-D. Beuchat in her article "Do the Bantu have a Literature?" took a somewhat different view from Jabavu. She was of the opinion that although influenced by "English poetical forms", Vilakazi was nonetheless able to write unique poetry that was neither traditional nor approximating to "any European form of poetry".

Although few other Bantu poets have written a number of poems in the style of the praises, most of these have tried to imitate English poetical forms or to adapt such forms and techniques to their own language. On the whole, at this stage at least, one cannot say that they have as yet attained a form suitable to their language. One exception is Vilakazi, who has been able to convey his feelings of frustration, of longing for the past, his aspiration and deceptions, in a style of his own, which is not that of the traditional poems, and not that found in any European form of poetry either.

(Beuchat, 1962, p.12, my underlining).

Contrarily, Jabavu, in his already quoted passage was of the opinion that Vilakazi's work was "English influence in excelsis", and an "outright imitation of English modes". If this is the case, then Vilakazi's poetry is demeaned by it. Outright imitation, gainsaying Jabavu's avowal that it is "ars artem celare est", is not great poetry. Only if a poet can create something new thereby, instilling aspects of his own creativity within the new work, can his poetry be considered something of value. Hopefully, Lestrade was correct when as early as in 1934 he, in his article entitled "European influences upon the development of Bantu Language and Literature" wrote

But, on the whole, the literary activity of the Bantu is turning into new channels, is occupying itself with new genres, and is evolving new interests, new structures, and new technique in its growth.

(Lestrade, 1934, p.123)

A.C. Jordan was of the same opinion

The idiom, style, and technique of the traditional lyric are easily adaptable to new conception. We have evidence of this in a Xhosa hymn composed by Ntsikana, the first convert to Christianity.

(Jordan, 1973, p.20)

Conversely, Endemann in his article "Wat is Bantoe-Poësie?" felt that literacy and the Western influence actually made some poets despair and give up composing altogether.

Menige Bantoe-digter wat met vrug sou kon gewerk het, het seker al moedeloos geword en opgehou om verder te dig, omdat hy nie in staat was om sy gedagtes in daardie bepaalde vorm te giet wat sy werk goeie poësie sou gemaak het nie.

(Endemann, 1959, p.377)

Many a Bantu poet who could have worked quite fruitfully, became despondent and ceased composing poetry altogether, because he was not capable of moulding his thoughts in that prescribed form which would have made his work good poetry.

I disagree with Endemann's remarks concerning the capability of the black composers and even more so with his view that it was necessary for them to conform to Western forms before their work could be classified "good poetry" ! However, the point about cultural bias has already been made earlier in this work. More interesting perhaps is his statement that

Oor een saak blyk almal egter ooreen te stem,
nl. dat die geskrewe of gedrukte vorm van 'n
gedig nooit in die ware sin van die woord
poësie kan wees nie.

(Endemann, 1959, p.377)

About one matter it appears that everybody should be in agreement, viz. that the written or printed form of a poem can never in the true sense of the word be poetry.

Were this true, we would have to accept that no written poetry can merit the designation, "poetry" and such a standpoint is obviously untenable. One would like to believe that he meant that much is lost when viewing the written format of oral declamations. Nonetheless, in his aforementioned quotation he was decidedly of the opinion that literacy was the death knell of Bantu poetry.

Lewis Nkosi (some of whose poetry has been banned in this country) in an article entitled "Where Does African Literature Go From Here?" was another to warn against (possibly more valid) dangers. He called for a critical re-assessment of bland statements full of "over-praise" of what is, in fact, mediocre African literature.

What is threatening to ruin most of us (African writers), including some writers of genuine promise, is over-exposure and over-praise. The reputations of some writers have simply been "manufactured" by busy-body students of African affairs determined to find (sic) something exciting and new to study and write home about.

(Nkosi, 1966, in an article without page numbering or publication details)

"Cultural assimilation" is another aspect that impacted on the origin of modern vernacular poetry in Africa. Lagneau-Kesteloot saw the influence of European culture on African writers as a danger and noted that

1 France had practised to an incomparably higher degree, than England, cultural assimilation and the disregard of traditional cultures.

(Lagneau-Kesteloot, 1965, p.37)

Presupposing that the above is valid, Nguni poets can consider themselves lucky that they were mainly exposed to English literary influence ! Yet even here literate poets have had to avoid the danger of looking down on their traditional heritage and of despising valid cultural ceremonies as being mere superstition.

But with the increasing advent of literacy it is perhaps inevitable that some, at least, believe that certain customs are outmoded and therefore dispensable and that a formal education necessarily renders one superior to one's illiterate counterparts in rural society. More educated they indeed might be, but certainly not necessarily superior. Another result of Western contact was that whereas the traditional imbongi often functioned as an intercessor, spokesman and mediator for his people by articulating their grievances; with the advent of modern poetry and new horizons, their role was somewhat modified. Nonetheless, compared to European society, even modern Nguni poets are viewed by their people in a vein quite different from Western poets. In Nguni society generally, a poet is esteemed as an articulate man of intellect by the populace at large, whereas in European society, the converse is sometimes the case - the poet often being regarded as some mildly aberrant oddity; harmless perhaps but not necessarily a community

spokesman (except perhaps when a protest poet and widely recognized as such). Concerning poetry in Africa generally, Lagneau-Kesteloot wrote

On the other hand, we are witnessing a regression as well as a falling-away from the anti-colonialist poetry. There, too, we find, to-day (sic) either a commitment to the military party sort, or a return to traditional sources where the poets try their hands, at different forms, at different expressions and subjects, sung in the vernacular languages.

(Lagneau-Kesteloot, 1965, pp.32-33, my underlining)

In Nguni poetry, as has previously been alluded, but little political or "anti-colonialist" poetry has been published in the country. Yet it is difficult to interpret Lagneau-Kesteloot's sentiments underlined above. How is it possible for African poets to "return to traditional sources" yet simultaneously use "different forms" and "different expressions and subjects" ? Perhaps he implied that modern themes and new ideas which were never before poeticised by poets, were treated in a traditional manner. If he means this, then his sentiments were echoed by A.C. Jordan who, commenting on "The Emergence of Literary Form in Xhosa" was of the opinion that

✓ There are some modern Bantu-speaking poets who seem to think that the praise-poem has had its day. But there are others who have shown very successfully that the idiom, style and technique of the traditional praise poem can be applied most effectively to modern themes.

(Jordan, 1973, p.27)

The praise-poem might have "had its day" when Westernization is such that it regrettably falls into disuse. Until such time as this occurs (and there is a possibility that not everything of value will be disregarded), it will continue, as Jordan correctly states, to be successfully applied to modern themes. In this sense then I cannot

disagree more strongly with Vilakazi's postulation in "The Conception and Development of Poetry in Zulu" that

The mechanism of style that has been adhered to by the dead masters of poetry bores the younger generation.

(Vilakazi, 1938, p.127)

✓ simply because the best of the modern school, indeed including some of Vilakazi's own poetry, has been based on a continuation or adaptation (whether it be conscious or not) of the "dead masters of poetry."

To return to Jordan's previously quoted avowal that "the style and technique of the traditional praise poem can be applied most effectively to the modern themes", one need look no further than Mqhayi's poetry recited in 1925 when the then Prince of Wales visited South Africa.

Recited live, in the traditional style of parallelism, with point balanced by counter point, the themes were decidedly "modern", if sad.

She sent us the preacher; she sent us the
bottle
She sent us the Bible, and barrels of brandy .
* * * * *
O, Roaring Britain ! Which must we embrace?
You sent us the truth, denied us the truth;
You sent us the life, denied us of life,
You sent us the light, we sit in the dark.
Shivering, benighted in the bright noonday sun.

In contrast to Vilakazi's avowal that the style of poetry of "the dead masters" bored the younger generations was his own injunction of Zulu poets that

They have to study the standards of Classic or European poetry which will help to rouse in them the finer and deeper feelings of every impact of the outer world upon their poetic souls. They have to model their styles upon those of previous writers, and strike at last a style of their own work in it, and bring it to perfection.

(Vilakazi, 1938, p.116).

Yet contrary to his postulation, many Zulu poets have not studied "the standards of Classic poetry" and even if they touch upon the subject at all, it is in such a brief and cursory fashion as to be almost negligible; they being products of an educational system, geared not towards philosophical study but mainly to one of practical application and technical learning. In this vein then, they did not need any knowledge of Classical poetry to "help to rouse in them the finer and deeper feelings." Dispersing with this supposed "necessity" they have nonetheless composed poetry adequate enough.

Strangely though, while stating that the work of "dead masters" bored the younger generation, they were nonetheless required "to model their styles upon those of previous writers" to be considered successful modern poets. Indeed, certain very accomplished artists aver to the contrary and they consciously strive to break away from the "styles of previous writers" thereby naturally avoiding stale sterility in their new-found creativity.

Ntuli, in his Doctoral thesis, was another to recognise the undeniable influence of traditional poets on modern Zulu poets and he went on to state that

Other influences are the traditional prose narratives, English poetry and the Bible.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.viii).

Imitation being the sincerest form of flattery; it often happens that poets, be they modern or traditional, will use a turn of phrase or so aptly express a concept that it will be taken up and repeated in everyday speech by the common people. In this connection, Ntuli's comments are pertinent.

While some of Vilakazi's similes

and metaphors have lost their effectiveness
because of this incorporation into the common
idiomatic language, others are very fresh and
 are handled with great ingenuity.

(Ntuli, 1978, p. ix, my
 underlining).

If Vilakazi was being criticized because some of his poetic expressions later found widespread acceptance in Zulu, it would be tantamount to present day readers of English criticising Shakespeare's work as being full of hackneyed cliches. However, if Ntuli meant that Vilakazi used figures of speech which were already commonplace in Zulu, his comments would be quite valid.

A natural discrepancy between modern and traditional Zulu poetry is that some modern Zulu poetry is an almost entire (if not a complete) translation from the English original - something obviously inconceivable for traditional poets who never came into contact with Europeans. However, Ntuli has very adequately commented on imitation in modern Zulu poetry, including the sentiment

Although Vilakazi's poetry has traditional traces, it is essentially patterned according to Western styles.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.16).

One great distinction between oral and modern Zulu poetry lies in the field of "borrowing" or should one choose to adopt a harsher approach, of "plagiarism". In oral Nguni poetry one could borrow freely without acknowledgement - such borrowing never being frowned upon. Indeed it was an implicit compliment. Yet with the advent of written poetry, to borrow from the lines of another, (or preferably from poetry of another culture) is not in itself sufficient because if nothing new is added, or the subject re-worked in a different light to give it another perspective - it can be regarded with a degree of suspicion.

Yet it is possible that such suspicion is suspended by Nguni readers of poetry that has lines originally composed by someone long since dead; the implicit assumption being that everybody would recognize whence the original emanated ! Again, certain latter day Zulu poets have composed written poetry on past chiefs, utilizing a pre-knowledge of the izibongo in composing new, adapted lines on the deceased dignitary. However, it is perhaps more advisable to be somewhat reserved when proclaiming the merits of such compositions. Ntuli was of the opinion that

We welcome such an adaptation because it is tantamount to the composition of a new poem.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.51).

I remain unconvinced that it is "tantamount to the composition of a new poem." However, the difference is merely one of degree. What is indisputable is that with the advent of Europeans in South Africa, with their religion, technology and literature; poets were exposed to broadened horizons and perspectives and this gave them increased opportunities to experiment. Vilakazi advocated the concept of experimenting in Zulu poetry and he claimed that he was not against the use of

Western stanza-forms and metrical system ... as vehicles ... for our poetic images.

(Vilakazi, 1938, p.127).

The advent of modern Zulu poetry has evidenced a concept unheard of in traditional izibongo. This was the translation of European language poetry (mainly English) into Zulu. Some poems were direct translations whereas others showed a marked influence of the original. Ntuli takes an interesting line in assessing Vilakazi's poetry.

We feel there is little point in refuting or accepting that such poems are inspired by English examples It would be a futile exercise to give a detailed comparison

of Vilakazi's poems with the English ones which are thought to have influenced him. Even if we accepted that these poems are of foreign inspiration

(Ntuli, 1978, p.55, my underlining).

Although Ntuli might hold the opposite viewpoint, it is widely accepted by critics that both Vilakazi and other poets were influenced by the English Romantics. Such critics did not deem it "a futile exercise" to comment on poetry which they knew and not "which are thought to have influenced him." For example, Friedman remarked that

Vilakazi (was) deeply influenced by the great English Romantic poets

(Friedman, 1973 p.xi).

Yet interestingly enough, Ntuli accepts that Vilakazi's Wena - ke uyothini ?

is one poem which Vilakazi has translated in full from English to Zulu

(Ntuli, 1978, p.52).

The question arises that if a poet felt a need strong enough to translate a poem in its entirety, did it not influence him, even in some small measure, to have caused him to do so ?

In this context it is interesting to read Shelley's views on poetic translations

Hence the vanity of translation; it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet.

(Sitwell, 1943, p.22).

While generally true, there have been noteworthy exceptions to Shelley's statement. How else could the indigenous poetry of Africa be even remotely appreciated by the Western world?

Besides Western literary influences, Biblical doctrine also unmistakeably influenced many missionary trained modern poets, yet while this influence was most profound among literates, even illiterate mineworkers in oral recitations used smatterings of Christian imagery. For example, Zwelakhe Mbizwa, a Xhosa mineworker from Butterworth, when reciting his praises at the Durban Roodepoort Deep Gold Mine in 1978, said

Zandla zinamanxeba ngokubetheka !

Hands that have wounds from being hammered !

and he, whether he knew it or not, was using a religious image first used by S.E.K. Mqhayi and subsequently repeated in latter day Church services.

Another modern characteristic was the concept of some spirit or divine muse that could lend inspiration. An example of this is to be found in Vilakazi's modern Zulu poem Ugqozi where Mnkabayi, Shaka's aunt, visits the protagonist in a dream and gives him a task.

Commenting on the Biblical influence and Vilakazi's allusion to Joseph's interpretation of Pharoah's dream, Ntuli writes that

Unfortunately there is a factual error in Vilakazi's lines because he says that it is Joseph who dreamt, while, in fact, it is (sic) Pharoah. The poet's inaccuracy counts against him because it makes the parallel he is trying to draw unacceptable.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.60 my underlining).

I cannot agree that the parallel is thereby rendered unacceptable because just as plain translations from poetry of one language to

another do not of themselves have much literary creativity, and just as traditional poets do not account historical incidents with absolute accuracy (praise being the operative feature) so, too, the modern poet cannot be expected to be an accurate historical chronicler in his treatment of a poetic theme. Successful poets interpret matters in a novel and unusual way which does not render their creativity "unacceptable". Notwithstanding this minor issue, Vilakazi did show an aptitude for a happy marriage of traditional style praising and modern, Western literary techniques in some of (not all) his poems. Generally, however, the poet himself is more readily identifiable in modern Nguni poetry because he is not tradition bound to conform to a certain genre. Modern poets found that they have a more diverse range and the thrust of their poetry did not have to be eulogistic in intent. Such was not the lot of the traditionalist whose poetry is most, and often justifiably so, referred to as "praise poetry".

It is rather ironic that society can turn a full circle in its cultural perceptions. In traditional poetry such as that of Zulu leaders such as Shaka, Dingiswayo and Phakathwayo they are praised for the dark hue of their skin and negritude is considered a sign of beauty. Yet although scions of present day society might reject their blackness and use various and often dangerous skin-lightening lotions, modern poets such as Vilakazi might be considered in the vanguard of black consciousness with poetry such as

..... ngombal' omnyama

Esilwa sifuna ukuwususa
Ngokubhix' ibumba likamlungu
Elenz' umunt' afane nekhonde
Lon' elilunguz emagatsheni
Livez' ubuswan' umzimb' ungekho ..

(Vilakazi, 1965, p.71)

..... concerning the black colour

Which we strive to get rid of
 By smearing on the white man's bleaches
 Which make a person look like a baboon
 That peers through the branches
 Showing a pale visage without a body ..

Just as modern poetry can influence traditionalists, so too can elements of traditional poetry make modern poetry most memorable. For example, in a poem with an ultra-modern theme of nature poetry, Impophoma yeVictoria (The Victoria Falls), the poet gives the waterfall the praise-name of Dumase, (The Roarer).

Dumase, ngathi zithi : "Hamba njalo
 Wen' ovalelis' ungavalelisi"

(Vilakazi, 1965 p.20).

Roarer ! it is as though they say
 "Go on for ever ! You who say
 goodbye but never goes."

Yet Raymond Kunene, in appraising the poem, criticised it by writing that

After reading the poem we still have
 no idea of the waterfall, except in a vague
 sort of way.

(Kunene, 1962, p.206).

Yet if one listens to praise poetry, with its abundance of allusive imagery and sometimes archaic expressions, the very same criticism (if valid) could be levelled against it. Poetry is not meant to be prosaic.

Whereas modern Zulu poets can be both male and female, a popular conception is that the traditional bard is necessarily a male

in Zulu society the bards, izimbongi
 are males. The name 'Mbongi' is for a male
 person; it cannot be given to a female.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.119).

The validity of this assertion is cast into doubt on reading Elizabeth Gunner's 1979 article entitled "Songs of Innocence and Experience : Women as composers and performers of izibongo, Zulu praise poetry." Cope (1968) in the postscript to his work on Zulu izibongo, (which were it to have been page numbered, would have been on page 230), comments on Princess Magogo's intimate knowledge of izibongo and he acknowledges her

interpretation of certain obscurities of
this selection.

(Cope, 1968, Postscript).

The thin dividing line between poetry and song has already been dealt with in this work. Rycroft, in his article entitled "The Zulu bow songs of Princess Magogo" notes that

The Mntwana (Princess) Constance Magogo kaDinizulu has for a great many years been recognised as the greatest living authority on Zulu music, besides being an expert performer without peer. Her vast repertoire of traditional Zulu songs extends back as far as the eighteenth century and she is herself a prolific composer.

(Rycroft, 1975/6, p.41).

Yet whereas Rycroft was commenting on the (now deceased) lady's singing abilities (albeit of traditional songs) and Ntuli was commenting specifically about izimbongi, it should be stated that whereas one does encounter female Zulu izimbongi, there is no record of "professional" female praisers.

Possibly due to broader exposure, modern poets also introduced novel ways of interpreting age old concepts such as death. In Amal'ezulu and Inkondlo kaZulu, Vilakazi's two anthologies, he visualizes death as being embodied alternatively as four different entities; firstly, as a woman with daughters, secondly, as a flying

creature, thirdly, as a soft sleep and fourthly, a slow disappearance or a vanishing or moving away.

Furthermore with the advent of modern poetry came the initiation of experimentation with and imitation of Western rhyme patterns - probably one of the most debated issues in Nguni poetry; critics having had very conflicting ideas about the efficacy of rhyme in modern Xhosa and Zulu poetry. Ntuli was one of those who took an optimistic view of Zulu poetry.

We would be looking at the Zulu language with prejudiced eyes if we considered the limited vowels as a hindering factor.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.242).

Optimism is commendable, perhaps surpassed only by pragmatism, especially when considering a Zulu poem such as We Moya where Vilakazi writes

Ngizw' izinkulumo zakho
Zingiph' ubuthongo bakho
Nenjabul' okungeyakho

(Vilakazi, 1965, p.13)

I hear speech which is yours
Which gives me the sleep which is yours
And the happiness which is yours

In such modern poetry Vilakazi is not improving on the artistry of his forebears. Another example of poor rhyme (where the rhyming effect depends on the repetition of the word ngezwi), is found in another poem within this same anthology of modern poetry.

Lungebong' oMkhwethu ngezwi
Imband' abayize ngezwi ...'

(Vilakazi, 1965, p.11)

It cannot praise Mkhwethu with a voice
'The bovine they heard from its voice ...'

It is also not a convincing suggestion that a poet will use rhyme in a poem simply because he did so in a preceding poem in the same anthology but

In fact it seems as if Vilakazi used rhyme here only because this poem is a sequel to 'Sengiyakholwa - ke' in which rhyme is used throughout.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.259).

Such argument could present an equally valid case for not using rhyme in a poem !

Probably the most successful Zulu poets were those able to produce a creative syncretism of old and new, a point well made by Ntuli.

Another significant point is that Vilakazi is able to synthesise various styles of traditional and Western art to produce something new. The izibongo style is used very well even in non-izibongo poems. Vilakazi here indicates to the aspirant poet the possibility of developing a new blend of Zulu poetry.

(Ntuli, 1978, pp. 280-1).

This synthesis of the old and new among emergent Zulu literate poets is not one unique to them alone but is to be found throughout Africa.

..... the second major field that African literature is exploring, (is) that of a linking- up with oral traditions.

(Lagneau-Kesteloot, 1965, p.32).

Yet Kunene, commenting on Zulu poetry, observed that there was some resistance to the new influence.

African intellectuals often prefer traditional poetry to modern academic poetry.

(R. Kunene, 1962, p. V).

If what Kunene postulates is true, this would naturally have had a detrimental effect on the demand for "modern academic poetry." In fact, Kunene found the traditional influence so pervasive that even among traditionalists themselves the post-Shakan oral poets reverted to the style of a former era.

The poets of this period tended to imitate the poetical pieces of the Shakan era. The incidence of borrowed verses is extremely high.

(R. Kunene, 1962, p.146).

Kunene correctly pointed out the distinction between mere imitation and creative imitation with its development of new ideas, but unfortunately

This is exactly what Post-Shakan poetry failed to do.

(R. Kunene, 1962, p.146).

Thus, besides the Western influence on modern Nguni poets, one must never lose sight of the very great indigenous, traditional influence on these poets; influences of which they possibly were only unconsciously aware.

4.5 The content of modern Zulu and Xhosa poetry

Once the anthologies started becoming published fairly frequently, modern Nguni poetry began to be composed on wide-ranging and eclectic themes such as the admiration of feminine pulchritude, the questioning of traditional beliefs, religion and Christianity, bridal anxiety or even poetry in commemoration of the establishment of a church. Poetry was also composed about natural phenomena such as waterfalls or events such as the devastatingly deleterious effects of the rinderpest. For the first time, poetry evidencing an aesthetic appreciation of nature

(in the English Romantic tradition), was attempted by poets such as Vilakazi (1965, p.18) in his poem on the Victoria Falls, entitled Impophoma yeVictoria. Similarly the Xhosa poets, Manyase (1960), Jolobe (1972), and Qangule (1970), all wrote about the arum lily in poems entitled Phakathi kweenyibiba, Inyibiba and Inyibiba respectively.

It is also hardly possible to determine a specific content for modern Nguni poetry and even less possible to look at content as a distinguishing feature between Xhosa and Zulu poetry. Thus modern poetry is as diversified as being about the wind, the sun, rain, a lost child, morality, didacticism, friendship, graveyards, prominent people and the questioning of traditional beliefs.

Naturally enough, much of the content of modern poetry is a continuation of the heroic eulogistic tradition and there is much modern poetry in commemoration of past people of note. Examples are to be found in Sikakana's Zulu poem, UBhambatha kaMakhwatha (1972, p.79), and Mqhayi's Xhosa poem, Inggungquthela Yesizwe (u John Thenge Jabavu) (1974, p.60). Indeed a whole section of Mqhayi's poetry was dedicated to izibongo ezingabafi bethu (Poetry about our dead), and in this section (1974, pp. 36 - 59), there were even poems about whites such as Harry Taberer, James Gray, James Chalmers, Major Geddes and Dr. W. G. Bennie. This poetry reflected the work done at the Alice Seminary and the efforts of the first prominent white to recruit black labour for the gold mines. Professor C.M. Doke, one of the most thorough Bantu language philologists ever, was also eulogised (Mqhayi 1974, p. 111).

To actually travel overseas was a remarkable event and this too was reflected in a section entitled Izibongo ngabawele iilwandle (Poetry about those who crossed the oceans) (Mqhayi, 1974, pp. 60 - 68). Thus

the travels of Jabavu, Dube, and the wife of John Knox Bhokwe were poetised.

Just as Harry Taberer (UTebha), one of the earliest recruiters for the gold mines was eulogised (Mqhayi, 1974, p.47), other Nguni poets were equally enamoured with aspects of mining life. Tshaka, the Xhosa poet, wrote a poem entitled Kwanyam' ayipheli, (1957, p.31), this name being, incidentally, the Xhosa name for the East Rand Proprietary Mine. Although the following lines are not from the aforementioned poem, Xhosa miners often recited the following lines when praising.

Kwanyam' ayipheli
Kuphela amazinyo endoda

At the place where the meat is in abundance
It is only the teeth of men which become worn
out.

It is quite possible that Tshaka took the title of his poem from this expression. In his poem there is the revealing line

Inkwenkwe phezulu, indod' ezantsi

(Tshaka, 1957, p.31).

A boy (works) on the surface, a man (works) underground.

To all steeped in a mine sub-culture, this is evocative of much concerning notions of manliness and courage. In less eulogistic vein was Vilakazi's very famous Ezinkomponi (1962, p.41).

There is also a substantial body of modern poetry with a moribund tendency. Examples include Nxumalo's Kufa (1975, p.8), and Vilakazi's Mangificwa Ukufa (1965, p.37), UNokufa (1965, p.72), Phezu kwethuna lika Shaka (1965, p.58) and Sengiyakholwa (1962, p.45).

Some modern Nguni poetry dealt with a desire for the upliftment of the nation and with historical pride. Vilakazi, (1962, p.35 and 1965, pages 24, 40 and 58) was a proponent of this among the Zulu, while for the Xhosa, Yako (1967) and Mqhayi (1974) gave testimony to this in poems such as Ma-Afrika Qinani Isibindi, Rev. J.J. Jolobe, Uhobe and Amagorha awe emfazweni e Mantla e Afrika.

Nguni poets attempted to put aside ethnic differences and some strove to unify Blacks. Vilakazi's Inkelenkele YakwaXhosa (1965, p.3) was about what has variously been referred to as "The Cattle Killing Episode" or "The National Suicide of the Xhosa". In this poem the names and deeds of Xhosa chiefs such as Tshiwo, Xiniha, Hahabe, Hanahana, Kleli, Sandile and Menziwa are mentioned and the former greatness of the Xhosa nation is recalled. Similarly, in NgoMbuyazi eNdondakusuka Vilakazi (1962, p.35) recounted the internecine strife between two factions of the Zulu nation.

The impact of Christianity was also reflected in the poetry. In a poem such as Izinsimbi zeSonto, Vilakazi (1962, p.14) wrote about the bells of St. Paul's Anglican Church, but although he was a Christian, they only served to remind him of the traditional horn blown to summon the Zulu regiments to beat their shields to start a battle din just prior to commencing hostilities. Nxumalo (1972, p.48) also wrote about a church in his poem entitled Indlu Yesonto. In the poem Umthandazo Wembongolo, Nxumalo (1975, p.39), portrayed a donkey beseeching its master for kind treatment, reminding him that it once carried Jesus when He was on this earth. Such a theme was entirely new to Nguni poetry because nowhere in traditional poetry is there evidenced this Romantic ideal of kindness to dumb animals.

Whereas one might be guilty of over-simplification and state that Vilakazi was preoccupied with three main themes being a search for inspiration, a dedication to the world of knowledge and a calling to speak out on behalf of blacks; if one were to look at the work of other poets, it would be extremely difficult to categorise the content of their poetry. For example, the Xhosa poet, Manyase (1960), composed poetry about his parents, cleverness, a hillside, kindness, the brain, loneliness, a whirlwind, a virtuous person, an orphan, hard times, big uddered cows, the breaking up of the nation, a black-backed jackal and a fight: whereas another Xhosa poet, Nkuhlu (1956), wrote about an equally diverse range of topics which included truth, thirst, life in the locations, freedom, birds and eternity. Thus to attempt to specify the content of modern Nguni poetry would elicit the same result as those Bantu language grammarians who in attempting to assign a specific content to each and every noun class, were often forced to conclude that the content was "miscellaneous".

4.6 The traditional influence on modern Zulu poetry

It is necessary to state unequivocally what is meant by the term "traditional influence" in the above heading. It refers to items from the traditional lifestyle of the Zulu which possibly could also be referred to as a description of "cultural reflection". It is not surprising that Zulu poetry whether oral or literature, traditional or modern, reflects Zulu culture or the desire for the preservation of Zulu culture. What is surprising is that izibongo-type poetry is written by some modern, educated, literate poets (but not by Vilakazi). Naturally

there were also traditional poetic techniques (for example, parallelism) and the traditional attitudes (lofty, eulogistic, heroic, public poetry) and never the quiet, private, lyrical, reflective poetry, such as that composed by Vilakazi and other Zulu literate poets. This very aspect is currently being analysed by Cope.

Naturally, with the advent of modern Nguni poetry, traditional topics could be expected to be replaced with different issues and an analysis of the content readily reflects this change. Thus, modern poetry was composed portraying intensely introspective human emotions such as love, hate or bereavement on the loss of loved ones. Yet, having made this point, in comparison with modern Western poetry, there does not appear to be as much Nguni poetry on inner conflict and turmoil, sturm und drang, self-delectative introspection, or on a search for identity (that is, one unrelated to the cultural clash).

R. Kunene was of the opinion that

There are two things that are obvious in post-Shakan poetry, namely, a tendency to appeal to the past for inspiration; not just inspiration to compose but inspiration to fight against existing conditions.

(Kunene, 1962, p.151)

Although he did not give examples of this "appeal to the past for inspiration", Kunene was quite correct in his assertion. In Vilakazi's more famous anthology, Amal'ezulu, there are numerous examples of this traditional influence. The introductory poem, Ugqozi is subtitled "Power of Inspiration" (this being virtually the only English in the anthology). This poem is redolent with traditional associations when one finds the protagonist standing on the fringes of Dukuza, the historical centre, where he saluted until the insila yenkosi (the King's personal body servant) arrived. While waiting there a scent entered his

nostrils and Mnkabayi, Shaka's paternal aunt, appeared before him, causing him considerable emotional perturbation. Eventually, yet another traditional association in the form of the umlindi - masango (the gate-keeper), allowed him to enter. The protagonist entered tongue-tied and impervious to all physical sensations.

It was then that he fell asleep and during a dream he found himself outside Dukuza's gates

Kanti sengintshontsh' amandl' ezimbongi

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.1)

Whereas I had pilfered the izimbongi's prowess.

Having been given the power of speech he can never rest without Mnkabayi awakening him with the admonishment-cum-injunction.

"Vuka wena kaMancinza
Kawuzalelwanga ukulal' ubuthongo.
Vuk' ubong' indaba yemikhonto,
Nank'umthwal' engakwethwesa wona."

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.1)

"Awaken you of Mancinza
You were not born to lie in sleep.
Awaken and praise military matters
This is the duty (lit. burden) I have
bestowed upon you."

Again, in Imbongi, the very next poem in the same anthology, the opening line refers to a voice calling out

Olukaban' ulim' olukhuluma ?

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.2)

Whose voice is it calling out .. ?

and we later learn that

Olwembong' ebongel' abangekho

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.2)

It is of the imbongi praising
those not with us.

Whereas in the case of the inspired imbongi

Ubikez' abaphansi bamathongo
Abakuthume ngolimi

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.2)

You speak of the ancestral shades
That warmed with words

the persona and other earthly mortals whereas

Thina sikhuluma ngekhubalo

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.2)

We speak with (the aid of) strengthening
medicines.

Whereupon

Konje ngaba yim' engikhulumayo ?
Noma ngabe nguwe Thongo likaMbongi ?

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.2)

And now is it me speaking ?
Or is it you Ancestral Spirit of the Imbongi ?

and finally

Ngizwe umemeza, Mbongi, phambi kwami
Wangihola ngodondolo ngingaboni ; ngabona.

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.2)

I heard you calling, Mbongi, from before me
You led me with a staff, I being blind :
And I saw.

In a third poem, Wo, Lelikhela also within the same anthology,
the persona admires the cultural artefacts of a bygone era. The
introductory line refers to an old man's grey hair which has a spiritual
essence, an aura and dignity such as possessed by chiefs.

Zinesithunz' izinwele zakho

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.8)

Your hair has dignity

and although

Ngingakwazi, kodwa ngiyakuthanda

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.8)

I do not know you, I nonetheless like you

He remarks on cultural objects such as his ear-plugs (iziqhaza zokuhloba) and his traditional snuff spoon (nentshengul' obhema ngayo) but realizes that the subject of his praise is in a reverie about a bygone age.

Umqondo wakho kawusekho lapha,
Namehlo' akho abuka kude

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.8)

Your thoughts are not here
And your eyes gaze into the distance

Indeed the old man is thinking that

Kukude ezihlangwini zawoShaka,
Phansi ezizibeni zikaDukuza
Lapho amanzi ezonzobele khona
Ngamakhand' amadoda nemizi yawo:
Nawo asengwevu njengawe phansi

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.8)

It is far from the shields of Shaka
Down below at the pools of Dukuza
There where the still waters run deep
And the heads of the men and their homesteads
They too are grey as you are below

This stanza contains numerous oblique references to past Zulu kings, Shaka and Dingane. Dukuza (Stanger) is where Shaka's tomb is situated and the "still waters" imagery is unmistakably from Dingane's praises. The reference to the "heads of the men" concerns Mhlangana who was killed in a river and as Dingane's izibongo record, the water flowed over his head-ring.

The persona asks the old man, the symbol of all that is good in Zulu culture, to

Chathazela min' engizobhala phansi
Okuzwayo, nokukhulunywayo, nokubonwayo
Ezweni lezimpunga nelawokoko

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.8)

Explain to me who will write down
 That which you perceive, speak and see
 In the country of our ancestors and of our
 grandfathers.

The poem concludes with a note of jealousy of traditional glory

Zinesithunzi izinwele zakho
Ngiyazithanda, zingivus' umona

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.8)

Your grey hair has dignity.
 (Which) I like and which makes me jealous.

In yet another poem entitled KwaDedangendlale, which is in itself a
 praise name meaning "Step aside so that I can make ready the place for
 sleeping," the poet looks nostalgically to the past. On a treeless open
 veld

Kuyo ngabona kukhwela
Izintokaz' ezimnyama
Zithwele amagobongo
Ziwayekelel' ekhanda

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.17)

On it I saw climbing
 Black maidens
 Carrying gourds
 Which they balanced on their heads

and behind these shining-bodied maidens were the shield-bearing suitors
 and

Ngabon' amasok' enqoba
Bewakhunga ngobuhlalu
Ngema ngafikelw' umona

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.17)

I saw the lovers conquering
 and the maidens decorating them with beads.
 I stood and was overcome with jealousy

He then describes the rustic scene of herders directing their charges homeward and then addresses the reader of the poem

Uyovakashela khona
Uzibone lezizinto
Ziyokuvul' inhliziyo

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.18)

You will pay a visit there
 And see these things
 Which will open up your heart.

which

Um' unenhliziy' egcwele,
Uyohlala phans' ubonge
Amathong' oyihlomkhulu
Akuzalela kwaZulu

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.18)

If you have a heart that is full
 You will sit down and thank
 The ancestors of your grandfathers
 Who made you to be born in KwaZulu

This KwaZulu is a rustic, idyllic utopia which is described in unique izibongo praise terminology of beautiful construction being

KwaBuhle - bungayindawo
KwaMful' isagcwel' amanzi
KwaTshani - buseluhlaza

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.18)

At the Place of Stable Beauty
 At the River still full of Water
 At the Grass which remains evergreen.

All of this bountiful heritage is

Phansi kwelakithi kwaZulu

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.19)

Down in our country of KwaZulu

where even a white man was moved to the point where

Wamisa nemotho yakhe
Waphuma wahlala phansi
Wakhiph' igudu wabhema
Wabuka waze wakhala

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.19)

He even stopped his car
 Got out and sat down
 Took out his pipe and smoked it
 Gazing until he wept.

That this should move a white man to this degree is remarkable but
 it is no surprise to learn of the persona that

Nami kaningi nginjalo
Ngidakwa yilezintaba,
Ngilahleka ngingatholwa
Ngedukile ngezigodi
Eziqhakaz' izimbali

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.19)

Even I on several occasions am like that
 Drunk with the aura of these mountains
 Lost and unable to be traced
 Having strayed in the valleys
 Blooming with flowers

Later on he alludes to the traditional izibongo of the night jar
 and incorporates its praises in his own poem

Ngabon' uzavolw' engikha
Ngasengel' abantabakhe

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.19)

I saw a night jar staring at me
 And I milked for his children.

His search for inspiration from the traditional heritage of his
 society takes on a passionate intensity with a direct invocation to the
 ancestral spirits to

Ngiph' indaw' enjenga lena
Wena Thongo likababa
Lapho ngiyoba namandla
Ngiqoq' umqondo kaZulu

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.20)

Give me a place like this one
 You, Ancestor of my father
 There where I can get strength
 And gather the wisdom of the Zulu nation

because by doing so he could

Ngihay' amahub' enkondlo
uShak' ayihay' enqoba,
Eqa kwaDedangendlale,
Ayaggule ngoKhahlamba
Adl' uLangalibalele.

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.20)

Sing the song of praises
 which Shaka sang when he became victorious
 When he went over the Valley of a Thousand
 Hills
 Until he was stopped by the Drakensberg
 Mountains
 And then defeated Langalibalele

He concludes the poem with unabashed nostalgia for the old order,
 pride in its military might and a conviction that he has been called by
 the ancestral spirits.

Ngikhumbuze ngobuZulu
Engibubona oThukela,
Ngiwel' eNdondakusuka,
Nakhona ngibhince

Ngikhulume namathongo.
Nina mathongo nilapha
Ningimema ngaseNtshangwe
Ningikhombisa kwaBhota
Nasezweni lamaQadi

Ngakhumbula kud' ekhaya.

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.20)

I remember the Zulu nation
 Which I saw at the Tugela River
 I cross over to Ndondakusuka
 I, too, don a warrior's apron

 I converse with the ancestors
 You, ancestral spirits, are here
 You invite me to Nchanga
 And direct me to Botha's Hill

 I remembered that it is far from home.

There has been marked traditional influence on modern Zulu poetry - some of it by unconscious assimilation and some by dint of a search for roots in one's heritage. Yet Kunene incorrectly believed traditional poetry to be "the sole form of literary expression" for rural folk.

Though traditional poetry has markedly declined, it is still the sole form of literary expression in the countryside.

(Kunene, 1962, p. 195).

Fortunately, besides traditional poetry there are other forms of literary expression such as izinganekwane (folktales), imilolozelo (lullabies), iziphico (riddles) and even izidunduzela (nursery rhymes) that are still existent among country people.

According to Kunene, the influence of post-Shakan traditional poetry could not have been very positive. In commenting on the poetry of Zibebu and of other poetry of this period, Kunene observed that -

The ideas are characteristic of the age, the spirit of melancholy puffs out threads of sentimentalism. Unlike the spirit of the Shakan era that trampled unmoved over its victims because it felt that it was beyond censure, the semi-heroic spirit of the period lingers and doubts and buries its victims in a rain of tears.

(Kunene, 1962, p.178, my underlining).

To substantiate his hypothesis about "the age which puffs out threads of sentimentalism" he quotes from Zibebu's praises the lines

Wamudla ubani ezalwa ngubani
Angithandi ukumusho,
Uma ngimusho kungaduma isililo

He killed so and so, born of what's-his-name.
I don't want to mention his name.
To do so would cause tumultuous wailing.

Yet such lines, quoted to substantiate a hypothesis about post-Shakan poetry, could just as easily have been taken from Shakan poetry; in fact from Shaka's own praise poem. Compare these with the lines from Shaka's praises.

Wadl' uMphepha ezalwa nguZwid' eMapheleni
Wadl' uNombengula ezalwa nguZwid' eMapheleni

He ate up Mphepha son of Zwide of the Maphelas
 He ate up Nombengula son of Zwide of the
 Maphelas.

(Cope, 1968, pp. 100-101).

and

uNdaba ngiyameba ngimuka naye
Ngimbuka kwehla nezinyembezi

As for Ndaba, I steal a glance at him and see
 him completely,
 When I look straight at him even tears flow
 down.

(Cope, 1968, pp. 106-107).

In commenting on traditional izibongo composed and recited in modern times, Kunene notes that

There has been a number of eulogies on
 Cyprian that have appeared in the
 newspapers.

(Kunene, 1962, p.188).

Such written praises, penned by literates with obvious traditional ties, allow the composer more time and scope to polish and perfect the lines until word perfect, thereby naturally contrasting with those verbal praisers who once having articulated a line cannot erase it. Kunene then states the obvious in his first sentence of the following extract -

Notable in the eulogies on him is a highly
 eulogistic tone. He is praised in most cases
 because praise of the ruler (sic) is customary
 and not because of any particular event

warranting poetical comment. His eulogies differ slightly from the traditional type in that they are recorded down, (sic) as a result each one of them is a complete poem.

(Kunene, 1962, p.188).

Kunene makes the very interesting (if subjective) observation that the king is praised not so much for his worth but simply because it is customary to do so. Concerning the fact that "his eulogies differ slightly from the traditional type", Kunene touches upon the little realized fact that each and every oral rendition of a poem by one or more poets constitutes another poem because as has been stated earlier, no two oral renditions are exactly the same. Kunene also takes the interesting view that

The Traditional School tends to be freer in expression while the Academic tends to be more cramped by foreign literary forms.

(Kunene, 1962, p.194).

As sincere as this statement undoubtedly is, it could of course also be argued that the "Traditional School" by conforming to tradition was more "cramped" than the modern poets who with innovation had incorporated "foreign literary forms". Far from being "cramped", they were freer to experiment and the individual creativity of each poet was allowed greater scope, a point, ironically enough, raised by Kunene himself.

Modern nature poetry is mainly a poetry of mood. It is also a poetry of reflection, either on death or personal experience. It is more individualistic than ancient Zulu poetry, hence personal idiosyncrasies distinguish each poet.

(Kunene, 1962, p.204, my underlining).

Furthermore, that corpus of printed modern anthologies available to us represents the poetry that had passed the stringent requirements of

publishers who had a vested interest, inasmuch as it was they who more often than not were outlaying the initial capital costs. Possibly it was this that moved Kunene to believe that modern Zulu poetry was superior to traditional.

Poetry of this period is also written by well-known figures, like Vilakazi, J.C. Dlamini, S. Dlamini, Made, Kunene, Mkhize etc. This means that the writing of poetry is now a more specialised work requiring a special skill. Consequently it has a greater unity and consistency of thought than traditional poetry which, as a communal work, had different levels of artistry.

(Kunene, 1962, p.204)

Kunene's postulations can be questioned on a number of points. Were traditional poetry "a communal work" (which as has been discussed earlier, it, strictly speaking, isn't) there would be a much greater likelihood of a uniform standard; that being the work of the community moulded into one; and it would therefore not reflect "different levels of artistry". Again, just as a man could recite his own or his clan's praises or a herder recite the praises of his cattle, so too was modern poetry engaged in by numerous laymen and everyday citizens and scholars who sent their literary work to local newspapers. In this sense then, modern poetry was not only written by "well known figures, like Vilakazi".

4.7 CONCLUSION

A full treatment of the role of missionaries in Southern Africa is the domain of anthropologists but what is of concern to us here is their undoubted impact on emergent Nguni authors and poets. Besides the provision of the physical wherewithal (such as allowing the use of their printing presses) their role as mentors, tutors and in some cases as the first bridgers of the literacy chasm has already been commented on. Yet

for all that, their lot has not been an easy one because they have been criticised by the political right for supposedly siding with black interests and conversely, they have been denounced by certain radicals on the other side of the political spectrum for allegedly interfering with the cultural heritage of blacks.

Written Nguni poetry was given a fillip by the enlightened policy of vernacular newspaper editors who actively encouraged and commented on the poetic contributions of their readers. Whereas some of these modern poems treated traditional themes, others broke from the bonds of convention and were written about that which for the Nguni were hitherto unpoeticised topics.

Some of this poetry can be considered quite daring for the era in which it was published. For example, on the 29th September, 1945 the editor of Ilanga newspaper published Obed Mooki's 36 lined eulogy on the African National Conference in 1945 (which admittedly was not banned at the time). Another political poem was Nyoni Matana's AbaNtwana e St. Helena (The Princes at St. Helena) the only reference of which is to be found on page 20 of S.A. Samuelson's "Newscutting Book" in the Killie Campbell archives. This poem is very explicit in its condemnation of whites. Furthermore, much early Nguni poetry was composed about the marvels of Western technology because objects such as trains, ships and aeroplanes were obviously new to the Nguni. Many of these early literary works of whatever theme or nature were diligently collected and preserved by far-sighted librarians of the Killie Campbell archives who would thereafter approach friends and researchers (the writer included) to translate some of the poetry to make it more accessible to a wider readership.

Notwithstanding the opening of new vistas to Nguni poets, a European and Western influence became evident in experimentation in fields such as rhyme and structure in written Nguni poetry. The English Romantic poets probably had the most profound influence of all simply because the poetry of Keats, Shelley, Byron, Blake, Coleridge and Wordsworth was analysed more than that of any other English poets in Nguni schools. This influence extended to the point where certain poems were translated in toto in Xhosa and Zulu and as such generated some controversy because they were viewed as being comparable to "new conceptions" by some while others were not as generous in their assessment of these as contributions to emergent Nguni poetry.

Possibly the most profound influence of all was the traditional genre of ukubonga and to date the most widely acclaimed modern poetry is that which represents a continuum from traditional praise poetry. That is not to say that experimentation was and should be frowned upon. A few poets experimented with rhyme, for example, but their efforts were circumscribed by the limited rhyme schemes available to them.

Finally, it was also held by some that the advent of literacy curbed the spontaneity and creativity of oral poets. Certainly those who wrote bawdier passages that were considered quite acceptable in oral declamation were criticised for doing so, (presupposing that such bawdy elements were allowed to be published in the first place).

CHAPTER 5

THE STRUCTURE OF NGUNI WRITTEN POETRY AND PRAISE POETRY

5.1 Miscellaneous theories on structure

Louis Simpson, in his almost indispensable handbook on poetry, defines structure as

The underlying logic or arrangement and movement in a literary text; its skeleton or paraphrasable content. The term "structure" usually refers to the organisation of the elements other than words. For the latter term "style" is used.

(Simpson, 1970, p.400).

Vilakazi in attempting a structural analysis of Zulu poetry wrote somewhat prosaically that

When I read a primitive poem and come on a gap,
there I discover the end of my stanza.

(Vilakazi, 1938, p.112).

Unlike Cope (1968, p.29) who definitively described the "gap" between stanzas as an elimination (by the declaimer) of the normal downdrift intonation sequence of a Zulu sentence, together with exaggerated final cadence; Vilakazi abstractly likened stanzas to lights on a piece of sculpture.

Stanzas in primitive Zulu poetry are like lights shed on a sculptured work from different angles. These lights operate independently of one another, but bring into relief the whole picture which the artists presents in carving. Lights are generally hidden from the on-lookers, but their effect to the eye and the mind bring perfect unity in their very difference. The primitive poet in tackling his theme acts like an exhibitor of sculpture in the arrangement of lights. The piece of sculpture and

the lights are one configuration indivisible as
a mental setting which induces an aesthetic
sense

(Vilakazi, 1938, p.112
my underlining).

Such a structural definition on the "development of poetry in Zulu" into stanzas, as lengthy as it is, unfortunately does little to shed light on the topic. Nonetheless, although pre-eminent as a poet, Vilakazi made his mark as a critic as well, so much so that as late as in 1967 Jahn made the following statement, obviously based on a total misconception of what a significant corpus on literary theory there already existed

His essay on the development of Zulu poetry
is the only significant paper on literary
theory in South Africa.

(Jahn, 1967, p.49).

In the same article Jahn more pertinently quotes Nyembezi on Vilakazi as a structural innovator.

And yet among the Zulus Vilakazi is remembered more as a poet than as a prose writer; he was mainly responsible for developing poetry whose form departed radically from the traditional Izibongo (or praises). He experimented with European forms. He divided his poems into regular stanzas. He also experimented with rhyme.

(loc. cit.)

Concerning Vilakazi's light-shedding analogy, a far more illuminating comment on the structure of Zulu poetry is that given by Ntuli

Sometimes lines are irregularly grouped so that the divisions correspond to important stages in the development of the narrative or discussion. Such units vary in length and are not marked by any set schemes of rhymes, if, indeed the lines are rhymed at all.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.275)

Ntuli was one of the first Zulu critics to adopt a holistic approach to the question of structure, stating that structure could not be seen in isolation because it is an integral part of other constituents. In this he was absolutely correct

Sometimes there is a tendency to discuss structural features apart from other components of a poem. In a well-written poem, content and form cannot be separated. Content determines the form in which it is to be expressed.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.222)

This holistic approach was one endorsed by Hrushovski in an essay included in the book Style in Language (edited by T.A. Sebeok).

A poem cannot be exhaustively decomposed into separate elements, rhythmic, semantic, etc; to describe the poem we must look at it as a whole from different aspects, the aspect of meaning, the aspect of rhythm, etc. Each one of them is but a certain function of the totality of elements of the poem.

(Hrushovski, p.180, no publication date given).

This "totality of elements" in the structural make-up of a poem was expanded in his simile that

A poem is like a many-sided crystal; we can observe its inner properties only from one side at a time, but then its whole structure appears through this particular face, showing different emphasis in different directions.

(loc. cit.)

Uzochukwu, in his article on Igbo elegaic poetry, postulates that prose lacks the "unified structure" inherent in poetry and this distinguishes between the two.

More important is the fact that communicative speech lacks the element of unified structure

Such critics are breaking new ground with theoretical observations on stanzas. It is highly unlikely that the poets themselves consciously strove to produce such "arrow patterns" in their poetry which were discovered by critics after the poem's publication. It is rather interesting that possibly the first time the poets would be made aware of such patterning would be on reading a critic's appraisal of their work. Obviously it is not implied that there is anything wrong for critics to do so. On the contrary, empirical research and innovation of this nature can make one appreciate a poem more fully and certainly from a new perspective. Oral poets, on the other hand, were probably more aware of the aural effect of repetitive elements such as linking, parallelism and the like and naturally the visual aspect was something beyond their ken because most of them were illiterate. Modern poets such as E.E.Cummings were very aware of the visual impact of their poetry and many literate poets (striving inter alia, for visual effect) have left examples of drafts before finally selecting one for publication. Written poetry is a conscious creation according to certain literary traditions. Thus it is interesting to read Vilakazi's views on form.

I do not believe in form; I rely more
on the spirit of the poetry. Form
tends to reduce everything to mechanical
standards and mathematical formulae.

(Vilakazi, 1938, p.129).

However, studies into structure are seldom definitive for as Taljaard has noted

Afbakenings van verse en stanzas
is dus in baie gevalle onvermydelik
arbitrêr.

(Taljaard, 1979, p.74).

The delineation of verses and stanzas
is therefore in many instances
unavoidably arbitrary

Whereas Hugh Tracey is an expert on African music generally, probably the most authoritative academic on Zulu songs is Rycroft, who in spite of the naturally limited duration of his visits to Southern Africa from London, still manages to conduct definitive research on the nature and structure of Zulu, Xhosa and Swazi praise poetry and songs. In one of his articles, "Melodic features in Zulu eulogistic recitation" (1960), he comments, inter alia, on the different structural features of izibongo and song in Zulu.

However, izibongo stands clearly apart from what is generally accepted as Zulu song Another departure from izibongo practice is the fact that in song exaggerated concluding formulae do not appear to be essential or standardized to the extent to which this is found in recitation Izibongo and song differ further in rate of utterance. An appreciably greater number of words per minute are uttered in recitation than in any known song. Words chosen for their imagery, sound and aptness, are the very core of izibongo..... In song, on the other hand, words often convey little meaning.

(Rycroft, 1960, pp. 76-77)

Although it is very difficult to be dogmatic about the verse structure of Nguni poetry, in tracing the relationship between traditional and modern Nguni poetry, what appears to occur with far greater frequency in the traditional genre, is what for want of a better term might be known as "narrative" type structure. By this is meant that the various characters depicted in the izibongo are quoted as speaking directly, as are those responding to their statements. For example, in the praises of the Ndlambe chief, Silimela, conversations are quoted verbatim

Wafik' uFeni ngesiqu.
Wathi, "Ndithi,
Ndithi, 'Buya, Makinan' uza nerola!"(sic)
Wath' uMakinana, "Hayi"
Asilosiko lakoweth' ukubuya ngomva!"

Feni caught up with him in person

and said, "I say,
I say, Return, Makinana, (for) you (will) bring
trouble."
Said Makinana, "No (matter) !
It is not our (home's) custom to turn back !"

(Kuse, 1979, p.222).

This same excerpt evidences the important characteristic of pauses in African poetry. One has to read the abovementioned passage aloud in Xhosa to appreciate the effect. There are distinct pauses and rhythm at the beginning of the verses, even though the rhyme is a repetition of -thi. When read aloud one can hear how the language is slowed down and controlled. The exact opposite of this effect is evidenced in the English poem, "How they brought the good news from Ghent to Aix" by Robert Browning. The opening couplet exemplifies this:

I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all
three.

(Untermeyer, Ed., 1959, p.149)

Here the language conveys a sense of haste and urgency, unlike the Xhosa (even though both poems describe a dramatic and fast moving venture).

Another example within the same izibongo where the characters are quoted as speaking directly, is where the contents of a letter are quoted as though it were the animate, articulate author thereof.

Incwadi yaphum' eGqolonci

.....
.....

Kwal' ukub' ifik' eMngazana yathetha!
Yathi, "Goduka, Makinan' ufil' uyihlo!
Ufel' eMthuman' emazants' eQangqalala.
Goduk' uye kubus' amaNdlamb' akanamntu!"
Wath' uMakinana, "Ndiyeza, ndisavun' amazimba."

A document came forth from Gqolonci,

.....
.....

As soon as it arrived at Mngazana, it spoke !
And said, "Go home, Makinana, your father is

dead!
 He died at Mthumana, south, at Qangqalala.
 Go home and rule, the Ndlambes have no one to
 rule over them."
 Said Makinana, "I'm coming, (will delay) still
 harvesting sorghum."

(Kuse, 1979, pp. 221 - 222).

5.2. Repetition as a Structural Element in Nguni Poetry

In assessing the structure of Nguni poetry, both written and oral, one is immediately struck by the high incidence of repetition in the poetry. This aspect, one of the most important in poetry, could have an entire thesis devoted thereto, if only because it has enjoyed such great attention during this century. Much discussion has centred on the various types of repetition and diverse critics have suggested inter alia, that repetition distinguishes oral from written poetry, or that it is part and parcel of both oral and written poetry, or that it fulfils many utilitarian functions besides being an aesthetically pleasing literary device. As such then, repetition can almost be seen as indispensable to poetry generally, and to oral poetry in particular.

The school of thought that it in fact distinguishes between oral and written poetry certainly has many adherents. Alternatively, scholars such as Gray and Boas, while commenting on this feature in oral literature, do not pay nearly as much attention to its occurrence in written literature

Repetition is prevalent in folk and primitive literatures because these are both oral literatures and repetition is a direct consequence of their oral nature.

(Gray, 1971, p. 290).

When Gray commented on "primitive" narrative, he was alluding to unwritten narrative. Gray's sentiments were echoed by Boas

The investigation of primitive narrative as well as of poetry proved that repetition, particularly rhythmic repetition, is a fundamental trait.

(Boas, 1925, p.329).

Such statements, although true, only tell half the truth. While accepting that repetition is a "fundamental trait" of the oral genre, it nonetheless is also found extensively in the written as well, in the form of refrains and choruses.

An essay that had a profound impact on those critics investigating this feature was that of Axel Olrik (1965, p. 129) who, in an article with the same title, regarded it as being one of the "epic laws of folk narrative". Olrik's statement is true but what is often overlooked by his readers is that he was not claiming that it is a feature exclusive to "folk narrative".

By repetition a layman would understand that a word or group of words is repeated. Yet poetic repetition can take many forms and while it often does mean a recurrence of vowels (assonance), of consonants (alliteration), or of syllables and words; it may also include the occurrence of formulaic expressions, or a paralleling of ideas, a juxtapositioning of sentiments; almost a case of point, counter-point. But it is a fallacy to assert that such balanced antitheses are peculiar to the "oral mind". Any assertions concerning the nature of the "oral mind" are best made with due circumspection because in the absence of any tangible evidence to either prove or disprove such hypotheses, they must be viewed as subjective and speculative. Supposing that there is indeed a dichotomy between the "oral" and "written" mind, how then do such critics account for the incidence of "oral minded" (initially, at least) iimbongi such as Mqhayi and

Yali-Manisi, who having been oral bards for years, subsequently turning their talents to collating their work as written anthologies?

Sweeping generalisations about the nature of the "oral" mind (and indirectly about "oral" poetry, the product of the "oral" mind), notwithstanding the fact that they have no literary base, are nonetheless quite prevalent.

Folk society and folk art do not accept,
reflect, or value change.

(Abrahams and Foss, 1968, p.11).

It does not even necessitate a psychologist to discount these views because even practical businessmen can vouch that industrialized workers - like their "folk society" counterparts - also evidence a resistance to change. Yet the psychology of the people is not what we are concerned with here. Their poetry is of sole importance but even so, the above quotation, indicative as it is of much thinking on this score, only tells half the truth about oral poetry. As has been pointed out elsewhere in this work, change, whether intentional or not, is part of the very nature of oral transmission of oral poetry!

Repetition can serve many practical purposes. It can afford an imbongi a "breather" while he thinks of the next topic of discourse in his rapid recital; it can serve as a mnemonic aid, help enlist audience participation in chanting a refrain or chorus and it can serve to emphasise a particular point. On this latter point of emphasis I am at variance with part of Olrik's statement that

In (written) literature there are many means of producing emphasis, means other than repetition. For example, the dimension and significance of something can be depicted by the degree and detail of the description of that particular object or event. In contrast, folk narrative lacks this full-bodied detail,

for the most part, and its spare descriptions are all too brief to serve as an effective means of emphasis. For our traditional narrative, there is but one alternative: repetition.

(Olrik, 1965, pp. 132-133, my underlining).

Contrary to Olrik's viewpoint that "folk narrative lacks the full-bodied detail (and that) there is but one alternative: repetition", Xhosa iintsomi and Zulu izinganekwane (both meaning "folktales"), evidence much full-bodied detail. To appreciate this one has only to listen to an expert storyteller on a long night by the fireside, weaving her tale by drawing out and elaborating on a number of incidents. Of course, only a small part of the reason therefore is to while away the hours because the setting of the milieu and the lending of colour to the tale are indispensable to her art. Any novel twist, or whatever else might be considered interesting, can be incorporated at the storyteller's whim and some folktale plots have a number of sub-plots, naturally bearing in mind that it is not solely children who constitute the audience. Similarly, in poetry such as Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales", much detail is given, but one example of which is the humorous account of the widow at her late husband's funeral admiring the shapely leg and items of clothing worn by one of the male members of the funeral party! Obviously, in such cases a mere repetition of a statement (regarded by Olrik as an "alternative") would certainly not serve the same purpose.

It is quite possible for a researcher to look at a single poem yet miss repetitive elements within that poem simply because those repetitive structures are not repeated within the same poem but only within the same poetic genre. By this I mean that a researcher, new to the field of Nguni poetry, might come across elements such as these

Xhosa introductory oral formulae which occur in certain personal praises.

<u>Kutsho mna!</u>	"So say I!"
<u>Athi ke mna!</u>	"So say I!"
<u>Ndingu.....</u>	"I am"
<u>Ndiyinto ka.....</u>	"I am the son of"

These formulae, although repetitive by nature, are stated only once during any declamation and might be overlooked for that very reason. Again, individual Xhosa praisers might choose to conclude their poems with the untranslatable formulae

Ncincilili-i-i!

or

Ndevovololo-o-o!

or

Ndiyehla Mhlekaazi! "I sit down, Sir!"

or

Ziphelile apho! "They are finished now!"

Whereas one of the above formulae is normally only used once in a single recital, they together constitute a body of phrases that are often heard throughout Xhosa oral poetry. Conversely, there is also another corpus of Xhosa oral formulae that can be repeated within a single recitation. These "peripatetic oral formulae" (a phrase which for want of a better I coined in my Master's dissertation) are used to describe these formulae that can occur at any point in a poem. Aesthetic considerations notwithstanding, they serve the utilitarian purpose of allowing the imbongi a breathing (and thinking) space before he flashes on to his next topic of discourse. Such peripatetic formulae are easier to recognise because they occur fairly extensively through

the poetic genre as well as often being repeated within the same declamation. Examples include the Xhosa

'Sangxa siyahula, siya kwamakhulu amahlathi!

The steppe buzzard glides off the way, going towards the large forests!

Magqirha ayaqhubana ukubheka esihogwini (or) esiheleni

The witch-doctors drive one another on, heading towards hell!

and the bawdy, yet humorous Zulu injunction

Bantwana, yidlani izinkobe nilale.
Thina sizodla onyoko!

Children, eat your cooked mealies and go to sleep
Whereas we will eat your mothers !

Formulae are encountered more often in oral than in written poetry but many Zulu and Xhosa contemporary poets have no qualms about incorporating lines and phrases first coined by other poets. The inference, of course, is that a reader would recognise these as "borrowings."

Repetition certainly enhances understanding if a listener did not hear what was said initially, yet I cannot agree with Finnegan's remark that

it (repetition) makes it easier for the audience to grasp what has been said and gives the speaker/singer confidence that it has understood the message he is trying to convey.

(Finnegan, 1977, p. 129).

This can almost be equated with those who believe that if one shouts loud and often enough, the listener will understand what he is being told!

Again, I am somewhat at variance with Finnegan's observation that

In the second case, as with oral literature and orally- delivered lectures (or sermons), more repetition is necessary to ensure that comprehension is complete.

(Finnegan, 1977, p. 129).

But is this necessarily true? If one is told something instead of reading about that same topic, is it only necessary to have repeated what you are told to ensure that "comprehension is complete"? Concerning the topic of understanding, Abrahams and Foss make the controversial statement that

The oral creator or performer is obliged to use expression which is immediately understandable because of the oral nature of his presentation and the limitations which this places on his audience ...

(Abrahams and Foss, 1968, p. 10).

Nguni oral bards certainly are not obliged to use expressions which are "immediately understandable" to the audience. In some cases these expressions are not even understandable to the declaimer himself, who when asked to explain them will merely shrug and say

Yizibongo nje! "They are just praises!"

Perhaps the reciter's lack of knowledge is occasioned by the fact that in such cases the expressions are borrowed from another. Were the poet to have fashioned them himself there is a far greater likelihood of their being intelligible to him, at least. Again, whereas a poet or even his audience might be able to explain the words, they cannot account for their significance. Thus, for example, when a Xhosa imbongi says the clan praises

NguSijadu, NguZizi,

NguNgxib' inoboya,
Usidla sibokoboko!

He is Sijadu, he is Zizi,
Of the woollen penis-sheath.
The penis-sheath which is soft!

most of the audience certainly recognise individual words but invariably fail to explain the symbolism or significance. Countless other examples could be cited to disprove Abrahams and Foss's postulation. I was once called upon to praise a man named Dan Dabula at his graduation party in Soweto and the latter's praises were begun with

Ngu D.Dan Dokolwana kaDyakalashe!
uDebela - dwasu; uDabulamanzi!

Such lines in a rapid recital were certainly not "immediately understandable" to the audience but they nonetheless responded positively to the repetition of "D's" (alliteration) and the pun on the praised man's isibongo, Dabula. For these abovementioned reasons one can therefore state that the following quotation is only partially true part of the time

Oral composition will gravitate towards conventional expression and repetitive expression because they are immediately understandable and retainable.

(Abrahams and Foss, 1968, p.10).

Finally, one cannot look to a single feature such as repetition to distinguish between oral and written poetry. This was very pithily summed up by Finnegan who correctly wrote that

If the line between oral and written cannot be drawn with any precision, why should there be two distinct styles, differentiated by a single crucial factor?

(Finnegan, 1977, p. 132).

Various conflicting theorists maintain that it is the single feature distinguishing between oral and written poetry; alternatively between poetry and prose. It has also been attributed as a characteristic of both oral and written poetry, fulfilling many utilitarian functions (such as mnemonic aids, allowing audience participation and the like) as well as being aesthetically pleasing. Some critics have fallen into the trap of attempting to analyse the "folk mind" and have concluded that oral poets - in contrast to their lettered counterparts - have favoured repetition because of their "primitive nature", "fixed ways", and "resistance to change" all of which are seen as being peculiar only to the "oral mind". Similarly, it has also been erroneously believed that if the same words are repeated often enough, understanding will automatically ensue, hence a natural aid for the oral poet struggling to make his "oral minded" audience comprehend the gist of his discourse !

In brief, repetition in all its various guises - assonance, alliteration, parallelism, oral formulae, or even the simple repetition of words or syllables - must be seen as an indispensable constituent of both oral and written poetry and the assumption that it is the hallmark of the former only is quite untenable.

5.3 Perceptions of the structure of a modern Xhosa poem

In a perfect sonnet, what you admire is not so much the author's skill in adapting himself to the pattern as the skill with which he makes the pattern comply with what he has to say.

(Whitlock, 1959, p.31, quoting
Elliot).

One of the many differences between the structure of, for example, Elizabethan and Italian sonnets on the one hand and Nguni traditional

and modern poetry on the other, is that in the sonnets the poets were obliged to conform to firstly, a specific rhyme scheme and secondly, the tight control of the exposition of an argument within fourteen lines - no more, no less. In Nguni poetry such strictly defined structural limitations do not exist. The poets are free to expound on their topic within as many lines as they choose and they do not have to conform to a rigid pattern of a pre-determined rhyme scheme. Indeed, they do not have to rhyme at all. There are, however, certain structural features encountered in the poetry. Cope was the first to comment on the characteristics of the Shakan praise which he cited as being a four-lined structure of statement, extension, development and conclusion, which conclusion was invariably introduced with a kanti (whereas) twist.

Qangule, in his article on Tshaka's Xhosa poem Igqili, saw the structure of this aforementioned Xhosa poem, at least, as being quite different. The first verse of this poem is

Amehl' akadinwa kambe kukubona
Inyok' esimanga ukuhamba kwayo,
Amatsh' ewenzayo nok' igwegwelezayo,
Inyoka engenamsila neliso layo linye.

(Qangule, 1973, p.4)

The eyes have not wearied from seeing
 The marvellous snake and its manner of motion
 Making fast movement nonetheless taking a
 circuitous route
 The tail-less snake with its one eye.

Qangule says of this verse

We describe the first stanza of this poem as consisting of an initial statement plus a final statement :

Line 1	:	initial statement
Line 2	:	final statement
Line 3	:	initial statement
Line 4	:	final statement

(Qangule, 1973, p.17)

If Qangule is correct in his assessment, such Xhosa poetry differs from Zulu izibongo. Based on Qangule's following observation, it would also appear that there are no descriptive or lyrical passages in a poem such as Tshaka's Igqili.

The second, fourth and fifth stanzas have the same pattern. We take the second stanza :

Line 5	:	statement
Line 6	:	statement
Line 7	:	statement
Line 8	:	statement

(Qangule, 1973, p.17)

Yet a closer inspection of lines such as these that he quotes, reveal that they are not simply a succession of statements.

Inyoka l' ayinamv' ayinamphambili,
Umlomo way' uselwandle, ilis' entabeni.
Inyok' ebulala ngomzimba kub' ayinazinyo,
Umfutho kukuxuxuzela kwethumbu ngumsindo.

(Qangule, 1973, p.4)

This snake has no hind-quarters, it has no
 fore-quarters.
 Its mouth is at the sea, its eye on the
 mountain.
 A snake which kills with its body
 because it has no fang
 Its hissing is the rumbling of its
 digestive tract

Such lines can clearly be seen to have a structure that is not simply a quatrain of flat statements. There is much descriptive embellishment and detail concerning the snake - an extended metaphor for a gargantuan river. The excerpt quoted above evidences a good example of rhyme in Xhosa poetry. Latin and Italian have a simple vowel system; therefore vowel rhyme is not common in these languages. The same applies to Zulu and Xhosa which use half-rhyme; examples of which are in the concluding syllables of the penultimate and ultimate lines above, namely,

-nyo and ndo, respectively.

Qangule justified his perceptions on structure with

This pattern emanates from the praise singer's tendency of making a single statement in each line, and its effect is achieved by piling up a number of statements towards a unified whole.

(Qangule, 1973, p.17)

Of equal relevance is his pertinent averment that

It is clear that in studying the structure of a praise poem we must not look for trochees, dactylic hexameters, iambic pentameters, rhyme schemes, etc.

(Qangule, 1973, p.21)

Besides being a critic, Qangule was himself a poet, and in 1970 he published an anthology entitled Intshuntshe (A long-bladed assegai). This anthology he dedicated to his parents and the final poem he dedicated to Professor D. Ziervogel, which poem he sub-titled KWIYUNIVESITI YOMZANTSI AFRIKA (At the University of South Africa). The poem is but one of many Nguni poems in praise of whites. For example, Mqhayi's anthology Inzuzo (Profit) is also concluded with a poem in praise of Professor Doke of the University of the Witwatersrand. Other such poems by Mqhayi include UTebha (Harry Taberer), Aa! Lusingasinga (Dr. W. G. Bennie), and one entitled EDikeni!!! (At Alice) which is subtitled (James Gray, M.A., Maya Khoboka, James Chalmers, M.A., B.Sc., Major W. L. Geddes, O.B.E.)

Qangule's poem necessitates a close study because of its play on words, its izibongo structure and its use of esoteric and idiomatic terminology.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | <u>Ndizihambela ndigagene nomlungu,</u> |
| | <u>Ndakha ndahlafun' isilungu,</u> |
| | <u>Ndaphoxeka akuhlafun' isiXhosa.</u> |
| | <u>Ndibe nephango akuhlafun' iinkobe,</u> |
| 5 | <u>Ndangxama kukutya kwakowethu,</u> |
| | <u>Ndazibamba hleze ndimphangele.</u> |
| | <u>Undiphakele ipapa kaMshweshwe,</u> |

Ndambuzisa ngengubo yakwaMshweshwe
 Suka wandikhuphela eyakwaLobengula,
 10 Wahleka wandambesa ngekaSobhuza,
 Ndadideka ndaqhoboshek' ulwimi.
 Undihlolele ngesikrweqe sikaMqhayi,
 Undigrogrisile ngomnquma kaMzamane,
 Undilingisile ngesabhokhwe sikaNcamashe,
 15 Undinkwantiyisile ngeruluwa kaJubase.
 Uthe sasinono Qhakancu ngaphambili,
 Uthe sasigigitheka naBathwa kuqala,
 Uthe mandixoze ndixoxe ndixikushe,
 20 Uthe mandicimbe ndicinge ndicoselele,
 Uthe mandigqogqe ndigqale ndigqabhuze.
 Ndokhe nditshone ndintywile esizibeni.
 Masifunde madoda sizibulale,
 Nanku uZiervogel esisakaza,
 25 Usiphethele isabile uyasihlahlela,
 Uvuka nekhwezi usikrobile.
 Unathi eziko uyasiguqula,
 Sakujubalaza usigcuntsa ngefolokhwe,
 Sakuthamba usicofa ngamazinyo.
 Nyama ayithandayo lulwimi,
 30 Naku ezulazula esikhamisisa,
 Lumkani madoda angalusiki,
 Thina siyazoyika izithunzela,
 Thina asithethi nezimuma,
 Zinto zingakwazi nokutshica,
 35 Zinto ziphila kukufunzelwa.
 Madoda mthuleleni iminqwazi,
 Ligora (sic) le ndoda ndiyincamile,
 Naku izulazula kwaXhosa,
 Naku indalasa kwaXhosa,
 40 Naku iphila kwaXhosa,
 Iyaphanga ingaze yomiwe,
 Abaziyo bathi ihlakaniphile,
 Kuba isika isipha,
 Kuba ikha ijonga.
 45 Akungeze uthi inesitsaba,
 Isibeka iingqeqe zakugragrama,
 Isithwala mhla zikhonkothayo,
 Isinxiba mhla ziqwengayo.
 Hay-hay madoda ndithe hayi!
 50 Sanukuyigongotha. Golokoqo!

(Qangule, 1970, p p. 55-56)

1 Strolling I came upon a white person,
 I happened to speak a white language,
 I was put to shame when he spoke Xhosa
 I felt hungry when he ate uncrushed boiled
 maize,
 5 I became annoyed, it being our type of food
 I held myself back lest I ate his food.
 He poured out Moshweshwe's porridge for me
 I enquired about Moshweshwe's blanket.
 Thereupon he brought out Lobengula's for me,
 10 He laughed and covered me with Sobhuza's,
 Perplexed I became tongue-tied.
 He sounded me out with Mqhayi's stick
 He silenced me with Mzamane's stick of wild
 olive,

He feinted as if to strike me with Ncamashe's
 whip.
 15 He frightened me with Jubase's gunpowder.
 He said we were with the Khoi before
 He said we laughed uproariously with the San at
 first
 He said I must strip bark off a tree, converse
 and xukushe
 He said I must go continually, think and pay
 close attention
 20 He said I must extirpate, aim a gun, cause to
 burst
 As if I dive very deep into a pool.
 Let us learn very hard, men,
 Here is Ziervogel stabbing us right and left.
 He is carrying a sword for us (and) he is
 cutting us down.
 25 He awakens with the morning star peeping at us
 He is with us at the hearth turning us over
 We struggled vainly, he turning us with a fork
 We became soft, he feeling us with his teeth.
 The meat that he likes is the tongue
 30 Since wandering about making us open our
 mouths.
 Be careful men, lest he cut it (the tongue),
 We fear ghosts
 We do not talk with the dumb
 Things which are unable to spit
 35 Things that live by being spoon fed.
 Men, take off your hats to him.
 This man is a hero, I have despaired of him
 Since it strolls among the Xhosa
 Since it sits rudely among the Xhosa.
 40 Since it lives with the Xhosa
 He eats with haste but never chokes
 Those who know say he is wise
 For it cuts and gives
 For it builds and looks.
 45 You should never say he has a crown
 He puts it on small dogs when they growl
 He carries it when they bark
 He wears it when they tear to pieces
 No! No! men, I say no!
 50 Do not drive it away. Golokoqo!

In typical izibongo fashion, many of the words chosen by the poet
 are almost impossible to translate. Certainly quite a few were not even
 cited in Kropf's Xhosa dictionary. Other words again had numerous
 totally different meanings, with no clue from the context as to what
 meaning would be most apposite. Others again were used idiomatically.
 For example, in the second line the reference to "chewing the white
 man's language" is actually to the speaking of the same. Lines eighteen
 to twenty were almost impossible to translate being more evocative of

sentiment than of real understanding. Each of these three lines evidenced a deliberate striving for alliterative effect and it would appear that words were chosen more for their alliterative qualities than for furthering meaning. In lines eighteen, nineteen and twenty there is an alliteration of -x-, -c- and -gq- respectively. One word in line eighteen, ndixukushe (I must xukusha) appears to have no meaning at all because it is not even cited in the most definitive Xhosa dictionary. This structure is very similar to izibongo where the sense and fury of the recitation often take precedence to conveying an adequate meaning of what is being expressed.

Of what sense or meaning are the lines:

He said I must strip bark off a tree, converse
and xukushe
He said I must go continually, think and pay
close attention
He said I must extirpate, aim a gun, cause to
burst

Moreover, the last line of the above triplet could even be translated (without adding to or detracting from the meaning) as

He said I must scrape everything out, take
notice of, cause to burst.

Just as a listener to an oral declamation would have great difficulty in fathoming the meaning, so too the reader is often left stranded, even though the latter can at least re-read the words as often as necessary or even consult a dictionary. For example, line twelve contains the word Undihlolele which has been translated simply as "He sounded me out". Yet the verb -hlolela means the following:

To put out a feeler for an alliance in marriage. The agent in the matter simply takes a spear, girdle or some beads (see um-Lomo) to the girl's residence, deposits them there secretly at dusk, or, in the case of a chief's daughter, in daytime, and comes away without

saying a word. If the alliance is acceptable they are retained, if not acceptable they are returned; to spy out for.

(Kropf, 1915,p.160)

Another example is in the description of the persona cooking the people at the hearth (lines twenty seven to thirty two). The first of these lines is

Sakujubalaza usigcuntsa ngefolokhwe

which has been translated as

We struggled vainly, he turning us with a fork.

For the complexity of these words, one has only to consult a dictionary. The first word is:

uku-Jubalaza, v.i. To struggle as an animal, whose head has been severed from the body, as a snake which has been struck on the head, or as a person held fast by the arms.

(Kropf, 1915, p.174)

The second word in this line, usigcuntsa, is derived from the following:

uku-Gcuntsa, v.i. To throw the isigcuntsa at the tuberos root of isi-kholokotho. By this method two boys determine which of them is to turn the cattle. The one who misses is 'eaten', i.e. defeated, by the one who strikes and has in consequence to turn the cattle.

(Kropf, 1915, p.118)

This concept of "eating" which is metaphorically conveyed in lines twenty six to thirty two, is a very common idiomatic expression in both Zulu and Xhosa. It can imply being beaten (both physically and literally) or being surpassed at something. In fact in Zulu the verb for "eat" can be used

in the widest sense with the following shades of meaning.

(Doke and Vilikazi, 1958,p.150)

The lexicographers then cite fifteen different uses of the word including, as a reference

to have sexual intercourse (of a male)

(loc. cit.)

In Xhosa the same applies even though Kropf does not cite as many examples as his Zulu lexicographer counterparts.

In both Xhosa and Zulu, a reduplication of a verbal stem indicates a diminution of the action; that it is carried out "just a little". Thus in line thirty, when we read that the persona was "wandering about", the complexity of meaning of the verbal infinitive ukuzula is evident on consulting Kropf.

uku-Zula, v.i. To run or wander about, as a sheep or goat affected by a maggot in the brain; fig. to be unsettled, or have no resting place: ndiyazula, my head swims, gets confused, giddy (after a stroke on the head or before death); uyazula, he does not know what he says (said of one who speaks badly of another).

(Kropf, 1915, p.492).

It has already been stated that traditional poetry is replete with difficult terminology, yet this modern poem is no less so. When in lines thirty three to thirty five there are disparaging references to dumb people, the persona refers to "things that live by being spoon fed". Yet the verbal radical -funzela is not limited to this meaning alone because it means

To give the charge to an army to rush on a place; to go straight to a place, putting on a bold face: masifunzele kulamlilo, let us make for that light; of a horse, to rush into; of birds, to feed their young ones; intaka iyafunzela amathole ayo, the bird feeds her young ones by inserting the food with her beak into their mouth.

(Kropf, 1915, p.110)

A true understanding of izibongo is not to be undertaken lightly.

5.4 The repetitive structure of Zulu and Xhosa poetry

The repetitive structure of both Xhosa and Zulu praises is well known. One has only to look at the Zulu praise/song about the famous rock of Ntunjambili which is both recited and sung by Zulu children to see this exemplified. L.H. Samuelson (1974, pp. 38-41) gives a fairly detailed account of the folktale concerning this rock.

Iitshe likaNtunjambili
Litshe IikaNtunjambili
Ngivulele ngingene
Alivulwa ngabantu
Livulwa yizinkonjane
Zon' ezindiza phezulu
Ngivulele ngingene

(Popular Zulu childrens' ditty)

Stone of Ntunjambili
 Stone of Ntunjambili
 Open for me so that I may enter
 It (the rock) is not opened by people
 It is opened by the swallows
 Those that fly overhead
 Open for me that I may enter !

In this popular refrain one can see that the first and second lines are the same and that the third and the final lines are also repeated. The fourth and fifth lines also indicate a form of repetition in the initial linking type of parallelism which is after all a simultaneous repetition and contrasting of two ideas. Lines of Nguni praises can be repeated in various differing contexts. For example, the praises of the Zulu Mnguni clan include that they are

. . . of the uncrossable sea
 It is crossed by the swallows
 which fly overhead.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.189)

These lines about the swallows are also very reminiscent of the poetic (if not prophetic) lines attributed to King Shaka, which as he lay mortally wounded he is said to have addressed to his assassins who had only just seized power

You will rule
But you will never rule the swallows
Those that build their houses with mud (i.e.
like the Zulu)
And the Europeans
Who crossed the uncrossable sea in their boats.

These lines were recited to me by Malcolm Sokhela, a young personnel officer at the Romatex company in Durban in June 1982. This same Zulu informant stated that Shaka is credited with the adage that they would rule neither the swallows nor the whites.

It has also been shown how Xhosa miners on mines separated by great distances and coming from different parts of South Africa, incorporated oral formulae within the structure of their own personal praises. For example, the following triplet was encountered on gold mines a few hundred kilometers apart and again in various parts of Transkei.

NguJujuju ! UMaqeg(w)amdaka !
Ndidubula ngenyeke etafileni
Kwatsho kwataka amashum' amasheleni !

It is Jujuju ! The dark ponies !
I shoot with the top lip at a table
And up popped ten shillings !

There is little doubt that these lines were based on those of the most famous of all Xhosa bards, S.E.K. Mqhayi, and were taken from his poem on a train entitled Ujujuju kwelakwaNyawuza (The train from Nyawuza's place), which is in his anthology Inzuzo (Profit).

Yangena kwaHlambangobubende,
Inqwel' akowethu kwaLwaganda !
Ngujuju igama layo,
NguMaqeg' amdak' elibizwa ziimbongi;

(Mqhayi, 1974, p.110).

It entered at
 Bather-in-clotted-blood-of-a-slaughtered-beast
 Our wagon of Lwaganda
 Jujuju is its name
 Called "The dark horses" by the iimbongi;

Particularly interesting is the fact that these lines about a train were used as "fillers" in the personal praises of illiterate mineworkers, such was the widespread knowledge of Mqhayi's poetry.

In the fourth and also in the final verse of the poem Mqhayi illustrates the structural feature of paralleling statements, a feature extremely common throughout Nguni poetry, particularly oral poetry. Examples include

Ukhaph' abemkayo, eze nabezayo !
 * * * * *
Linceda ngenxenywe, ligwaze ngenxenywe
 * * * * *
Nobon' ubakuhle, nobon' ubakubi

(loc. cit.)

It accompanies those going thither, and
 brings those coming hither !
 * * * * *
 It assists on one side and stabs on
 another side
 * * * * *
 You will evidence good, you will evidence
 evil.

Mqhayi saw in the advent of such mechanized monsters both good and evil and he alerted his people against the dangers of the latter

Mna ngelam ndithi namhla, "Vukani!"
Lo mlozi kajujuj' uthi, "Vukani!"
Izinto zonke namhla zithi, "Vukani!"
Ncincilili ! ! !

(loc. cit.)

I, with my voice, say today, "Wake up !"
 This whistling sound of the train says,
 "Wake up !"
 Everything today says "Wake up !"
Ncincilili !

Noteworthy is Mqhayi's use of the word umlozi in the above quotation because it means a whistling sound and also a whistling spiritual diviner who divines without the aid of divining bones. It is as though the train itself warns the Xhosa against itself, a theme echoed by Vilakazi in his poem Ezinkomponi where he bewails the fact that black labour was conveyed from rustic, rural homesteads to work in an industrialized, austere environment.

In the above example one can see that Mqhayi, a master of language, chose to repeat the word Vukani thrice in as many lines. In the hands of a master, such a simple concept could easily have been conveyed by the use of various synonyms. It therefore appears that Mqhayi deliberately chose such repetitive elements. One has only to look at his poem eulogizing the wife of John Knox Bhokhwe (Umka John Knox Bhokhwe) to see that this structural reduplication of words and syllables was consciously striven for. Mqhayi was one of the earliest Xhosa poets to experiment with such "reduplication" poetry, as in the following example

Izizwe zibus' iinzwakazi!
Zathumel' amahombakazi;
Zisuse nezityebikazi, -
Zathumel' amacikokazi;
Zisuse izilumkokazi !
Zathumela neemfundikazi;
Zisuse namagqirhakazi !
Zathumel' iingcaphephekazi;

(Mqhayi, 1974, p.67)

The nations recalled the beautiful women
 They sent the beautifully adorned
 They recalled the extremely wealthy
 They sent the eloquent orators
 They recalled the cautiously prudent
 They sent the experts
 They recalled the traditional doctors
 And sent academics.

As is frequent in Nguni oral poetry, certain words are virtually untranslatable. Iingcaphephekazi, the final word of the above quotation

is not cited in Kropf and Godfrey's dictionary, nor were numerous Xhosa-speakers able to shed any light on its meaning hence the tentative translation as "academics".

Except in the first line where the word zisuse appears as the second word, both it and zathumela appear as the introductory words of four consecutive couplets. There is thus a paralleling and contrasting of "recalling" and "sending" in each of these lines. It is also noteworthy that Mqhayi structured his poem so that in the final position of each of the eight lines there appeared the augmentative suffix - kazi.

All in all it evidences a structural experimentation which has a potential propensity for being stilted and contrived - particularly since a similar structure is evidenced throughout the entirety of the poem. Perhaps it was this structural trait that caused Vilakazi to dismiss sections of Mqhayi's anthology with the bland statement that this "cannot be called poetry".

The whole of Section I of "Inzuzo" is dull, it may be treated with Section III which consists of elegies In this however, Mqhayi does not rise to our expectation. He lacks the inexplicable flash of spiritual lightning, which enters the poets' mind, as life enters inorganic matter. In these sections Mqhayi has composed mere oratorical sermons of great eloquence - but this cannot be called poetry .

. . .
But I fail to see real poetry in this.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.305
my underlining).

Yet Vilakazi himself used a repetitive rhyme scheme as a structural feature - with equally limited success in lines such as these from his poem We Moya (Oh ! Wind !) where there is a repetition of the possessive - akho in three consecutive lines.

Ngizw' izinkulumo zakho
Zingiph' ubuthongo bakho
Nenjabul' okungeyakho

(Vilakazi, 1965, p.13)

I hear the talkings which are yours
 Which gives me the sleep which is yours
 And the happiness which is yours

It is interesting to note that Vilakazi averred that

I must first prove the necessity and
 desirability of rhyme in Zulu

(Vilakazi, 1938, p.128).

I believe that he has failed badly in his attempt to prove this point and consequently where Vilakazi and others have forced rhyme upon an Nguni poem, it is usually very contrived, stilted and of a repetitive nature. Of course, this need not always be the case and it is accepted that some researchers today believe that there is a place for the imposition of rhyme schemes on Nguni poetry.

In his defence of rhyme in Zulu poetry Ntuli writes that

A poet is free to borrow or emulate
 patterns which are used by other artists
 in other cultures. Why should there be an
 objection when a poet wants to decorate
 his piece with similar endings ?

(Ntuli, 1978, p.241).

and

Vilakazi's initial rhyme comes very
naturally but it is clear from some
examples that it was used deliberately,
 hence the neat schemes to which it
 conforms.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.244, my
 underlining).

In a superficial reading of the above one might be forgiven for assuming an apparent contradiction because if a poet has to borrow a

poetic feature, rhyme, from another culture, and this is used "deliberately" with "neat schemes", it would imply that it is at best contrived and therefore could not possibly "come(s) very naturally".

Yet, on deeper assessment, one would have to concede that in any well-written poem deliberate patterns do not sound contrived. It is only the forced patterns that sound artificial. One often finds rhyme at the beginning of a sentence in Zulu and Xhosa poetry. End rhyme is very rare in Zulu and Xhosa traditional poetry. This feature is more typical of modern poetry.

Again, whereas a superficial observer might fail to see the interrelationship between rhyme and meaning, assuming that the former cannot influence the latter, Ntuli has correctly remarked that

We feel that if a poet uses rhyme, such rhyme is of greater value if it is not only ornamental, but is somehow relevant to the meaning of the poem.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.283, my
underlining).

Ntuli has also written that

Studies into aspects of Zulu poetry are limited.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.285).

and this succinctly sums up the necessity for further in-depth research in this field.

5.5 Pouring new wine into old wineskins ?

In the previously quoted example Vilakazi's poetry is no better than that of Mqhayi's, whom he criticizes. Yet Vilakazi was charitable

enough to concede that it was "unfair" to compare the poetry of traditional praisers such as the (Xhosa) Mqhayi and (Zulu) Meseni on the one hand with that of the modern (Xhosa) poet, Jolobe, and the modern (Zulu) poet, Ngidi, on the other.

With that in mind, it is unfair to match the group of Mqhayis and Mesenis, with that of Jolobes and Ngidis. For there is a group of supreme poets, who cannot be weighed against each other, each being so different in age and outlook on life.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.348)

Nonetheless, while considering it "unfair" to do so, Vilakazi, himself a modern poet, was of the opinion that it was the modern poets who had "true poetic poise".

They outshine each other in certain points, both in quality and quantity. The greatness of the Mqhayis and Mesenis lies in their combining and using the knowledge and craft of the dead izimbongi, while the greatness of Jolobe and his confreres lies in experimentation and innovation, backed by their knowledge of past history, and in the delicate culture of mind drilled in the study of European literature which generates true poetic poise.

(loc. cit.)

The bias towards European or written literature has already been discussed at some length earlier in this work. Bearing in mind that oral poets did not have pencil and eraser to reconstruct poor lines and that the written records of the earliest oral bards are not necessarily a totally true reflection of their creativity, to delegate them to a minor status when compared with modern poets, is possibly a bit harsh. In this sense then, what was said for the Xhosa imbongi and his art, holds true also for his Zulu counterpart.

Yet in all his recitals, be they of mine personnel, clan or personal praises, he effectively utilizes such a great array of

poetic devices including puns, metaphors, parallelism, various types of eulogues, linking, personification and symbolism that his poetry must certainly rank among the foremost oral literatures of the world.

(Wainwright, 1979, p.167)

It is decidedly strange therefore to read Vilakazi's averment that the work of one of the first modern Zulu poets, Ngidi, suffers not because of the poet's lack of prowess (which might be considered understandable) but because the Zulu language of a few decades ago was "limited" and "undeveloped". Vilakazi in appraising Ngidi's work bewailed

the limited resources of the yet undeveloped language of the Zulu, which is unable to contain all that is surging to be expressed in written words.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.350)

For all that the development of Zulu was deemed auspicious in comparison with other Nguni dialects

a language like Zulu has spread far more than others, while some languages have already shown lack of development. This is happening with Swazi and Mpondo.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.368)

Whereas Zulu was considered capable of further development

The position must be worse with Xhosa, where the great majority are not of pure Xhosa origin, but are immigrants.

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.362)

It is my contention that until the advent of industrialization and scientific concepts introduced by Whites, all the Nguni languages were quite capable of expounding on the poetic themes they had been treating before coming into contact with Whites and their advanced technological

concepts. To "remodel" or "reconstruct" other peoples' poetry as Vilakazi suggests and does (p. 94) is totally unnecessary.

It is better by far to consider that great corpus of Nguni poetry which is a felicitous marriage of the old and new. In an appendix to his Doctoral thesis (p. 401) Vilakazi appends certain praises which he heard recited by others or which he culled from various sources and in some instances he translated these. Among these is a poem entitled Izibongo zikaNdunankulu Wakithi ; Usikhwishikhwishi kwaSivunguvungu which was written by the Rev. M.J. Mpanza eulogizing Field Marshall Smuts. Other than that it was structured in the modern style with clearly identifiable verses of varying length, the content and theme is that of the traditional Zulu izibongo. Included in the lines is the superb praise metaphor (rendered with a typographical error in his thesis).

Umpndompondo (sic) kwazibam zaphezulu

He of the innumerable horns which are
rifles in the sky.

This line represents a brilliant syncretism of two cultures. In Nguni society cattle are, inter alia, a symbol of wealth, but here we see Smuts becoming (cattle) horns becoming guns - symbolizing both wealth and power. Imagery of this rare quality is reminiscent of Joyce's stream of consciousness in excerpts such as

God becomes man becomes fish
becomes barnacle goose becomes
featherbed mountain.

(Joyce, 1969, p.55)

5.6 Traditional and modern poetry concerning current issues.

An extremely relevant anthology of worker poetry by Zulu and Xhosa poets was published in November 1986. Entitled Black Mamba Rising, this anthology is subtitled "Izimbongi Zabasebenzi Emzabalazweni Wase - South Africa" (South African Worker Poets in Struggle).

The poetry is the product of three people, being Qabula (a Xhosa), Hlatshwayo (a Zulu) and Malange (who was neither). Nise Malange, the only female poet of the three, had a Xhosa father and a "Coloured" mother. In the introduction to the anthology (page 5), it is stated that she was mocked by her peers for being neither a "real" Coloured nor a "real" Xhosa. However, it is her poetry that concerns us here.

The three poets have declaimed their poetry "live" at mass-meetings, worker and community gatherings, trade union annual general meetings, at factory strikes, May Day celebrations and at a factory where there was a commemoration service for a deceased worker. The power of an imbongi to incite or mobilize public opinion was quickly realised by trade union leaders and such poets were welcomed at all trade union gatherings and/or cultural activities. Whereas I have often read their work in publications such as "Cosatu News", this is the first time that their work has been collected and published in a single anthology. A study of their vernacular poetry reveals that just as traditional izimbongi were able to convey their feelings about pressing social issues of the day; so, too, were these "worker izimbongi" able to comment quite forcibly on matters pertinent to them.

The introductory poem is one by Qabula, entitled Izibongo Zika Fosatu (The praises of Fosatu). Throughout this discussion, no attempt

will be made to correct the numerous typographical errors evident in the poetry. The poems will be cited as rendered in the text. (For example, the above title should consist of two and not three words). Such minor errors apart, the poetry is worthy of closer study. The word "Fosatu" in the above title stands for "Federation of South African Trade Unions", which federation on the weekend of the 30th November and 1st December 1985 joined other trade unions to become "Cosatu" (Congress of South African Trade Unions).

Numerous traditional izibongo constructions and images are to be found throughout the entire anthology. For example, in the abovementioned poem there is the typical Shakan stanza structure in :

Wena hlathi elihambayo lase Afrika
Ngifike amawele elilelana
Kanti ngabasebenzi

(Qabula, 1986, p.7)

You, moving forest of Africa
 I arrived (and) the twins were crying
 Whereas it was the workers

The kanti Shakan praise-stanza has already been very adequately described, (Cope, 1968, p.54). What is interesting is its use here and in other poems from this very modern anthology. In this poem there is also a "borrowing" from the traditional praises of Cetshwayo because

Cetshwayo, whose skin was dark and hairy, is described as a black forest (ihlathi elimnyama), thus indicating his awesomeness also.

(Cope, 1968, p.38)

Fosatu, the abovementioned federation of unions, is also praised as a moving, black forest in the following lines:

Balekani ningene kulelohlathi
Hlathi'limnyama elabonwa ngabaqashi
balibalekela labonwa ngabasebenzi

Bathi : "ngelethu masingeneni sicashe
Ukuze siphephe kubazingeli bethu."

(Qabula, 1986, p.7)

Run away and go into the forest
 Black forest that was seen by the employers
 That they ran away from and was seen by the
 workers
 Who said, "It is our own. Let us go in and
 hide and escape from our hunters."

(It is again pointed out that all commas, capital letters and other typographical entities are reproduced here as published. Whereas it is not necessary to make excuses for spelling errors and other examples of poor text, perhaps the overriding concern of the publishers was to politicize the "working class", rather than to record poetic passages precisely.)

Another example of very traditional imagery which is found in numerous izibongo is also evidenced in this same poem when Fosatu is metaphorically alluded to as a protective hen with outspread wings.

Sikhukhukazi esimaphikwa' abanzi
Okufukamel' amatshwele aso
Sifukamele nathi
ngalawamaphiko akho angena ubandlululo
Sikhukhumeze nathi
ukuze sihluzele' ingqondo sihlakaniphe

(Qabula, 1986, p.7)

Hen with wide wings
 To protect its chickens
 Protect us also
 with those wings of yours which have no
 discrimination
 Protect us also
 so that we clarify the brain and become wise.

Another traditional reference is to Chakijana, the traditional trickster figure of Zulu folklore.

Chakijana wogcololo
Mpephethi wezinduku zabafo,
Vuka! Uggoke amandl'akho okuhlakanipha
Vala amasango akho FOSATU

Ngoba izitha zabasebenzi ziyakuzungeza

(Qabula, 1986, p.11)

Chakijana gcololo!
Blower of the medicating potions on the sticks
of the fellows!
Wake up! (and) Wear your strength of wisdom.
Close your gates, FOSATU
Because the enemies of the workers surround
you.

In this excerpt FOSATU is depicted as the cunning little mongoose which deceives the slow-witted dupes of Zulu izinganekwane (folktales).

Again, just as black workers are described as rock-rabbits in Vilakazi's poem Ezinkomponi (1962, p.41); so, too, the federation of black workers is depicted as a mole in this poem.

Imvukuzane eyobonwa yizimpimpi zabaqashi
Iza kancane
Ngomgwaqo
Iphikelele ngasezimbonini
Zagijima zatshela abaqashi

(Qabula, 1986, p.9)

(It is) the mole which was seen by the
employer's spies
Coming slowly
Along the road
Continuing obstinately to the factories
They (the spies) ran and told the employers.

It is at this point that truly modern izibongo in all its cultural perspective can be appreciated. In a mock parody of the employers and their collaborators, the poet describes their conversation in Fanakalo, a "language" perceived as demeaning by most blacks. (See "The attitudes of Black and White employees to the use of Fanakalo on Gold Mines" by Radise, Wainwright and McNamara).

Zathi: Basi, basi
Thina bukile lomvukuzane
buya losayidi kalofekthri kathina.
Yah, Yah
What is the Mvukuzane, my boy,
Tell me what is it?

Is it one of the FOSATU Unions?
Muhle muntu.
Mina azi akhela wena 6 room house lapha
Lohomeland kawena.
Thatha lomachinegun
Vala logates
Losikhathi buka yena
bulala yena
Losikhathi yena ngena lapha lofekthri kathina
Zonke lomasheya yena zophela.

(Qabula, 1986, pp. 9 - 10)

They (i.e. the spies) said,
 "Boss, boss
 We have seen the mole.
 Come to this side of our factory."
 "Yes, Yes
 What is the Mvukuzane, my boy,
 Tell me what is it?
 Is it one of the FOSATU unions?
 Good fellow.
 I am going to build you a 6 roomed house there
 In your homeland.
 Take this machine gun,
 Close the gates.
 When you see it,
 Kill it!
 The moment it enters our factory
 All our shares will drop."

One might argue about the relevance of Fanakalo in a Zulu poem but in this context it is quite valid and extremely effective in its satirical rendition of the interchange between the two people. Patronising terminology such as "my boy", "Muhle muntu", and the humorous reference to building a six-roomed house in the "homeland" would be met with derision in the live rendition of the above. As such then, it is decidedly valid and just like Adam Small's poetry in Afrikaans, indicative of poetry in transition.

It is not the function of a critic to moralize. Therefore let the following excerpt be judged solely on its literary merits. Fosatu is depicted as something sent to the workers by divine intervention after they had prayed to both the Creator (literally, "he who appeared first") and to an ancestral shade for a leader.

sacela kuMvelinqangi (sic)
Saguqa
sacela nasedlozini sathi
Sicela umholi, sicela umholi
UMvelinqangi nedlozi basiphendulile
Basithumelela wena FOSATU.

(Qabula, 1986, pp. 10-11)

We requested from the Creator
 We knelt
 We requested from the ancestral shade, saying
 "We ask for a leader, we ask for a leader".
 The Creator and the ancestral shade answered
 us.
 They sent us you, FOSATU.

This poem, like many others in this anthology, then goes on to chronicle events in the "workers' struggle". The following excerpt is a reference to the workers requesting permission to hold their annual general meetings at sports stadiums such as Curries Fountain, which permission has sometimes been refused by the authorities. The unions have thereafter sought court interdicts to grant them legal use of such facilities.

Mnumzane omuhle
ngikubhalela lencwadi, ngicela
Imvume yokusebenzisa
lenkundla yezemidlalo
Sizobe sixoxa, sibikela amalungu ethu ngako
Konke esesikwenzile
nanso i-agenda ukuze wazi
Ngesizobe sixoxa ngakho

(Qabula, 1986, p.13)

Good Sir,
 I am writing you this letter. I request
 permission to use
 this sports stadium.
 We will be discussing, reporting to our members
 about
 Everything that we have done.
 Here is the agenda so that you will know
 About what we are going to discuss.

The poet then describes how the man who refused them use of the stadium is called upon to justify his refusal before the judge. The

judge then rules against him and there is a thinly veiled warning to the "bosses" and the "authorities".

Ungadlali ngomlilo mfana uzosha

(Qabula, 1986, p.12)

Don't play with fire, boy, you will be burnt.

The intensely political nature of such poetry is evident in lines such as

Sihole FOSATU usiyise laphe silangazele khona.
Ngisho nasePalamende nguwe oyilizwi lethu.

(Qabula, 1986, p.14)

Lead us FOSATU and take us there where we so
ardently desire
I mean even in Parliament it is you who is our
voice.

Fosatu is also depicted with religious images of salvation which almost sanctifies it by being praised by association with Moses and Canaan.

.....nguwe uMosi wethu.
.....singene nakweluthu (sic) iKhenani

(Qabula, 1986, p.14)

.....you are our Moses
.....and we enter into our Canaan.

This religious imagery is continued in a reference to the Red Sea. There is now an incitement to violence but it is almost suggested that such violence would be justifiable, as though it were a Jihad or "Holy War".

.....uyobathela nakolubomvu ulwandle.
Baklinye ungabadedeli baze balikhulume iqiniso
lokuthi bawadlalani amandla abasebenzi
bangawakhokheli,

(Qabula, 1986, p.14)

..... and throw them into the Red Sea

Strangle them and don't let go until they tell
the truth about why they dissipate the strength
of the workers without paying them.

The poem is then concluded with a new, political oral formula.

Bayethe!
Amandla kubasebenzi!

(Qabula, 1986, p.14.)

Hail!
Power to the workers!

Just as this poem was recited live at the Annual General Meeting of the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union at the Edendale Lay Centre in Pietermaritzburg in 1984, so was Qabula's next poem in this anthology, Impilo Ngumalalephenduka, recited at the Annual General Meeting of the Metal and Allied Workers Union at the Curries Fountain Stadium in 1984. The poem, a migrant worker's lament, has many spelling errors, which errors in all probability are the publisher's and not those of the poet. The opening stanza is

Lixo, (sic) uma ngabe nqikonile (sic) ngixolele
Imfuyo yami-izinkomo
Izimvu nezimbuzi sekufile
Angazanga ukuthi ngenzenjani
U'mdali ngixolele

(Qabula, 1986, p.15)

Lord if I sinned against you, forgive me.
My live-stock, cattle
Sheep and goats are dead.
I did not know what to do
Creator, forgive me.

The persona then continues with a listing of his travails

Izingane zami azisafundi
Azinancwadi azinazingubo zesikole

(Qabula, 1986, p.15)

My children are no longer at school
They have no books, they have no school
uniforms

whereupon he takes whatever action he can to secure employment

Ngaya e Wenela

Ngaya nase silo.

(Qabula, 1986, p.15)

I went to Wenela

 I even went to Silo

Wenela above is a reference to a section of Teba (The Employment Bureau of Africa) which latter name, incidentally, originated from Harry Taberer, one of the first recruiters of black labour for the gold mines. The poet, perhaps unconsciously, gives an indication of his plight when he says "I even went to Silo." Silo refers to the Sugar Industry Labour Organisation and whereas men traditionally would go to work on the gold mines, Transkeian youths would work in the sugar cane fields of Natal. This is a point that Qabula, a Xhosa from Flagstaff in Transkei, would only be too aware of and it implies that the persona was prepared to humble himself to obtain work; to no avail. The persona then looks for work on the Reef and

Emva kwesikhathi eside
Nqawuthola (sic) wangilahlekela masinye
Ngoba nganginge naso (sic) isipesheli

(Qabula, 1986, p.15)

After a long time
 I got work which I soon lost
 Because I didn't have a "Special".

The "Special" that is referred to is a permit to work in the urban areas. However, he then secured casual employment which he also lost because

Kepha amablackjacks afika angibpipha (sic)

(Qabula, 1986, p.15)

But the black-jacks came and arrested me.

The reference to the black-jacks is to black Administration Board policemen who used to be dressed in a black uniform when raiding for Pass Law "offenders".

Uma sengiphumile ejele ngafuna futhi

(Qabula, 1986, p.15)

When I came out of jail I searched again

and

Nomqashi wajabula

Wanginika incwadi yokulanda imvume ekhaya

(Qabula, 1986, p.16)

And the employer, too, was happy
He gave me a letter to fetch a work permit from
home

but

Wathi umabhalane: "Ngiyazibona izincwadi".

Waqubeka : "Hamba ngokuthula ndoda",

Kwafanele ngimunike uBrandy no beer nenyama

Ukuze akwazi ukufunda amaphepha ami.

(Qabula, 1986, p.16)

The clerk said, "I see the letters"
He added, "Go in peace, man."
I had to buy him brandy and beer and meat
So that he could read my papers.

Such bribery was the final straw because

Ngajoyina inyunyana ukulwa nomqashi

Yabe ingekho enye indlela mdali

Umhlaphazi (sic) suka kumini (sic).

(Qabula, 1986, p.16)

I joined the union to fight the employer
For there was no other way, Lord,
Persecutor, leave me alone!

On page twenty one in another of Qabula's poems from the same anthology, Ukufa isitha soluntu nendalo (Death, the enemy of common people and creation), death is referred to in the opening couplet with the praise images of

Isilwane esingumhlola

Esingabonwa ngamehlo.....

(Qabula, 1986, p.21)

Marvellous animal
That is not seen with the eyes.....

but is immediately criticised for its indiscriminate selection of
victims including

Abantu abalusizo kithi
Uyabazonda uyabalulala kufa
.....
Amaqhawwe ezizwe
.....
Abenzi bemfanelo nokulunga
.....
Ubathuthela emathuneni

(Qabula, 1986, p.21)

People who are a help to us
You hate, you kill, death
.....
Heroes of the nations
.....
Doers of propriety and righteousness
.....
You carry them to (their) graves.

Death is then "praised" in typical traditional izibongo imagery,
including the repetitive structure of oral declamations.

.....uyinkuzi (sic) engavinjwa
Umachusha kuvaliwe,
Umangena kuvaliwe,
Aphume kusale izililo

(Qabula, 1986, p.23)

.....you are a bull (whose path) is not
blocked
He who winds his way through where it is
closed,
He who enters where it is closed,
Who goes out and lamentations remain.

Possibly the most important poem of this anthology is Hlatshwayo's
poem recited at the Dunlop strike in November 1984. It is entitled
Yavuka yagoqana imamba emnyama kwalala uyaca (The coiled black mamba
awoke and an array of similar objects fell down). It is also from

this poem that the title of the anthology "Black Mamba Rising" is derived. To fully appreciate the significance of this, one has to be cognizant of the Zulu maxim ukuvusa indlondlo (to awaken a horned viper) which has similar connotations to the expression "to stir up a hornet's nest".

In the second stanza it is claimed that the new Jerusalem and the heaven above approve of the workers' struggle

.....nabaseJerusalem
Elisha
Bathi makubenjalo basebenzi!
Nezulu eliphezulu liyavuma

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.29)

Even those of the new Jerusalem
 Say, "Let it be so, workers!"
 And the heaven above agrees.

The next stanza is a comment on the plight of domestic workers who tend to the household chores of others while their own homes are neglected.

Ngudungudu mfazi ongalotsholwanga
Olibele ukubilisa izimbiza zabezizwe
Ezakubo zibe zibanda.

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.29)

Ngudungudu, the woman for whom no bride-wealth
 was paid
 Who wasted time boiling the pots of the
 foreigners
 Yet those of her own remained cold.

The "Black Mamba Rising" is, of course, a metaphorical allusion to black workers and there is a couplet which forms an entire stanza in praise of the mamba. This couplet would not have been incongruous in the praises of any Zulu chief of yesteryear.

Mamba emnyama ebhace ngamahubo
Ezinye zibhaca ngemithi

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.29)

Black mamba which sheltered in the sacred songs
(Whereas) others shelter in the trees.

Again, the following lines from this poem would also not have been out of place in the izibongo of Dingiswayo, the son of Jobe, of the Mthethwa clan

Bathi ndlondloni le?
Efa ivuke njengedangabane

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.29)

What type of horned viper do they say this is?
Which died and arose again like the dangabane
plant.

The opening line of Dingiswayo's praises is

UMafavuke njengedabane,

He who died and rose again like the dabane
plant.

(Cope, 1968, pp. 122-123)

Cope, in a footnote, comments on this plant

Dabane, or dangabane, a plant which withers and
recovers again. This refers to his miraculous
return after his father's death, to take the
chieftainship.

(Cope, 1968, p.122)

Like the aforementioned plant, the black mamba was stabbed at Sydney Road (where the Dunlop strike occurred) and

Kwahleka wena mpimpi

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.30)

And you, spy, laughed.

Then follows a perfect example of a Shakan praise stanza with its kanti twist

E - Auckland Park ko T.V.
Bethi asisekunyakaza,

Bethi asisekululama,
Bethi asisekubuya
Kanti yilapho izodlondlobala

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.30)

At Auckland Park on T.V.
 They said it will never move again
 They said it will never recover
 They said it will never return
 Whereas it is there that it will stand ready to
 strike!

The repetitive structure of the above passage is also that of traditional praises. The very next stanza is again one that, were it not for names of present day towns and people, could as easily have come from the praises of deceased chiefs.

Ndlondlo evuke ekuseni eSt. Antonys(sic)
Isimakhandakhanda
Elinye balikhomba eMobeni
UNjakazi ithole eliluhlaza leMAWU
Unokufakaza.
Elinye balikhombe kubaQulusi eMnambithi
Lapho selivuke selingumlilo.

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.30)

Horned viper which awoke in the morning at St.
 Anthony's
 It was multi-headed
 The one (head) they pointed out at Mobeni
 Njakazi, the calf of MAWU in the prime of its
 life,
 He can testify to this
 The one (head) they pointed out at the Qulusi
 at Ladysmith
 Where on awakening it was already a fire.

The mixed metaphor of the multi-headed horned viper which on awakening was a fire, the mentioning of MAWU (The Metal and Allied Workers Union), the names of places such as St. Anthony's, (a community centre in Boksburg) and Mobeni and Ladysmith in Natal, are all details commemorating the struggle of the black working class.

There is another mixed metaphor when the black mamba is referred to
 as

Mkhonto owaduma ekuseni
E St. Antonys (sic)
Wadla ndodana, wadla ndodakazi

Uwadla uwayenga ngehubo.

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, pp.30-31)

Assegai which thundered in the morning
 At St. Anthony's.
 It devoured a son, it devoured a daughter

 Devouring them, enticing with a hymn.

The poet pulls no political punches in the lines

Namuhla bathi uyiBantu
Ngakusasa bathi uyiKhomanisi
Nganhlanye bathi uyiNative
Namhla bathi uyiForeigner
Ngakusasa bathi uyiTerrorist
Nganhlanye bathi uyiUrban
PURs.

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.31)

Today they say you are a Bantu
 Tomorrow they say you are a Communist
 On one side they say you are a Native
 Today they say you are a Foreigner
 Tomorrow they say you are a Terrorist
 On one side they say you are an Urban
 PURs

The PUR referred to in the final line above stands for "Permanent Urban Resident", a term used in what was colloquially referred to as the "Koornhof Bills". Immediately after this follows yet another mixed metaphor when the mamba is referred to as

.....nyathi emnyama
Esiqu sibushelelezi

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.31)

.....black buffalo
 With a slippery stem.

The persona then tells everybody to proclaim the news

Zimbongi, zithunywa, zethameli (sic)
Gijimani ngazo zonke izindlela

Nime ezicongweni (sic) zezintaba
Nibikele oBotha ePitoli
Nibikele amaqhawe akithi eziqhingini
Nibikele nezingelosi ekudumiseni
Nithi nasi isikhukhula sabasebenzi
Abaqashi bayenzile indaba
Bathinte imamba

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, pp.31-32)

Praise poets, messengers, spectators,
 Run along all the paths
 And stand on the summits of the mountains
 And report to the Bothas in Pretoria
 Report to our heroes on the islands
 Report to the angels in your extolling
 Say here is a multitude of workers
 The employers have done a serious thing
 They have touched the mamba!

They are moreover told to report that

Akukho litshe liyoma phezu kwelinye

Nithi obolekiwe akaphindiselwe

Nithi kusho imamba emnyama.....
Nithi kusho abasebenzi

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.32)

No stone will remain on top of the other

 Say that what is borrowed must be returned

 Say that the black mamba says this
 Say that the workers say this.

The poem is then ended with a very modern concluding formula which interestingly enough (given the militancy of the foregoing lines), evidences an element of acculturation.

Basebenzi baseDunlop nginethulela isigqoko!
Basebenzi baseDunlop nginethulela isigqoko!

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.32)

Dunlop workers, I take off my hat to you!
 Dunlop workers, I take off my hat to you!

Hlatshwayo's next poem in this anthology, Isililo Sabasebenzi (The lamentation of the workers) was recited live during the 1985 May Day

celebration at the Curries Fountain Stadium in Durban. In lines very reminiscent of the A.N.C. slogan Mayibuye iAfrika (Let Africa return i.e. to the hands of the blacks), the poet declaimed

Mama Afrika sabela
Buya Mama wethu
Sesiyizimvanya ezilambile
E-Afrika yemifino

Namanzi siyaswela
E-Afrika yemifulafula

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.33)

Mother Africa, answer
 Return, Mother of ours,
 We are already hungry little lambs
 In an Africa of shrubs

 We are even in need of water
 In an Africa of many rivers.

Later he continues in similar vein, invoking Africa to

Buya mama wezizwe zonke
Buya Afrika yezimfihlo namafa

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, pp. 33-34)

Return, mother of all nations
 Return, Africa of secrets and estates.

The poet then praises the Africa of yesteryear and states that

Mama Afrika asisoze sakukhohlwa
Emapusheni ethu sohlala sinawe

Thina basebenzi siyakulilela
Afrika endala

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.34)

Mother Africa we will never forget you
 In our dreams we will live with you

 We, the workers, cry for you
 Ancient Africa

He then describes the crying out of the workers:

Abasebenzi bayamemeza Afrika
Ekunxuseni kwabo bathi:
"Esidakeni semijondolo yakithi
Emijulukweni yabavukuzi
Emathunjini omhlaba
"

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.35)

The workers call out, Africa
 In their entreating they say,
 "In the rich soil of our shacks
 In the sweat of the miners
 In the bowels of the earth
"

He then concludes with the couplet

Abasebenzi bayanxusa
Abasebenzi bayanxusa

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.35)

The workers entreat you
 The workers entreat you.

In Hlatshwayo's next poem, the workers do not entreat anybody; on the contrary, they warn the "oppressors". In Thina Basebenzi Singabakhathazekile (We workers are a worried lot) the opening stanza exemplifies this.

Vukani bacindezeli
Vukani
Thina basebenzi
Singabakhathazekile
Sabe sithi sisebenza
Ukunciphisa ukungalungi
Komthetho
Isitha sobuntu

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.36)

Wake up, oppressors,
 Wake up.
 We workers
 Are a worried lot.
 We thought we work
 To reduce injustices
 In the law,
 The enemy of human nature.

The following two stanzas continue this vein and have a repetitive point, counter-point structure.

Sabe sithi sisebenza
Ukunciphisa ingwadl (sic)
Yokungasebenzi
Isitha sobuntu

Sabe sithi sisebenza
Ukunciphisa indlala
Isitha sobuntu

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.36)

We thought we were working
 To reduce the aggression
 Of unemployment,
 The enemy of human nature

We thought we were working
 To reduce famine,
 The enemy of human nature

The structure of the following three stanzas is similar except that isitha sobuntu (the enemy of human nature) is contrasted with positive aspects, Umhlobo wobuntu (the friend of human nature). This is a modern form of parallelism. In these stanzas ukuthula (peace), ukulondolozeka (protection) and ukulingana nomthetho (equality in law) are seen as the aforementioned Umhlobo wobuntu, which phrase appears three times in eight lines. The warning Vukani bacindezeli Vukani! (wake up, Oppressors, wake up!) is given six times in the poem including in the juxtapositioning of words in the introductory couplet of a stanza.

Bacindezili Vukani
Vukanzi bacindeli

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.38)

Oppressors, wake up
 Wake up, Oppressors.

There is also an injunction concerning one of the most pressing issues facing workers and unions in this country at this time of depressed economy, namely, the fight against retrenchments.

Masixwaye ukuxoshwa

Kwezindimbane

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.37)

Let us be on the lock-out for the dismissal
Of the masses.

Slogans such as "Jobs for all", "No retrenchments" and "An injury to one is an injury to all" are common in South African trade union circles where it is argued that workers must be "on the alert" for retrenchments because the capitalist "bosses" are accused of ruthless retrenchments to preserve profits. Hlatshwayo's lines are thus a direct reference to this extremely sensitive issue. The poet continues with:

Singaba aboNeil Aggett
Singaba aboHelen Joseph
Singaba aboNeil Alcock
Amaqhawe eqiniso
Yebo eAfrika

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.37)

We can be Neil Aggetts
We can be Helen Josephs
We can be Neil Alcocks
Heroes of truth
Yes, in Africa.

The reference to Neil Aggett is a particularly emotive issue. Daily in my work I negotiate with colleagues of the late Dr. Neil Aggett, a trade union leader and secretary of the one time Food and Canning Workers Union (which has now merged with other unions to form a single industry union, the Food and Allied Workers Union). Dr. Aggett was found hanged in his cell at John Vorster Square in 1982, an event which notwithstanding the enormity of the tragedy itself, has continued to bedevil industrial relations in South Africa.

The other references in these lines are to Helen Joseph, a political activist and to the lesser-known Neil Alcock, an agrarian self-help activist who was killed during an attempt to intervene and create peace between two warring Zulu factions in the Msinga district of

KwaZulu. As an injunction that the struggle must continue, the poet writes that :

Ukwesaba kuyinsambatheka
Isithunzi esibulalayo
Manje, manje dedani
Masinyathele kowenu
Ongcwele.

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.39)

Fear is a confusion of mind
 A shadow that kills
 Now, now get out of the way
 Let us tread on your
 Sacred ground.

After the introductory couplet of metaphors, one learns that the sacred ground is

Ngaleyondlela
Singafukamelwa
KuFOSATU
Ngaleyondlela singakhuliswa
KwiCCAWUSA
Ngalenyondlela singakhuthazwa
KwiCUSA

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.37)

In that way
 We can be given shelter to
 By FOSATU
 On that road we can be caused to grow
 by CCAWUSA
 On that road we can be encouraged
 By CUSA

Some of the above terms require elaboration. FOSATU is the already mentioned federation of unions, CCAWUSA is the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union which today, together with FOSATU, is part of the more than thirty strong COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions). What is particularly interesting is the poet's reference to CUSA (The Council of Unions of South Africa). At the time that this poem was composed, CUSA was not a member of FOSATU and there were numerous attempts to merge all union groupings into one. The poet, a Fosatu organiser, was praising CUSA by association with FOSATU. However, on

ideological grounds CUSA refused to join the non-racial COSATU and instead affiliated to the other "black consciousness" union group AZACTU (The Azanian Congress of Trade Unions). They later merged to become NACTU (The National Council of Trade Unions). Hlatshwayo's praise of CUSA here is indicative of FOSATU efforts to have a worker controlled "One Federation, One Country." The poet's strategy is that together

Yebo singakhankasa
Nokhongolose babantu

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.37)

Yes, we can outmanoeuvre
With the Congresses of the People.

Extremely interesting is his use of the word Singakhankasa above.
Khankasa is cited as

Move in horseshoe formation with a view to
intercepting or outmanoeuvring.

(Doke and Vilakazi, 1958, p.380)

The outmanoeuvring that would occur would be in the traditional Zulu military "horns of the buffalo" formation that historians have commented on so frequently. This "Together we shall overcome" philosophy is again evidenced in the lines

Sihlangene singanqoba
Impi yezinkanyezi

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.38)

Together we can conquer
The army of the stars.

because

I-Eden yezizwe
Yi-Africa
Insika yomhlaba

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.38)

The Eden of nations
Is Africa
The pillar of the earth.

Recited live, at the 1985 May Day celebrations in the Curries Fountain Stadium, the effect on the assembled thousands must have been electrifying.

The next poem in this anthology is again by Hlatshwayo, this time in praise of a National Union of Textile Workers' shop steward, Samson Cele, who worked at the Frame Group of textile companies in Pinetown, Natal, and who was assassinated by a hooded gunman during the Frame strike of 1981. The poem is entitled Shwele Samson Cele (I beg your pardon, Samson Cele) and contains the traditional poetic structure of :

Wo! Wo! Shinga laseMawuleni
Iyashishiliza eyenkululeko kwaHalal! (sic)
Kuwe Nqayi kaMagaye
Abayigawule lapho idlondlobala
Yinyama nje eyashabalala

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.40)

Wo! Wo! Wrong-doer of Mawuleni!
It travels far, that of the freedom of Hala!
To you, Nqayi of Magaye
Whom they chopped down there where it towered
with rage
It is only the flesh that is destroyed.

The flesh might wither but the spirit lives on, which spirit is entreated to convey the message of the struggle to God in the heavens. Cele is then praised in imagery that would have been as apposite more than one and a half centuries ago.

USoqili
Indlondlo ebomvu
Umashiya kukhalwa

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.40)

Father of guile.
The red horned viper
He who left behind him lamentation

In fact, the USoqili praise above was first recorded as being in praise of Mnkabayi, probably the most important woman in Zulu history. She was the daughter of Jama, the sister of Senzangakhona and the paternal aunt of Shaka. She died in 1825 aged about 95.

Mnkabayi is addressed as a man in the praise-name Soqili, as the prefix uso- indicates a man. This is significant as a reflection of character.

(Cope, 1968, p.172)

Cele is then praised in the next line as Umdungi, which noun is derived from the verb, dunga, which means to

disturb the peace, agitate, stir up trouble.

(Doke and Vilakazi, 1958, p.175)

His spirit is told to whisper to other ancestral shades

Hlebela uBhambatha wakoNkandla
Uhlebele uMakana wawoNxele
NoMoshesh waseLusuthu

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.40)

Whisper to Bhambatha of Nkandla
 Whisper to Makana of Nxele
 And to Moshesh of Lesotho.

Cele is praised by association with the illustrious figures of Southern Africa. Moshesh was the most famous chief ever to rule in Lesotho whereas Bhambatha was the chief of the Zondi in the Umvoti area of Natal. He led the 1906 rebellion against the imposition of poll tax, in what was then known as Zululand,

Usuyisisekelo somzabalazo
Kusho abasebenzi bakwaHala

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.40)

You are still the foundation stone of the
resistance
So say the workers of Hala.

Hala in the above line is probably a reference to the Frame group of companies.

The first two words of the couplet above require some explanation. Isisekelo means a prop, a support or a foundation stone whereas umzabalazo, which appears in the sub-title of this anthology and many times within the poetry, means a firm stand, a stubbornness or a refusal to give way. For both brevity and clarity it has been translated as "the resistance".

Hlatshwayo's next poem is also in honour of a Frame company worker, Jabulani Gwala, who was a shop steward and organiser for the National Union of Textile Workers (a FOSATU affiliate). This poem was composed and recited at the KwaDabeka Hostel in September 1985 before being published in this anthology. The opening stanza is also replete with traditional praise imagery constructions.

Menzi wamandla
Umngqongqozi wezingoje
Zawobasi
Qede zingqongqozane zodwa
Khula, khula njalo Jabulani

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.42)

Creator of power
Knocker on the precipices
of the bosses
After which they knock each other
Grow, grow always, Jabulani

Umngqongqozi in the second line, which has been translated as he who knocks, also has another meaning of bully. Both are equally apposite in this context and the choice of one is quite arbitrary. The second

stanza is also filled with traditional references to what is to the Zulus a modern phenomenon, a trade union.

Vukuyibambe butho
Lako NUTW
Abake baliqumba phansi
Ngeklwa leRetrenchment
Ngeklwa le-Industrial Council
Kepha lavuka seluwukhozi

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.42)

Vukuyibambe, regiment
of the NUTW
Which they threw down heavily
With the assegai of retrenchment
With the assegai of the Industrial Council
But it resurrected itself already a black
mountain eagle.

The above stanza evidences the kepha "but" or "whereas" twist which concludes stanzas of Shakan structure. The praise name Vukuyibambe means literally, "Wake up and catch it." The poet explains that the National Union of Textile Workers, just like a military regiment, was decimated by retrenchment and the adverse manoeuvres of the industrial council, but like the phoenix bird (or dangabane plant) it rose again. Again, just as in poetry of the Shakan era and in the latter day praises of Xhosa mineworkers that I recorded, a person could be praised as a firebrand, or as a log of very hard, fire-resistant wood, so too is the shop steward praised.

.....khula
Khulakhuni (sic)
Olwake lwabaselwa
Zimfolomane zakwahala
Lwabaselwa zinduna
Lwabaselwa ngosokhulu
Bakwa-industrial council

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.42)

..... grow
Grow, fire-log
That was kindled
By the foreman of Hala (the Frame company),
That was kindled by the indunas,
That was kindled by the important people
Of the industrial council.

However the inevitable happened because the abaphehli (those who produced fire by friction) were hoist with their own petard because

Okumanje selushisa abaphehli

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.42)

Even now it burns the producers of fire by friction.

In line twenty eight of this poem Gwala is praised as Mgabadeli which is both a very old, traditional praise-name as well as being one with many meanings and therefore difficult to translate succinctly. The first published record of it is in the praises of Dingane

Wagabadela inkundla yakwaBulawayo

He usurped the throne at Bulawayo

(Doke and Vilakazi, 1958, p.224)

The two aforementioned lexicographers also cite the meaning of the verb gabadela as to

1. Leap about, jump up and down, prance
2. Act presumptuously, take undue liberty with superiors; usurp

(Doke and Vilakazi, 1958, p.224)

However, it is also a praise that I recorded fairly frequently in the izibongo of Xhosa mineworkers and this single word, more than any other, was the most perplexing to translate because in Xhosa it can mean anything of :

To go beyond one's means in spending; to be extravagant; to become poor through debt; to go deeper in a discussion than the actual circumstances demand; to grow too rapidly.

(Kropf, 1915, p.112)

At this point a minor digression may be permitted to pay belated homage to a remarkable man who in 1899 compiled the basis of what is still

today the most definitive item in Xhosa lexicography; the Rev. Kropf, who so humbly and unpretentiously wrote of his own masterpiece:

I hope that my advanced age and consequent defective hearing may be taken as an excuse for the errors and omissions in this book

(Kropf, 1915, p.IV)

It is extremely disappointing to note that a subsequent editor of Kropf's work excised some of the words from the dictionary before it was published supposedly because

Some of the Zulu names had been wrongly placed by Kropf but these and many others have now been excised as belonging to a Zulu, and not a Kafir, dictionary.

(Kropf & Godfrey, 1915, p.VI)

Men such as Kropf have certainly facilitated the task of present day researchers.

The penultimate stanza, in praise of trade union victories over companies, is extremely reminiscent of Shakan praises such as:

Ngimthand' exosh' uZwide ozalwa uLanga

I liked him when he pursued Zwide son of Langa

(Cope, 1968, pp. 94-95)

and

Lwagasel' uMangcengez' emaMbatheni,
Lwagasel' uDlidlama wakwaMajola

.....
Wath' esadl' ezinye wadl' ezinye;

He attacked Mangcengeza of the Mbatha clan
He attacked Dladlama of the Majolas

.....
And as he devoured others he devoured some more.

(Cope, 1968, pp. 96-97)

Hlatshwayo's stanza is :

Ngikuthanda udla uJames North
Qede wamgubuzela
Ngikuthande udla uFabrina
Qede wamgubuzela
Sikuthande udla Universal Lace
Qede wamgubuzela

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.43)

I like you devouring James North
 As soon as you had done this you covered him
 I liked you devouring Fabrina
 As soon as you had done this you covered him
 We liked you devouring Universal Lace
 As soon as you had done this you covered him

The three companies mentioned above are personified because wamgubuzela means "You covered him." Yet this "covering" has a special significance of

cover (as a dead person by blanket, or a dead warrior by shield)

(Doke and Vilakazi, 1958, p.272)

The final stanza leaves no doubt concerning any sentimental philosophy about "let's work together" in the National Union of Textile Workers' attitude to the Frame Group of companies.

Manje sesikuthanda
Ushaya amaphiko
Phezu kwenxuluma
Yontamo lukhuni oFrame
Khula, khula njalo Gwala

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.43)

Now we still like you
 Spreading your wings
 Over the combination
 Of hard-necked Frame Companies
 Grow, grow always, Gwala.

Another poem by Hlatshwayo was first recited at a Dunlop factory-meeting in October 1985. The meeting was held to honour Mdunge, a Dunlop sports

factory worker who was killed in a faction fight. Even so, the workers' struggle is never forgotten because the opening lines are

Lapho sesigxumazela
Ezitelekeni zomsebenzi
Lapho sesigxumazela

Wawumthola eqoqekile

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.44)

There where we would be leaping about
 At work related strikes
 There where we would be leaping about

 You would find him calmly collected.

It would appear that the poet had little concept of mediation, or else possibly believed that industrial strife was preferable to peace. For example, Mdunge is praised for destroying attempts at mediation and conciliation. I have personally acted as a mediator, chosen by both management and unions, to attempt a mutually acceptable resolution to disputes, but the behaviour evidenced in the following stanza would make any mediation settlement quite impossible. Yet this is seen as praiseworthy.

Ngaso sonke isikhathi ezimisele
Ukuphikisa imilamula juqu
Yabobasi

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.44)

All the time he was prepared
 To enter into strife with the mediators
 Of the bosses.

The poet emphasises this quarrelling with those who attempted to make peace between contending parties by using the ideophone, juqu, to describe this. Juqu means

of sudden cutting, severing, lopping off;
 wrenching; dividing.

(Doke and Vilakazi, 1958, p.367)

Mdunge's philosophy is summarized in the lines

Umzabalazo wesizwe esimnyama
Ubewukhonzile
UMdunge ubeyikhonzile iMAWU
UMdunge ubemthanda uMandela

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.44)

The resistance of the black nation
 he paid homage to
 Mdunge payed homage to MAWU
 Mdunge liked Mandela.

However, the workers are told that

Kodwa manje akasekho
Izimpi zombango zimshwabadele

Basebenzi
Balweli benkululeko

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.45)

But now he is no longer with us
 The faction fights have consumed him

 Workers
 Fighters for freedom,

Hlatshwayo's final poem in the anthology was recited live on the weekend of the 30th November and 1st December 1985 at the launching of COSATU at the Kings Park Stadium in Durban. The poem is entitled Izinyembezi Zikamakhi Umsebenzi (The tears of a creator work). In this poem COSATU is eulogized, inter alia, as a creator of work. COSATU is seen as blameless because many stanzas end with the rhetorical question Pho isono sakho siyini? (Well then, what is your sin?) For example the second stanza is:

Ezimbonini izitha
Zakho zikuhaqile
Nganhlanye obasi
Nganhlanye zinduna
Pho isono sakho siyini?

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.47)

In the factories your
 Enemies have surrounded you
 On the one side the bosses
 On the one side the indunas.
 Well then, what is your sin?

COSATU is depicted metaphorically as "raw-meat", prey for all.

Emabhasini, ezitimeleni, ematekisini
Uyinyama engavuthiwe

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.47)

In the buses, in the trains, in the taxis
 You are the raw meat.

There is also implicit comment on the Group Areas Act in terms of which many black workers have to live great distances from their place of work.

Msebenzi ababusi sebakujikijela
Emajukujukwini
Amadolobha

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.48)

Worker, the rulers have thrown you
 A long distance
 From the towns

Nonetheless waphendulwa (you turned around) and

Uvukile ulele
Abacindezeli bakho
Belokho bekulangazelele
Bafuna ukukuncela
Pho isono sakho siyini?

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.48)

You have awoken from your sleep
 Your oppressors
 Who have continually ardently desired you
 Wanting to suckle you.
 Well then, what is your sin?

The workers are metaphorically depicted as the foundation stone of the wealth of the country, yet they have only swollen hands to show for it.

Izandla zakho sezidumbile

Msebenzi akusiwena na
Isisekelo somnotho wezwe?

(Hlatswayo, 1986, p.48)

Your hands are already swollen

 Worker, is it not you who is
 The foundation stone of the wealth of the
 country?

The poet comments bitterly that the products of the workers' labours are used to oppress them.

Ngamasarasine
Ngamakhwelakhwela
Ngamathiyegesi
Izitha zawo zikubulala ngawo
Umsebenzi wezandla zakho

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.49)

With the saracens
 With the pick-up vans
 With the tear gas
 Your enemies kill you
 With the products of your own hands.

A saracen is a military vehicle and a khwelakhwela is a name indicative of humour in adversity. It is derived from the imperative of the verb Khwela! Khwela! "Get on! Get on!" during police raids.

COSATU is told that the hope of the workers is in it.

Sithi COSATU manje
Ithemba lethu basebenzi
Likuwe sesilindele

Sithi ezandleni zakho
Makuzalwe inkululeko eyodwa
Makuzalwe idemokrasi eyodwa

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, p.50)

We say, COSATU, now
 The hope of us, the workers
 Is in you. We are still waiting.

We say that in your hands

Let there be born a single freedom
 Let there be born a single democracy.

COSATU is then praised (p.50) by association with prominent unionists such as Ray Alexander (incorrectly spelt as Alexandra), Champion and Kadalie.

COSATU is warned against going the way of other union federations which broke up, were poisoned and annihilated.

.....baphi
 O - ICU bodumo 10-1920
 O - FNETU bodumo 10-1930
 O - CNETU bodumo 10-1940
Baqhibuka baloywa bashabalala

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, pp. 51-52)

.....where are
 Those of the famous ICU of 1920
 Those of the famous FNETU of 1930
 Those of the famous CNETU of 1940
 They broke up, were poisoned and annihilated.

The ICU, FNETU and CNETU above were the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, the Federation of Non-European Trade Unions and the Confederation of Non-European Trade Unions, respectively. They operated with varying degrees of success before disbanding.

The poem is then concluded with the following praises:

Nina baqhubi
Bentalasipote

 Nina
Bamakhishi obasi
Hele le
Helele basebenzi
BaseSouth Afrika

Woza Msebenzi! Viva COSATU
Woza Freedom
Woza Nkululeko.

(Hlatshwayo, 1986, pp. 52-53)

You drivers
 Of transport

 You.....
 Kitchen workers of the bosses
 Go for it!
 Go for it! Workers
 Of South Africa.

Come, Worker! Viva COSATU
 Come Freedom
 Come Freedom.

The final contributor to this anthology was Nise Malange, who started working for the trade unions in Durban in 1983. Today she is an organiser for the Transport and General Workers Union. Her contribution was four militant poems. The first of these was Mina Engingasebenzi (I, the unemployed). This poem was published with the error of Mina Enginqasebensi which is the only typographical error that I have "corrected", simply because were it left as published, it would be meaningless. This poem was recited at the May Day celebration at Curries Fountain Stadium in 1985. Her second poem was Umhla Wokugala KuMay 1985 (The first of May, 1985) and it, too, was recited at the aforementioned May Day celebration. Her third poem was entitled Lenkondlo Ingumnikelo Kumfowethu uRaditsela (This poem is dedicated to our brother, Raditsela). It was first recited at a commemoration service for Raditsela in May 1985 after he, a shop steward at a Dunlop factory and Transvaal FOSATU organiser, died in police custody. Her final poem Namuhla (Today) was recited at the COSATU Culture Day in June 1985. The theme of all her poetry is no different to that of Qabula and Hlatshwayo, if perhaps a little more militant.

5.7 Conclusion

Structure is understood as the ordering of the elements within a particular passage. Although Vilakazi wrote that he did "not believe in

form" because it reduced everything "to mathematical formulae", Ntuli, adopting a holistic approach, believed that "content and form cannot be separated". Any facet studied in isolation could not reflect a true picture of the whole. Anyidoho was of the opinion that the "unified structure" acted as a mnemonic device or at least rendered the poem memorable. In assessing the structure of unpublished oral poetry there is always the problem of what constitutes a line and in certain cases researchers have had to make unavoidably arbitrary decisions.

In a study of the structure of Nguni poetry one is immediately assailed by the great incidence of repetition that occurs within both the oral and the written genre. There are adherents to the school of thought that it is repetition that distinguishes oral literature from its written counterpart but a study of Nguni poetry gainsays this theory.

Unlike European sonneteers who strove to conform to a Shakespearean or Italian type sonnet, Nguni poets were quite free to structure their poetry in any way they chose, but this is not to say that their poetry was without form. Indeed, Cope has very adequately discussed the nature of the Shakan stanza. One of the most perceptive statements on the structure of Zulu poetry is that of Taljaard who wrote

Daar kan geen direkte ontwikkelingslyn tussen die tradisionele izibongo - stanzas en die stanzas van die moderne, geskrewe poësie getrek word nie. Ons kry eerder die indruk dat die stanzas, soos wat hulle vandag in die geskrewe vorm van die izibongo bestaan, as erkende vorm aanvaar word. Struktuur - (sic) en stylvorme word oorgeneem en nuwe temas word binne die raamwerk ingepas of gedeeltes van hierdie raamwerk word gebruik.

(Taljaard, 1979, p.97)

There can be no direct developmental line that can be drawn between the traditional izibongo stanzas and the stanzas of modern, written poetry. We rather get the

impression that the stanzas, as they exist in the written form of the izibongo, will be accepted as the acknowledged form. The forms of structure and style are being adopted and new themes are being encompassed within this framework or portions of this framework are being used.

If one compares the structure of praise poetry and modern poetry, one will find that it is difficult to break praise poetry into distinct (one lined) verses and (many lined) stanzas. Poetry is a very disciplined form of literature and even what some consider to be loosely structured free verse, evidences this same discipline.

In traditional izibongo, izimbongi will use oral formulae which they might have created themselves or else first heard when recited by others. For example, it is very common in Nguni praise poetry to hear a chief being compared to a lion or an elephant. The difference between modern Nguni poetry and praise poetry is that in the former type there are decidedly fewer oral formulae. Modern poetry is also more individualistic. What is interesting is that S.E.K.Mqhayi, who wrote both traditional and modern poetry extremely well, wrote more of the traditional izibongo and thereby consequently evidenced a great array of oral formulae.

CHAPTER 6

IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM IN PRAISE POETRY AND MODERN POETRY

6.1 What is Imagery?

Ezra Pound once defined an image as

that which presents an intellectual and
emotional complex in an instant of time.

(Wellek and Warren, 1954,
p.192).

There are two totally divergent philosophies concerning the necessity of imagery in poetry. The first, and certainly more popular is that

Imagery in a poem is a 'sine qua non'

(Bill, 1976, p.79).

Whereas the former view was espoused by a South African critic, the absolute converse was believed by Untermeyer, a more internationally renowned critic.

Some of the most profound poems do not contain
a single image.

(Untermeyer, 1968, p.59).

This little perceived viewpoint was underscored by Wellek and Warren.

One common misunderstanding must be removed.
"Imaginative" literature need not use images .
But imagery is not essential to fictional
statement and hence to much literature. There
are good completely imageless poems; there is
even a "poetry of statement."

(Wellek and Warren, 1954, p.16).

As true as these statements undoubtedly are, the more common perception of imagery (which is equally as valid) is that

We consider imagery to be the hallmark of good poetry.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.221).

This view coincides with that of Cope, who wrote the first authoritative book on Zulu izibongo.

An image is at once the richest and the most concentrated method of description.

(Cope, 1968, p.39).

A less evaluative yet more definitive description of imagery is that of Heese and Lawton who have said of it that it is

a reference to or a description of something concrete by means of which the writer wishes to tell you about something else.

(Heese and Lawton, 1978, p.62).

Whereas the above definition has concentrated on the "concrete", Wellek and Warren have noted (1954, p.191) that imagery can also be an evocation of the senses of sense, heat and movement and nowhere in Nguni poetry is this to be found more explicitly than in the ideophone, that strange yet indispensable tool which in the hands of skilled poets stimulates many different sensual responses.

Yet the ideophone, a stylistic device probably largely unheard of in Western countries, is but one facet of imagery. Imagery includes symbolism, synaesthesia, personification, metonymy, simile, synecdoche and metaphor. One needs therefore to examine certain of these features more closely and to determine the extent and efficacy of their usage in Nguni poetry.

However, before doing so it is worth noting that much has been written on each individual aspect of imagery in European poetry, and some of the terminology of American critics when discussing this same feature can lead to a certain amount of confusion. For example, Wellek and Warren discuss the concept of "tied" and "free" imagery.

Finally, there is the distinction, useful for the reader of poetry, between "tied" and "free" imagery: the former, auditory and muscular imagery necessarily aroused even though one reads to himself (sic) and approximately the same for all adequate readers; the latter, visual and else, varying much from person to person or type to type.

(Wellek and Warren, 1954, p.191).

They go a stage further and on the same page discuss various other types of imagery which they construe as being, inter alia, "static imagery", "kinetic or dynamic imagery," and "synaesthetic imagery". Naturally, unless readers elsewhere know the definitions of such terminology, confusion is almost inevitable. This is not to imply that the two authors do not define their concepts but it indicates that a single entity can be viewed variously and with subdivisions.

Imagery has been dealt with in numerous ways, but one of which is to see it as a set of types which include "Sunken" or "Violent". Wellek and Warren cite Henry Wells where

His seven types of imagery, arranged in his own order, are : the Decorative, the Sunken, the Violent (or Fustian), the Radical, the Intensive, the Expansive, and the Exuberant.

(Wellek and Warren, 1954, p.206).

One needs therefore to look at certain of these "types", but in doing so to simultaneously use more conventional terminology.

6.2 The various types of imagery and their usage in Nguni poetry

6.2.1 Simile

Simile has been defined as

The comparison of two things of different categories . . . because of a point of resemblance and because the association emphasizes, clarifies or in some way enhances the original.

(Shipley, 1970, p.304).

It has also been seen as a

unification of disparate ideas.

Furthermore, Ntuli (1977, p.177) and Nowotny (1968, p.51) have, among others, recognized that there is a very close affinity between similes and metaphors, which are but two of the numerous subdivisions of what is understood as "imagery". Whereas in English the immediate signals of an impending simile are the words "like" or "as", in Nguni they are introduced by formatives such as njenga - .

It is, of course, to be understood that similes indicate aspects that are considered to be similar, not identical. Therefore without any comment whatsoever on the sensitive issue of whether the following simile is apposite, when Vilakazi says of blacks

. . . . ngisho nonwele
Luqoqene njengolwemvu

(Vilakazi, 1965, p.84).

. . . . even the hair
Was coiled like that of sheep

this prompts Ntuli's criticism that

This comparison gives no problem
to the people who are used to

black sheep. Otherwise the mention of a sheep's hair recalls a white colour because this is a dominant feature when one looks at a white sheep from a distance. It sounds a bit absurd, therefore, to see a comparison between a Blackman's black hair and sheep's white wool.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.181).

In this regard one is reminded of Shelley's statement concerning the language of poets.

Their language is vitally metaphorical;
that is, it marks the before unapprehended
relations of things and perpetuates their
apprehension,

(Sitwell, 1943, p.41).

In this sense then, Ntuli is, in my opinion, incorrect. Similes depict similarities and not precise exactitude in every respect. Vilakazi's comparison was between hair "coiling" and not hair "colouring", yet it must be added that all this is said without making any comment whatsoever on the suitability or sensitivity of the said simile. In this instance the quibble is about the colouring of wool and hair, being white and black respectively. Similarly, in KwaDedangendlale, Vilakazi describes a scene where rocks are covered with moss

Eluhlaz' enjengoboya
Bemvan' esanda-kuzalwa

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.16).

Green like the fleece
Of a newly-born lamb

Using the above argument, this simile could also be criticised on the grounds that lamb's wool is not green. But then similes can, and often do shock; sometimes deliberately so, with startling efficacy. For

example, in describing the death of the Zulu King, Solomon, Vilakazi wrote

. . . . wonk' uZulu
Unyanyamfuz' okwezimpethu,

(Vilakazi, 1965, p.25).

. . . . the entire Zulu nation
Mills around like maggots,

he used a simile which the prurient would object to if considered used with reference to them.

Untermeyer, for one, had greater faith in the efficacy of metaphors than similes

A metaphor is usually more
effective than a simile because
it makes an instant comparison
and an imaginative fusion
of two objects without the use
of explanatory prepositions.

(Untermeyer, 1968, p.225).

Certainly metaphors do demand more of one's intellect than similes because the latter point out the specific aspect referred to; as in the beautiful parallel in the praises of Mpande, a former Zulu King.

UMakhalimakhande njengezulu
Lona limakhalima, limandindizela

(Msimang, 1981, p.53).

He who grumbles and strikes just like the
heavens do
Which thunder and rumble

The simile is particularly effective in that it incorporates a vivid image of the distant rumbling of a thunderstorm before a sudden flash of devastating lightning. The praise name, UMakhalimakhande, (a single word) is itself a succinct synthesis of what necessitates a number of English words in translation.

Similes and metaphors derived from celestial elements are very common in Nguni poetry, as in the metaphorical reference to Senzangakhona as

Ilang' eliphume linsizwa,
Lithe liphezulu lansasa,
Selifun' ukwothiwa mizimbazimba.

Sun that came forth shining brightly,
 And when it was high it spread out its rays,
 Seeking to supply warmth to many bodies.

(Cope, 1968, pp. 76-77).

Zulu izimbongi have also praised chiefs as

ilanga limi lodwa ezulwini

the sun stands alone in the sky

or as

Ozulu lizayo

He who is an oncoming storm

(Cope, 1968, pp. 92 -93)

Msimang, in his excellent article, has cited extracts from Dinizulu's praises, which, inter alia, include the random lines of successive similes

Umashesha njengezulu
Ephikelele kwaNdunu
UDlothovu kabhekeki
Ufana nemisebe yelanga
Uciso lifana nonyazi lwezulu
Sengathi elengwe
Sengathi elengonyama

(Msimang, 1981, p.53).

He who hurries just like a thunderstorm
 Which rushes to Ndunu
 Dlothovu cannot be looked upon
 He is like the rays of the sun
 He is the eye that is like lightning
 Like that of a leopard
 Like that of a lion.

Shaka, too, was referred to in "natural" terms, as in the metaphors

Ilanga eliphahl' elinye ngemisebe,

The sun that eclipsed another with its rays

(Cope, 1968, pp. 90-91).

Umlilo wothathe kaMjokwane;

Umlilo wothathe ubuhanguhangu

Fire of the long dry grass, son of Mjokwane

Fire of the long grass of scorching force

(Cope, 1968, pp. 90-91).

and as

usiphepho - shunguza

He is a whirling wind.

In fact, Shaka was attributed with changing the nature and content of Zulu poetical imagery.

Zulu culture underwent a change when the Zulu tribe grew into the Zulu nation. The new tribe was Shaka's creation, and to a certain extent he imposed his own values on it. Chiefs were no longer portrayed by images of small animals but by large animals such as elephants, lions and leopards

(Cope, 1968, pp. 31-32).

Many scholars, including Kunene and Mzolo, to name but two, were influenced by this fact first commented on by Cope. Indeed, such was the influence of Cope on researchers concerning this particular element of imagery that Mzolo was moved to paraphrase him almost verbatim in his Master's dissertation.

The turning point in Zulu history came about when Shaka united the people and formed the Zulu nation. It was at this time that the values of the Zulu people underwent a change. The emphasis was laid on warfare and military prowess. The images that portrayed the Chief were no longer those of small animals, but

powerful, strong and even ferocious animals
like lions, leopards, elephants etc.

(Mzolo, 1977, p.68).

Strangely enough, however, within the same work Mzolo denies imagery that would use an elephant as a vehicle of expression.

As Zulu clans are not at all
totemistic, they do not draw metaphorical
parallels with an elephant.

(Mzolo, 1977, p. 162).

In modern Nguni poetry, similes and metaphors can be drawn from virtually any field. For example, in Izimpophoma Zomphefumulo, one of the many anthologies of Zulu poetry edited by Nyembezi, there is a poem by Khumalo entitled uMzilikazi. In this poem there is a metaphorical allusion to the founder of the Ndebele nation, a man who was formerly the commander of one of Shaka's fighting regiments. He is considered to be a flower, yet there is also a simile in the second line of this passage.

. . . . obembali enhle
Emi okwentandane ogwadule,
Amakha aphelel' esihlabathini

(Nyembezi, 1963, p.45).

. . . . splendour of a beautiful flower
Standing like an orphan in the desert
With a fragrance dissipated on the sandy soil.

Ntuli in his Master's dissertation considers such imagery inappropriate.

It is unfortunate that Khumalo calls
a tough, powerful and dauntless
warrior like Mzilikazi, a flower -
a sweet and tender little thing.
Khumalo, calls Mzilikazi a beautiful
flower !

(Ntuli, 1973, p.52).

If one takes the view that Aristotle did when he declared that the chief power of the poet was the ability to perceive similitudes in dissimilitudes, then one might not regard the flower simile as "unfortunate" but rather as a "unification of disparate ideas". Furthermore, in the controversial lines in praise of Senzangakhona, he too, is referred in somewhat "effeminate" imagery.

Another modern Zulu poet, H. Guma, used flower imagery in his poem entitled Zihlobisa bese zifa (They bloom and then they die), a title reminiscent of the line about the rose that once has bloomed In Guma's poem, man's life is compared to a flower, a sentiment also expressed in M.J. Khumalo's poem Impilo yomuntu (Man's life).

Similarly, both Senzangakhona and Shaka were referred to by traditional poets as

uQangabhodiya wawoMkabayi

(Nyembezi, 1963, pp. 12,26).

which could be freely translated as

Tall umgangabhodwe grass (son) of Mkabayi

Such imagery (in this case, a metaphor), did not in the least imply that they were men of straw. Ntuli gives a perceptive insight to the meaning of the word uQangabhodiya on page 90 of his Master's dissertation. Such a play on words is one of the benchmarks of good Nguni poets.

One of the better known similes of modern Nguni poetry is found in P. Myeni's poem entitled uMafukuzela, in praise of the prominent Ilanga editor-cum-writer-cum-politician, J.L. Dube. The simile is in the lines

. kwaNongoma
Laph' izintombi ziqhibuka njengamakhowe

(Myeni, 1969, p.55).

. at Nongoma
 Where the maidens grow like mushrooms

Should one look up the meaning of the verb - qhibuka in Dent and Nyembezi's dictionary, the only example given of its use is in the expression

ukuqhibuka njengekhowe - to
 grow like a mushroom

(Dent and Nyembezi, 1969,
 p.466).

Yet Ntuli takes exception to Myeni's use of this simile because

This is one of Vilakazi's most
 precious lines, and it is a
 gross injustice for any poet
 to claim its authorship.

(Ntuli, 1973, p.128).

This is indeed a very interesting observation. Concerning the close relationship between oral praise poetry and much good written poetry, one is struck by the fact that whereas izibongo are normally regarded as common property by all and sundry and can be "borrowed" without any sense of injustice, the same is not necessarily true in much modern poetry even if it does partially account for the high incidence of such unacknowledged borrowing in modern poetry. Ntuli's statement can be compared with his assessment that

Sometimes we praised the borrower
 even though he had not acknowledged
 the borrowing. This was the case
 when the poet took for granted
 that the source of his material
 was well known to his readers.

(Ntuli, 1973, p.136),

One could well ask whether this was not perhaps the case with Vilakazi's aforementioned simile ?

6.2.2 Metaphor

Metaphor has been defined as

The substitution of one thing for another or the identification of two things from different ranges of thought
Metaphor is considered by many the basic poetic figure : Quintillian calls it the commonest and most beautiful.

(Shipley, 1970, p.197).

Z. S. Qangule, a present day Xhosa poet, wrote a sonnet replete with both metaphors and conventional wisdom. In his anthology first published in 1970 and entitled Intshuntshe (A long-bladed assegai) there is a poem entitled Amanqaku (Remarks). Thereafter follow fourteen lines of metaphorical allusion and parallelism of ideas being

Ulwazi lufukame ubudenge,
Ubudenge yitrone yobulumko.
Inyembezi ngumthombo wenkathalo,
Inkathalo ihlanjwa zinyembezi.
Intiyo iphuphuma luthando,
Uthando liyeza lwentiyo.
Ukhula lutshaba lwesivuno,
Isivuno sondliwa lukhula.
Ukholo lulwandle lweenkolo,
Iinkolo sisifingo seentolo.
Impilo yambethe ukufa,
Ukufa yileli yobomi.
Ukuba oku uyakwamkela,
Ilizwe ngoko lokwamkela.

(Qangule, 1970, p.2)

Knowledge incubates stupidity,
Stupidity is the throne of wisdom.
Tears are the fountainhead of concern,
Concern is washed in tears.
Hatred abounds in love,
Love is the medicine of hatred.
Weeds are the enemy of the harvest

A harvest is fed by weeds
 Faith is the sea of beliefs
 Beliefs are the deep darkness preceeding the
 dawn of nervousness.
 Life covers death,
 Death is the ladder of life.
 If you accept this
 The world will accept you.

Qangule in his poetry appears to be particularly keen on the use of metaphors in his distinctive point, counter-point type structure. This is again evident in a poem such as Isixhobo esiyinxaki, an excerpt of which is

Umlomo yintunja yobushushu,
Ulwimi yibhuloro yovakalelo,
Umlomo lucango lwengqondo,
Ulwimi yinkanunu yomphefumlo.

(Qangule, 1970, p.26)

A mouth is an aperture of heat
 A tongue is a bridge of understanding
 A mouth is a door to knowledge
 A tongue is the cannon of the soul.

In a poem such as Indlamanzi he describes a drunkard in a series of metaphors and concludes that the British Constitution is a drunkard. An excerpt from this poem is

Niyamazi umfo onxanwayo?
Thulani mna ndonixelela:
Imilenze yakhe ilishumi,
Imilebe yona isixhenxe.
Anehlo wona atyebile
Lincoko Nantsi alicelwa
Sisilumko kwedini asilindi,
Izidenge kwedini uyazazi.
Izibalo zezakhe kuuphela,
Isingesi savunywa naliNgesi.
Ububele bakhe yindlezane,
Umsindo wakhe yingonyama.
Izimvo zakhe yintlabathi,
Ulwazi lwakhe lumbaxa.
Akubila amanzi esiswini,
Enyuka adudule ubuchopho.
Bona bududula umzimba,

Zikhona iinkabi ezinzima,
Zivavanye wena kaninzininzi.
Ziculise izixwexwe zamagama,
Ugqibele ngoBRITISH CONSTITUTION.

(Qangule, 1970, p.44)

Do you know the fellow who is always thirsty?
 Be quiet and I will tell you:
 His legs are ten
 Lips there are seven
 With eyes that see everything (literally,
 "eyes that are fat")
 He is clever, boy, he doesn't wait
 He knows fools, boy.
 Arithmetical problems are his alone
 His English is agreed to by the English
 His compassion is a suckling mother
 His anger is a lion
 His ideas are sand
 His knowledge is a double-barrelled gun
 When the liquor (literally "water") foment
 in the stomach
 It goes up and pushes away the brain
 Which pushes away the body

 There are heavy oxen
 Examine yourself thoroughly
 Cause yourself to sing about the flatness
 of the words
 And you finish up with the BRITISH
 CONSTITUTION.

This poem is replete with metaphorical allusions and metaphors and
 in three consecutive lines we read that

His compassion is a suckling mother
 His ideas are sand
 His knowledge is a double-barrelled gun

(loc. cit.)

Qangule's fondness of such metaphors is again evident in his poem
Amangcwaba (Graves).

Akhedamile amangcwaba akathethi,
Azinzile amangcwaba akashukumi.
Athinzile amangcwaba akathembisi,
Balele ngaphakathi abaphuphi.

Ziinduli zani endizibonayo?
Mqophiso wani owaqalwayo?
Ngcamango zini ezinjalo?
Bantu yini zekubenjalo?

Mhlaba uyingubo yethu,
Mhlaba ukukutya kwethu,
Mhlaba sikukudla kwakho,
Mhlaba uyimfihlo yethu.

Uziginyile iintsana zethu,

Ubaxhwithile omama bethu,
Ubagqebhile otata bethu,
Uzombeke izizalwana zethu.

Siyacela kha usihlebele?
Buphi ububele bomama?
Aphi amancumo eentsana?
Ziphi iingqondo zezilumko?

Sukukratsha ngcwaba siyabuza,
Isondele imini enkulu,
Yokugrajuzwa kweentumbu
Zomhlaba.

(Qangule, 1970, p.46)

The graves are sorrowful and do not speak,
 The graves have settled down and do not stir.
 The graves are quiet and give no cause for hope
 Those sleeping within don't even dream.

What hills are those that I see?
 What promise there was?
 What thoughts were there like that?
 People, why was it like that?

Earth, you are our blanket,
 Earth, you are our food,
 Earth, we are your nourishment,
 Earth, you are our hiding place.

You have swallowed our progeny,
 You have plucked our mothers away,
 You have hit our fathers hard
 You have buried our relatives.

We ask you to tell us your secret.
 Where is the compassion of our mothers?
 Where are the smiles of our babies?
 Where are the brains of the wise?

Don't be selfish, grave, we are asking,
 The great day is approaching,
 Of splitting open the bowels
 of the earth.

The second and the fifth stanzas consist of four lines, each of rhetorical questions, and the third stanza consists of four lines of comparative metaphors. The graves, the subject of the poem, are personified and endowed with human emotions, attributes and faculties.

This poem has been quoted in its entirety to illustrate the incidence and use of metaphors as well as other poetic qualities. However, while it is before us, it can also be used to exemplify aspects

such as its form and structure. A study of these reveals that the introductory words of each of the first three lines end in -ile, the second word of each of these same three lines is amangcwaba and the first quatrain has a rhyme ending in -i.

In the next quatrain, the second word of each of the first three lines is zani, wani and zini. The opening couplet of this stanza rhymes in -ayo and the concluding couplet rhymes in -alo.

An inspection of the third stanza reveals that the introductory word for each of the four lines is Mhlaba and except for the third line, all three other lines end in the rhyme -ethu.

The fourth quatrain reveals that the introductory word of the first three lines ends in -ile and the quatrain has a repetitive rhyme scheme ending in zethu and bethu. The second word of each line of this quatrain consists of the (translated) words, "progeny", "mothers", "fathers" and "relatives". The poem also consists of six quatrains. Because such a structure is obviously not coincidental, it is a good example of purposeful experimentation on the part of a modern poet.

There is also much personification and metaphorical allusion in Qangule's elegy on Advocate D. Kutumela. The introductory stanza describes the sense of loss at his parting.

Inkumbulo iyala ukumkhulula,
Iliso liyala ukucimela.
Bathi amaNdebele manye,
Uthi ukufa kunye.

(Qangule, 1970, p.53)

The memory refuses to release him
 The eye refuses to close
 They say the Ndebeles are united
 They say death is one.

The following stanza is one which depicts personal characteristics of the late advocate. The poet uses esoteric terminology, language not readily understood by the layman, in the first verse of this stanza. This line should be read aloud to appreciate the aural effect of the repetition of -bu and -didi.

Ubudididi kuye yayibubugwididi,
Igumasholo kuye lingumzondo,
Ukugitshima kuye kwakuyimpilo,
Okwayizolo esithi kulihasa.

(loc. cit.)

Delay was something he did not like
 A big but inactive man was hateful to him
 To run was health to him
 That of yesterday was stale food of yesteryear.

Immediately following upon the metaphor of the last verse of this stanza, the poet proceeds with metaphorical references to "well-to-do person" and "hero".

Nonke, bonke, sonke, sasimazi:
Indoda eluma ngolwimi lwakowayo,
Isicwicwicwi esicula isiNgesi
Intshatsheli etshila ngesiBhulu.

You, everybody, us; we all knew him.
 The man who spoke the language of his home
 Well-to-do person who sang in English
 Hero who danced lewdly in Afrikaans.

The last two lines of this stanza are particularly interesting. The poet contrasts a well-to-do person who sings in English with a champion who dances in Afrikaans. However it is no ordinary dance because the word ukutshila is cited in what is still the most authoritative Xhosa dictionary as

A dance of a lewd and licentious character,
 with obscene gesticulations, performed by
 circumcised lads, during the period of their
 stay in the hut.

(Kropf and Godfrey, 1915, p.425)

In the following stanza there is again a contrasting of ideas. (Other) nations are told to fast but "The House of Blacks"; that is, the nation of blacks, is told to cut meat into large pieces for one another. The ancestral shades are told to start a ritual dance.

Zilani mazwe nimkelwe,
Bhongani zizwe nilahlekelwe.
Mzi ndini oNtsundu gixani,
Nina minyana xhentsani.

(loc. cit.)

Fast, countries, you have lost.
 Cry out in distress, nations, you have lost,
 House of Blacks, cut large slices of meat
 for one another.
 You, ancestral shades, dance.

However, it is no ordinary dance because ukuxhentsa means

To dance (done by one person only in a house,
 or by the doctor in public) by throwing the
 body into contortions, while keeping time to
 the singing and clapping of hands of the
 by-standers.

(Kropf and Godfrey, 1915, p.470)

Thereafter follow four consecutive rhetorical questions in the next stanza

Mbubho nina le inje?
Sojonga phina xa kunje?
Lakha latshona livela na?
Lemka kwaphela yini na?
 (loc. cit.)

What kind of death is this?
 Where can we look to if it is like this?
 Did it set while rising?
 Did it go away for ever?

The next stanza is one of personified metaphors, including the mixed metaphor in the second line.

Isinkempe seentlungu sigqugqisile,
Iingqondo zeengqondi zijongile.
Isiqwayi sokufa siyagqithisa,
Iintolo zobomi ziyatshutshisa.

(loc. cit.)

The sword of pain has destroyed
 The brains of the sages are looking on.
 The stick of death kills
 The arrows of life persecute.

There is little respite because

Amehlo makadade ezinyembezini,
Iintliziyo zigxampuze egazini,
Ubuchopho mabuchachambe buqhekeke,
Umoya weAfrika ude uthuthuzeleke,

(loc. cit.)

The eyes must swim in tears,
 The hearts must wade in blood,
 Brain matter must burst open and crack
 So that the Spirit of Africa be comforted.

The poet then plays on the word iqanda (an egg) in the opening couplet of the next stanza. This is done in the idiomatic expression for noon and in the symbolical breaking of an egg (i.e. of Kutumela's life).

Samkhaphela ngobunye emini emaqanda,
Sixhelekile kukuwa kwelo qanda.

(loc. cit.)

At noon, in unity, we brought him across
 the border (i.e. to death),
 We were greatly hurt at the falling of
 that egg.

The result of this was that

Ndazibona iinkokheli zeentlanga zidwelile,
Aphuma amagorha ezizwe ekrozile.
Iingelosi nazo zenze umngcelele,
Besamkelwa kuloo mzi weengcwele.

(loc. cit.)

I saw the leaders of the tribes in single file,
 The heroes of the nations came out in line.
 Even the angels were in line
 To welcome him at that undefiled house.

Thereafter follow eight lines of metaphors where the deceased is referred to variously as a "centre post", a "forest in which to hide" and a "castle of bullets".

Umthombo utshile maqobokazana,
Intsika inqunyulwe madodana
Iqhaji liwile zinkosi,
Kugawulwa owaziwayo makhosi.

Umsinga wentshabalalo uvulelwe,
Isicithi sokunqakulwa sisitshulwe.
Ihlathi lokukuzifihla ligeciwe,
Inqaba yeembubulu ibhidliziwe.

(loc. cit)

The fountain has ceased to flow, dispatch-carriers.
 The centre post has been cut down, little men.
 The brave person has fallen, chiefs,
 It is the famous that get chopped down,
 ancestral spirits.

The tide of destruction is let loose,
 The tuft of long grass on which to catch
 hold, is taken off.
 The forest in which to hide has been
 cleared
 The castle of bullets has been softened.

Qangule effectively uses an interesting metaphor in the last line. One can envisage a sturdy fortress, but one made out of mud bricks which have been softened as by rain. Unfortunately, however, it would appear that Qangule was determined to rhyme at all costs, even sometimes at the expense of logical meaning. For example, in the first of these two stanzas just quoted, he ends the lines with maqobokazana, madodana, zinkosi and makhosi, which mean "dispatch-carriers", "little men", "chiefs" and "ancestral shades" respectively. One is led to suspect that such words were chosen more for their rhyming compatability than for furthering the meaning of the poem. The word, makhosi, precipitated a few interesting discussions. I believe that it means "ancestral spirits" and this conviction is strengthened when in line twenty of the same poem, the ancestors are told to dance

Nina minyanya xhentsani.

(loc. cit.)

The confusion that this word can cause is particularly prevalent for those proficient in both Xhosa and Zulu. In Zulu, inkosi can mean, inter alia, "a chief" and the plural is amakhosi. But amakhosi can also mean

(pl. only) spirits of the departed
(cf. amadlozi)

(Doke and Vilakazi, 1958, p.405)

In Xhosa inkosi (chief), the plural is cited as izinkosi (See Kropf, 1915, p.194). Because this is a Xhosa poem, I believe that makhosi is an invocation to the ancestral shades (naturally some of the most powerful of whom were once chiefs). This translation is also one agreed to by other Xhosa-speakers I consulted.

The poem ends with the following two stanzas, the initial line of which is a metaphorical allusion to Kutumela as the "milk which is always there is spillable."

Ubisi lwasoloko luchithakala,
Iimpukane zahlala ziluhlanzela
Inqatha lithandwa ziimpethu,
Esihle asidleli mawethu.

Kusizungu usishiyile Dan
Ufikile kwilizwe loxolo.
Ndimbonile uVilakaz' encumile,
UMathews ekunik' unqulu,
Ebemil uLetele ezolile,
UJabavu umlomo engawuvali,
Zenisingxengxezele kuQamata.

(loc. cit.)

The milk which is always there, is spillable.
The flies sit and vomit in it.
The piece of fat which is liked by maggots.
A beautiful (dish) is never eaten from,
my people.

It is so lonely now that you have left, Dan.
You have arrived at the country of peace.
I have seen Vilakazi smiling,
Mathews giving you a volume of books,
Letele was standing tranquilly,
Jabavu with a very broad smile,

Pray for us to God.

Comment need be made on some of Qangule's terminology here. He uses an idiomatic expression which is the equivalent of "Whom the gods love most, die soonest." This is expressed in the evocative Nguni metaphor, Esihle asidleli (A beautiful (dish) is never eaten from). He also uses idiomatic Xhosa in the line

UJabavu umlomo engawuvali

(loc. cit.)

which literally means

Jabavu was never closing his mouth

but which figuratively means that he was smiling.

The poem concludes with deceased Xhosa and Zulu poets such as Jabavu and Vilakazi welcoming Dan Kutumela to the land of ancestral spirits.

In the "Native Teachers' Journal" of January, 1949 there is a poem entitled Izibongo zeMfundo by S. Ntshingila who sees education as dual shield and buckler-type metaphors

Nasisikhali samadoda
Nasisihlangu samaqhawe

(Ntshingila, 1949, p.54).

Here is a weapon of the men
Here is a shield of the heroes

This poem is a combination of traditional and modern Zulu poetry and through the skilful use of poetic initiative he revitalizes old praise imagery and says of education that it is a raging fire. This is an allusion to the Shakan umlilo wothathe (fire of the long grass) metaphor. Ntshingila borrows again from his traditional background and alludes to the "raging fire crossing fords" metaphor of Zulu clan

praises which also evidences the structural feature of final - initial linking in

Ngawubon' uwel' amazibuko
Amazibuk' angawelwa

(loc. cit.)

I see it (the fire) crossing the fords
The fords which are not crossed.

In this modern, written poem there is a trace of personification or animation. Ntshingila's use of "swallowing monster" imagery would make his poem quite at home both structurally and thematically, among Shakan izibongo, particularly in the lines

Unodum' olukhulu impela,
Ngokugwiny' izingane zabantukazana,
Wagwiny' izingane zabanumzane,
Wathusagwiny' (sic) ezinye
Wagwiny' ezinye
Wath' usagwiny' ezinye
Wagwiny' ezinye

(loc. cit.)

You have great fame, indeed
Through swallowing children of people of
no consequence
You (even) swallowed the children of the
headmen
While swallowing some
You swallowed others
While swallowing some
You swallowed others

In this poem education has been metaphorically alluded to variously as weapons, shields, a raging fire and a swallowing monster.

Descriptive metaphors that very interestingly evidence the structural feature of repetitive statements, are encountered in the praises of Sarili, the Xhosa chief. Excerpts include

NguNganawa e zavalel' amaJoni,
zaya zawakhupha kwaSomtseu;
'kuz' amaBhac' alwe namaNgutyana
.....

NguNcwadi zaphambana kwelikaXam;
'kuz' amaBhac' alwe nama Ngutyana.

He is ships that blocked the soldiers
 and drove them up to Port Shepstone;
 hence the Bhaca fought the Ngutyana
 people.

.....
 He is documents that crossed at Monitor's
 ford;
 consequently the Bhaca fought the Ngutyana
 people.

(Kuse, 1979, pp. 218 - 219).

One of the most pervasive couplets of Xhosa oral poetry which is
 heard time and again in the oral declamations of Xhosa miners working on
 various goldmines across the Reef is

Umntu ovuk' emini akabonanga nto
Engayibon' inamba icombuluka.

The person who awakens at midday
 has seen nothing.
 If he has not seen the python uncoiling.

When these lines are recited in the personal izibongo of the miners
 concerned and when they are asked to explain the meaning thereof, the
 praisers have invariably been at a loss to do so. Only one person, a
 female indigenous healer in Soweto, hazarded a guess suggesting that it
 might mean that "the early bird catches the worm." Yet probably
 unbeknown to all the migrant workers who used this couplet in their own
 personal izibongo, it originated from the metaphorical allusion to the
 long dead chief, Sarili, who was referred to as a python in these lines
 (which are rendered in the orthography in which they were published).

YiNamb' e nkul' e jikel' iHohita;
O vuk' emini akabonanga nto,
kub' engayibonang' inamb' icombuluka.

He is the Python that is huge, surrounding
 the Hohita (place);
 the late riser has not seen anything,
 since he has not seen the python uncoil.

(Kuse, 1979, p.217).

Perhaps the most famous and certainly most memorable passage of Xhosa metaphorical poetry was that of S.E.K. Mqhayi's salutation of the Prince of Wales when he visited South Africa in 1925. This poem is to be found on pages 70-73 of Mqhayi's anthology Inzuzo (A Profit), which was published in 1974. February's translation is

Ah Britain, Great Britain
 Great Britain of the endless sunshine
 She hath conquered the oceans and laid them
 low;
 She hath drained the little rivers and lapped
 them dry;
 She hath swept the little nations and wiped
 them away;
 And now she is making for the open skies.
 She sent us the preacher: she sent us the
 bottle,
 She sent us the Bible, and barrels of brandy;
 She sent us the breechloader, she sent us the
 cannon;
 O, Roaring Britain which must we embrace?
 You sent us the truth, denied us the truth;
 You sent us the life, deprived us of life,
 You sent us the light, we sit in dark,
 Shivering, benighted in the bright noonday sun.

(February, 1970, p.286).

This extremely rich passage has the typical izibongo construction of point, counter-point with parallelism where the "Bible" and "barrels of brandy", for example, are contrasted. The coming into contact with such conflicting values was later reiterated by both Zulu and Xhosa novelists in works such as R.R.R. Dhlomo's Indlela Yababi. The poem is rich in synecdoche-type metaphors of "the bottle" etcetera, obvious enough to obviate further elaboration.

There is a structural quality to certain izibongo, both Zulu and Xhosa, when the imbongi, acting as a social commentator, postulates his ideas with point and counter-point. An excerpt of poetry very similar,

structurally, to that of Mqhayi's, is in the praise of Sarili. The anonymous imbongi commences with a metaphor before continuing with rhetorical questions.

Hash'e lingwevu!
Ndim ndodwa n' o mdal' ebantwini?
Nithe ezi zinto ndizazi nganto
ni na, bethu;
iinto zonke zindongamele nje?
Kundongamel' ukulima nokulamba
Bundongamel' ubuntu nobukhosi
Bundongamel' ubuhle nobuciko
Kundongamel' ukuphatha nokulawula.
Bundongamel' ubukhulu nokuduma.

Horse which is grey!
 Am I the only one who is old among the
 people?
 How happens it, dear ones, that I know
 these things;
 seeing that all things tower over me ?
 Plowing or starving tower over me.
 Humaneness and royalty tower over me.
 Beauty and oratory tower over me.
 To reign and to rule tower over me.
 Greatness and fame tower over me.

(Kuse, 1979, pp. 219 - 220).

Mqhayi's poem is also reminiscent of Vilakazi's lines

Wo, ngitshele mntanomlungu
Yini yonke len' engiyibonayo ?

(Vilakazi, 1972, p.7).

Oh, tell me child of a white person
 What is all this I see ?

In Mlung' Ungazikhohlisi ! (White person, don't deceive yourself!),
 J.C. Dlamini metaphorically alludes to a "lamp" and a "shadow" in the
 admonitory lines.

. . . . angikwazi ukuthenga
Elimhlophe ibala ngelimnyama,
Njengawe awukwaz' ukuthenga
Elimnyam' ibala ngelimhlophe
.
Elimhlophe ibal' alison' isibane,
Elimnyam' ibal' alakh' ithunzi;

(As edited by Nyembezi in his undated anthology, Imisebe Yelanga 4, p.31).

. I am unable to buy
A white colour with a black,
Just as you are unable to buy
A black complexion with a white
* * * * *
A white colour is not a lamp,
A black colour is not a shadow;

He then refers to the metaphorical "pillar of truth" in the simile

Kodwa isibonda seginiso simile
Njengentaba yedwala sijamile;
MLung' ungazikhohlisi!

(loc.cit.)

But the pillar of truth stands
With threatening visage like a mountain of
stone

.
White man, don't deceive yourself !

It is at this point that there is a metaphorical allusion to the waters of life which is done with Dlamini's distinctive izibongo-style technique.

Amanz' ahlukile kwamaxhaphozi,
Amanz' engiwagwinya ngibe wusizo;
Ngibe wusizo kubantu bami,
Ngibe wusizo kubaba nomama,
Ngibe wusizo esizweni sakithi,
Ngibe wusizo ezizweni zonke;
Ngikhohlwe yibala ngikhumbule ubuntu.

(loc. cit.)

The waters differ in the marshes
The water that I drink causes me to become
succour
I become succour to my human nature
I become succour to my father and mother
I become succour to our nation
I become succour to all nations
And I forget colour and remember humanity.

It was Mthiyane who wrote an article on the symbolism of water in Vilakazi's poetry but an article could as easily have been written on Dlamini's water symbolism. In this poem the water symbolizes the waters of life which cause the drinker thereof to become succour to all humanity. We have already read of Dlamini's mystical water in the poem

just cited; however there is still further reference to it in the following excerpt from the same poem.

Ngafika nendebé kulomhlaba,
Nendebé ngiyomuka kulomhlaba,
Owangingika lendebé angimazi;
Ngingamazi kanjani ngingazazi,
Ngingahlangana nami ngizedlule
Ngingazi nalapho ngavela-khona?
Igcwele amanz' angandile lendebé
Amanz' acwebile apholile,
Amanz' angukudla okuphelele
Amanz' adliwa ngokungaphangwa
Kwabawaphangayo axhelisa okoju;
Owawathela lamanz' angimazi,
Nowathela imijuluko emzimbeni angimazi
Nowathela izinyembezi emehlweni angimazi.

(loc. cit.)

I came with a gourd into this world
 And with a gourd I will depart from this world.
 Who gave this gourd to me, I do not know.
 How can I know him if I do not know myself?
 Can I meet myself without recognizing myself
 I not even knowing whence I came?
 It is full of rare water, this gourd.
 Water which is pure and cool
 Water which is food which perfectly suffices
 Water which is not to be consumed with
 greediness.
 Those who take it greedily, it chokes like
 honey.
 Whoever poured this water I do not know
 And who poured sweat into the body, I do not
 know
 And who poured tears into the eyes, I do not
 know.

The last couplet of this poem is a reference to the Creator. Water symbolism is also evident in Dlamini's poem uBhokod' Amanzi which is literally a long stick for probing water to check its depth: but it is also, figuratively, the Bachelor of Arts degree. In this poem he describes the water of contradictory words and difficult thoughts. The repetitive structure of this excerpt also bears a closer scrutiny. Nendebé is rendered as the second word of the first line and the first word of the second line while Lendebé is given as the second word of the third line. Angimazi is the last word of the third line and ngingamazi is both the first and the last word of the fourth line, appearing again

as the first word of the sixth line. Amanz' appears as the second word of the seventh line and as the first word of the eighth, ninth and tenth lines respectively.

The opening words of the concluding triplet are owawathela and nowathela (which is repeated). Angimazi again appears as the final word of the last triplet. Such poetic structure could easily lend itself to the "arrow-patterning" symmetries discussed earlier.

Dlamini's izibongo-type structure is again evident in a poem such as Ukutshakadula which means "to frisk about" (as a calf would). The repetitive nature of izibongo has already been discussed in this work and in the fourth stanza of Dlamini's aforementioned poem (1957, p.48) he starts eight consecutive lines with ngi-. Similarly, in the final stanza of the same poem, fourteen of the fifteen lines are commenced with ng-. Another example of this repetitive structure is evidenced in the lines

Kunga ubong' izibusiso zenkululeko,
Noma izibusiso zokungaz' ukungazi,
Zokungaz' ukungazi nokwazi,
Zokungaz isiqalekiso sokwazi,
Zokungaz amathamsanqa okungazi?

(Dlamini, 1957, p.47)

It is as though you praise the blessings of
 freedom,
 Or the blessings of not knowing ignorance.
 Of not knowing ignorance and knowledge,
 Of not knowing the curse of knowledge,
 Of not knowing the blessings of ignorance?

Such language is difficult to follow and is not meant for casual reading. It is almost as though he is contradicting himself, just as in the line Silwa singalwi (We fight without fighting) which is encountered in another of his poems Khumbula! (Remember!). The seemingly apparent contradictions are found in the lines

Ningasethusi,
Nisinyonyobele;
Asinabuqhawe
Asinabugwala;
Silwa singalwi
Silwa nempi yezithunzi
Yezithunzi zenhliziyo
Yezithunzi zengqondo,
Yezithunzi zomphefumulo.

(Dlamini, 1973, p.65)

Do not startle us,
 Do not move stealthily against us
 We do not have courage
 We do not have cowardice
 We fight without fighting
 We fight with the army of shadows
 The shadows of the heart
 The shadows of the mind
 The shadows of the spirit.

Vilakazi also uses convoluted language as well as synecdoche-type metaphors in his poem Ngizw' ingoma (I hear a song) in the line

Bebhem' izinyathi nezinkab' ezizimbedula.

(Vilakazi, 1965, p.39).

(They were) smoking buffaloes and widespread,
 twisted horned oxen

Yet even Vilakazi, regarded by some as a Zulu Shakespeare, was not above mixing metaphors as in his poem on death, UNokufa.

. . . . nom' oklebe
Base bephakuza izimpiko
Bencil' izithupha beq' ilanga
Bethi ngeke ngamehlo simbone

(Vilakazi, 1965, p.73).

. . . . even if the hawks
 Were flapping their wings
 And sucking their thumbs and jumping over the
 sun
 Saying that we would never see him with our
 eyes.

The mixed metaphor of the hawk is surrealistic, almost bizarre imagery. Here we find hawks (which naturally have wings) simultaneously

having thumbs which they suck. They also jump, (rather than fly), and have the faculty of speech, which gift they use in an allusive and paradoxical manner. Another example of a mixed metaphor is in the personal praises of the famous Zulu bard, Mnyamana

uMsuth' ongubo zimawunguwungu
Zinjengezabefundisi bavela kusonta,
USikhukhukazan' esimaphiko
Esifukamel' amazinyan' engonyama

USuthu supporter with your wildly flapping
garments
They are like those of the missionaries
coming from church
The small hen with wings
Who gives shelter to the young ones of the
lion.

(Gunner, 1976, p.84).

Here we see a hen with the responsibilities of a lioness, using her wings protectively to shelter lion cubs. Yet such "dual imagery" is not uncommon in praise poetry. For example, I once recorded a poem in praise of a gold mine induna as recited by Jubase Mbuku, a Mpondo from Port St. Johns. In immediately consecutive lines the induna was praised as both an "umbrella" and as "shade" in

Wena, samblela selanga
Mthunzi wam wokuphumla

You, umbrella against the sun
My shade in which to rest

Some of the metaphorical allusions used in praise of chiefs were quite bawdy, imbued with explicit sexual innuendo which when one considers that they were recited in the presence of both the chief and his people, necessitated a fair degree of daring on the part of the imbongi, who like Shakespeare's fool might sometimes have pondered whether he would escape a whipping. For example, the Xhosa chief, Silimela, was referred to in the metaphor of "(He is) ribs that go backwards and forwards".

UMbambo zemka zabuyela;
ngaphantsi kwelitye kuyoyikeka,
kuba zilaph' iinzwana namadikazi.

Ribs go back and forth;
 (what goes on) beneath the rock is horrible,
 for the handsome are there together with
 the courtesans.

(Kuse, 1979, p.221).

Nguni poetry, both traditional and modern, abounds in metaphors, possibly the most frequent form of imagery. Xhosa clan praises, which I collected for a previous study, include metaphors such as

S'khuni somnga nesomngampunzi !
S'khuni somthathe nesomthole !

(Wainwright, 1979, pp. 103, 114).

Firebrand of the acacia horrida and
 of the camel-thorn tree !
 Firebrand of the sneezewood and of the
 cat-thorn tree !

Similarly, Zulu clan praises reflect equivalent metaphors, the only difference being in the species of tree (usually a hard, fire resistant wood). Again, there are Xhosa and Zulu clans which share the metaphorical praises of being people of the uncrossable sea, river or ford : an obstacle which is only crossed by birds (which fly), Europeans (in their boats) and the eyes (by glancing across the divide). In structure and content the metaphors are similar, the obvious differences being in the use of the Zulu or the Xhosa words to express these concepts.

6.2.3 Personification

Personification is generally understood as the bestowal of human attributes upon that which is not human. It has been defined as

that kind of image where the
 "something concrete" relates to human beings,
 while the "something else" is not human.

(Heese and Lawton, 1978, p.63).

Inanimate technological wonders such as a train, which caused a tremendous amount of excitement to those who saw one for the first time, were often the subject of transitional and modern Nguni poetry. The train would be lauded for its human-like qualities and even be envisaged as a military strategist in images such as "Encircler of mountains". In E.E.N.T. Mkize's anthology Kuyokoma Amathe there is a poem about a train entitled Isitimela (p.48). In this modern poem there are lines reminiscent of izibongo imagery. A train, the subject of the poem, is addressed as though alive

Hamba kahle Masunduza
Ngokusunduza abantu behlezi

(loc. cit.)

Farewell, Mover
 By moving people while they are seated

In this imagery there is parallelism by final - initial linking in the words Masunduza and Ngokusunduza. The concept of linking, first commented on by Cope (1968, pp. 41-44), is well understood by Nguni poetry scholars and therefore requires little further elaboration here.

T.N. Mtetwa, in treating the same topic, (Nyembezi, 1961, p. 43) entitled his poem Umzungezi wentaba, which metaphorical image literally means "Surrounder of a mountain". This is a very clever image with more than a trace of personification, as well, because a long train, through having rail-tracks which encompass a mountain, can "surround" that mountain when passing through that locale.

In Xhosa childrens' oral ditties a train is personified as

Xhegwazana phek' iphapha
Xhegwazana phek' iphapha

Old woman cook the porridge
 Old woman cook the porridge

This beautifully illustrates the halting, jerking movements of the train and in this instance one is delving into synaesthesia where the movement of train is conveyed by the repetition of the abovementioned phrase.

Even in ostensibly metaphorical imagery such as the well known Shakan praise

Ilemb' eleq' amany' amalembe ngokukhalipha;

Axe that surpasses other axes in sharpness;

(Cope, 1968, pp. 88-89).

Shaka is obviously praised as a battle-axe but what is less significant immediately is that the axe itself has cognitive abilities of its own in being able to overcome its contemporaries. Again in the famous iziziba esinzonzo sinzonzobele praise of Dingane, (Cope. 1968. p.34) he is metaphorically eulogized as a deep pool which is silently powerful. It is almost as though there is a transference of human attributes from the person being "praised" to the pool. Consequently Dingane is seen as a "personified" pool with human characteristics of guile and cunning, with strong undercurrents of duplicity.

Similarly, a river is bestowed with human attributes of feminine pulchritude in the Xhosa poem Umlambo, in the anthology Umlu kaPhalo by L.T. Manyase. A lady (the river) is seen as going on a long journey.

Wa, mlanjana wam ! Wa, Mlanjana wam !
Wa, nzwakazi yam ! Wa, nzwakazi yam !
Lud' uhambo lwakho, nzwakazi yam.
Lud' uhambo lwakho, mlanjana wam !

(Manyase, 1960, p.15).

Oh! my rivulet! Oh! my rivulet!
 Oh! my beautiful lady! Oh! my beautiful lady!
 Lengthy is your journey, my beautiful lady!
 Lengthy is your journey, my rivulet.

The repetitive structure of such poetry has already been commented on in the previous chapter.

6.2.4 Symbolism

Symbolism has been defined as

The representation of a reality
 on one level of reference by a
 corresponding reality on another.

(Shipley, 1970, p.322).

and the difference between symbolism and metaphor is that

An "image" may be invoked once as a metaphor, but if it persistently recurs, both as presentation, and representation, it becomes a symbol, may even become part of a symbolic (or mythic) system.

(Wellek and Warren, 1954, p.194),

One of the most skilful uses of symbolism in modern Zulu poetry is that evidenced in Vilakazi's anthologies. In his poem Woza Nonjinjikazi ! from his anthology Inkondlo kaZulu he addresses a train as though it were a living entity. The opening couplet to the personified train is

Woza wena Nonjinjikazi !
Woza mshikishi wendlela !

(Vilakazi, 1965, p.22).

Come, you, Nonjinjikazi !
 Come, scuffling-footed dancer of the
 roads!

On reading the poem one sees that the train symbolizes the inroads of industrialization, the consequent urbanization of once rural blacks and most importantly, what the persona considers to be the exploitation of black labour.

Wen' owathath' obabamkhulu
Wababhungula nakalokhu;
Sathi sibabuza waziba,
Washushubeza ngejubane
Sengath' uvalwe nezindlebe
Utshobeles unotshobeles.

(loc. cit.).

You who took our grandfathers
 And seduced them to leave their homes
 Which when we enquire about them, you
 feign deafness
 You race past with great speed
 As though your ears were blocked
 (And) You disappear from sight.

It was the train that brought the huge machines to burrow the earth
 and even the persona falls into the resultant, insidious pit

Bheka nakhu ngihlezi phansi
Kwexhib' abaphumula kulo
Okade ubaginge bezwa

(loc. cit.).

Look, here I am seated as well
 In the (underground) waiting station
 Where you insatiably swallowed the living.

The symbol of the insatiable swallowing monster, so prevalent among the Sotho and the Nguni, is found in the last line of the above triplet. The train as a symbol of oppression is paralleled by Vilakazi's machines which he addresses in Ezinkomponi, a poem in his second anthology, Amal' ezulu. The introductory couplet of this poem is very similar to the one just discussed because the persona addresses the machines directly.

Dumani mishini yezinkomponi
Nidume ngesokusa lize lishone

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.41).

Roar machines of the (mine) compounds
Roar from dawn till dusk.

The machines symbolize unfeeling exploitation.

Dumani mishini ningalaleli
Ukugquma kwezisebenz'
Ziqaqanjelwa ngamanxeb' omzimba

(loc. cit.)

Roar, machines, and take no heed of
The groanings of the Black workers
Aching with stabbing body pains

In the second stanza he depicts the forging of the monstrous machine in a flaming furnace in another land.

Memeza mfan' omdala kukude
Kukude laphe wabunjwa khona
Washisw' emlilweni kwavuthwa
Wena kwasal'

(loc. cit.)

Call out, old man,
It is far from where you were forged
Smelted in a fiery furnace
And you came forth

A literal translation of the Zulu passage makes one think of the common Nguni folktale where a trickster figure and dupe take turns to cook one another and only one survives.

The machine was obviously foreign to this land because

Sakubon' uwele amanz' olwandle

(loc. cit.)

We saw you crossing the waters of the ocean

and

Wakhala mhla-thize kwaghamuka,
Kuvela macal' onke izimbila
Izimbila zaba-nbala mnyama

(loc. cit.)

You cried out at a certain time and there
 appeared
 From all sides, conies;
 The conies were black in colour

It is quite explicit that the black conies symbolize the black,
 groaning workers already mentioned because

Wazigqum' emgodini wazisenga

You stamped them into the mine and milked them.

The conies were transformed into burrowing moles searching for
 gold.

Ngizwile kuthiwa kwakhala
Imishini kwavela mbib' emnyama,
Emqondweni wayo kuhlwile khuhle,
Yabanjwa yaphendulw' imvukuzane,
Yavukuz' umhlabathi ngabon' igoli.

(loc. cit.)

I heard it said that a machine sounded
 And a black cony appeared
 It was totally at a loss what to do.
 And was caught and transformed into a mole
 Which burrowed the earth and I saw gold.

At this point the first hints of resistance are evoked in an
 oblique reference to Isandlwana (the site of the Zulu victory of the
 British) and in the lines where the machines symbolize sadistic
 taskmasters.

Gegethekani mishin' emidala
Kuhle nisihleka sifuquleka

(loc. cit.)

Laugh, you old machines
 It is good that you laugh at us and we
 become angry.

But it would appear that all is in vain because

Amandl' enu makhulu, niyesabeka
Ningenza ngokuthanda kwenu, siyavuma

(loc. cit.)

Your strength is great, you are
awe-inspiring
You can do whatever you like and we accept
it.

The result is catastrophic

Buphelile ubunumzane, singabafana
Siyabona izwe lishay' ungqimphothwe

(loc. cit.)

The dignity of manhood is gone, we are boys
We see the country standing on its head.

and when he returns to his homestead

Ngathi ngiyagoduka nemithwalo
Ngashayw' amahlanga namanxiwa

(loc. cit.)

When I go home carrying my bundle
I am met by dry stalks and deserted kraals

It is only at this point that the thinly disguised symbolism is
revealed for what it is

Bangitshel' umlung' engimsebenzelayo
Ngathula ngawuhlab' inhlali

(loc. cit.)

They told me it was the white man
for whom I work
I became silent and kept quiet.

He then reverts to the machine symbolism and addresses them
directly.

Ake nilalel' esikushoyo nathi
Ngoba funa singanithetheleli
Ngalowo muhl' engingawaziyo

(loc. cit.)

Please listen to what we have to say
Lest we do not forgive you
On that day of which I know not.

In the ninth stanza the poet referred to the country being upside down, literally having somersaulted, ungqimphothwe, and in the fourteenth stanza there is indeed a volte face.

Mhlazane kuthiwa, zinsimbi
Seniyizigqili zethu bantw' abamnyama

(loc. cit.)

On that day when it is said, machines
That you will be the slaves of us, the
blacks.

At this point he once again addresses the machines in what must be one of the most explicitly political statements of modern Zulu poetry,

Yenzani kahle noma ngivathazela
Kuzona lezizingalwana ngeny' imini
Kwakekwazululeka izijul' ezimbi,
Engazizwiba kwafiphal' umhlaba
Kwanyakaz' umbuso weNdlovukazi

(loc. cit.)

Behave well (because) although I am empty
handed
In these small arms in other days
There once were fearsome assegais
Which when I hurled them the earth clouded over
And it bestirred the reign of the Great She
Elephant.

The Great She Elephant is a metaphorical reference to Queen Victoria whose soldiers once felt the might of the Zulu regiments. However, they were not alone because

Kwancipha abakaPewula

(loc. cit.)

Those of Kruger were (also) reduced.

The result of pitting shield and assegai against rifles, artillery and cavalry was inevitable

Kodwa ngadliwa

(loc. cit.)

but I was overcome

He once again addresses the metaphorical mntanensimbi
(child of steel) in

Ngiya ngiphupha njalo, mntanensimbi,
Ngiphuph' umhlaba wawokok' ubuyela
Ezandleni amanxus' amnyama

(loc. cit.)

I continually dream, child of steel,
I dream that the land of our ancestors has
returned
To the hands of the black representatives.

There is a firmly held belief common among both the Xhosa and the Zulu that the ancestral shades who can foretell the future, visit their progeny in dreams to forewarn them of impending events.

In the poem Ngombuyazi eNdondakasuka (About Mbuyazi at Ndondakasuka) which is in the same anthology, Vilakazi used symbolism in depicting the inter-sibling and internecine struggle for supremacy between Mbuyazi, the son of Mpande, and Cetshwayo. As a result of this disastrous episode in Zulu history, Mbuyazi and four of his brothers were killed, thus depleting the ranks of the Zulu royal house. The titanic struggle having been described, it dawned and night is metaphorically symbolized as "black wings in flight leaving the earth."

Ngacikic' amehlo ngabuka futhi,
Kwakungampondozankomo,
Amaphik' omnyam' ebaleka
Eshiy' umhlab'

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.39).

I rubbed my eyes and looked anew
It was dawn
The black wings in flight
Leaving the earth

The highly poetic, agglutinative word, which has eventually become everyday language, kwakungampondozankomo, literally means "It was (the time of) the horns of the cattle". This is the early dawn when the horns are etched and silhouetted against the morning sky. That Vilakazi chose black wings in flight to symbolize night is not surprising in view of his use of "winged symbolism" in other of his poems. In his latter anthology, in a poem entitled UNokufa (Death) he used the already commented on mixed metaphor symbolism of

. . . . the hawks
Were flapping their wings
And sucking their thumbs and jumping over
the sun
Saying

Another modern Zulu poem with "winged" imagery is Aggrey weAfrika which was about James Aggrey, a Ghanaian, "a bird of the African hills", Intaka yeziduli zeAfrika. He studied in America and equipped with a Doctorate in Philosophy, he visited South Africa on an educational fact-finding tour. His visit was widely acclaimed by black intelligentsia of the time, hence Vilakazi's poem in his honour, the opening line of which was the praise imagery

Intaka yeziduli zeAfrika

(Vilakazi, 1965, p.67).

Finch of the African hills.

Throughout this poem Aggrey is depicted with bird imagery. Whereas in the previously quoted poem the wings of flight were those of death, and in the one before it they symbolized night, in this poem the persona refers to eagles soaring in flight stretching their wings, but in this instance the wings of flight are something positive, namely, educational advancement.

Yathontela phezu kwamanzi
Esibhakabhaka sasolwandle

Iyofunda ubuyangakazi
Bemitshivovo yangaphesheya . . .

Kawuyon' intaka yemifula,
Uyinkosi yazo zonk' izinyoni.

(Vilakazi, 1965, p.67)

It flew high above the water
 In the sky above the sea
 It went to learn the great bewilderment
 Of the red-faced coly from overseas . .

 You are not a bird of the rivers
 You are the king of all birds.

The "red-faced coly bird from overseas" is an obvious reference to whites who had been surpassed by the "bird of the African hills".

Vilakazi's penchant for "winged" imagery is evidenced yet again in his poem, Umthandazo Wembongi (The Prayer of the Imbongi).

O Dloz' elisezulwini
Wena Lukhoz' olubuthise
Amaphiko emafini !

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.3)

Oh ! Ancestral Spirit in the sky
 You, Eagle, who closed
 (Your) wings in the clouds!

The Eagle symbolizes the Muse of Music which is invoked to

Vusa nakithina
Sizwe sikaSobantu
Esiyimisebenzi yezandla zakho

Zibamb' iminyibe yezulu namafu,
NjengoShubethi, noBithovini, noPinsuti

(loc. cit.)

Also awaken in us,
 The nation of Sobantu,
 We who are the work of Your hands

 That we may acquire music of the ethereal
 spheres
 Just like Schubert, Beethoven and Pinsuti.

The reference to Pinsuti in the last word of the last line quoted above, is to Ciro Pinsuti, a well known Italian Romantic composer. One of his songs was recently prescribed for the Ford Choir Competition.

Another symbolic image used by Vilakazi is that of the cutting down of elements of nature, such as trees or wooden pillars, to symbolize the destruction of humans. In his poems on death, the girls are "chopped down" as are the "pillars of the homestead" (which can be compared to the English concept of the pillars of society).

Ngabaleka ngacasha ngomuthi.
Ngabuye ngabona nezabanye
Ziyek' izihlathi zichithela
Phansi nobuntombi bumsulwa
Zigawulwa zinsizwa zendl' emnyama
Ngiyabuza kuwe weNokufa
Wena engikubone ubunisa
Umuth' omkhulu wakwaMakhwatha

(Vilakazi, 1965, p.76)

I ran away and hid behind some trees
 I returned and saw others
 Leaving the cheeks and spilling
 On the ground innocent maidenhood.
 They were chopped down by young black men.
 I ask of you, Death,
 You, who I see withering
 The large tree of Makhwatha.

The cutting down of the pillars of the homestead is reminiscent of the Scytheman of the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, whereas "the withering of the large tree" is an extremely natural image, in every sense of the word. The transient nature of man is evident when

Ngabona izinsika zomuzi
Ekade ziphase nokababa
Zinqunyelwa phans' okoqadolo

(loc. cit.)

I saw the pillars of the homestead
 Which even propped up those of our father
 Cut down like a common black jack weed

In another poem entitled Nayaphi ? (Whither ?), mourning the death of his wife, Nomasomi, Vilakazi asks his deceased brother who, in the form of an ancestral shade, should naturally intercede on his living brother's behalf, to help him find Nomasomi. The persona, not eliciting the required response, then addresses a personified moon

Inyanga iphume ngiyibona,
Ngahlunga ngamehlo ngiyibuza
Yathi ayizange inibone

(loc. cit.)

I saw the moon rising
 I could distinguish it and I asked of
 it
 It replied that it had not seen you

Nguni children are told in folktales about the old, stooping woman on the moon who carries a bundle of firewood. The persona then addresses this figure, to no avail

Nenkosikaz' ethwel' izinkuni
Phakath' endilingeni yenyanga
Ngayiqhweba ngayibuza,
Yangifulathela

(loc. cit.)

Even the old lady carrying wood
 Inside the orb of the moon
 I beckoned to her and asked her
 And she turned her back on me.

In desperation, having gone so far afield as Pietermaritzburg and Durban to search for his recently deceased wife, the persona ends the poem by asking a bitter rhetorical question of his brother's spirit,

Wamebelani uNomasomi ?

(loc. cit.)

Why have you stolen Nomasomi ?

Traditionalists would anticipate succour from the ancestral shades of deceased relatives but here one finds a deceased sibling being accused of theft. Vilakazi obviously had a certain preoccupation with death in his poetry and in his poem uNokufa he personified Death as a cowardly and treacherous warrior and then later as a maiden.

Mamo, uligwala weNokufa !
Ith' imp' iphakwa wen' ub' uhoxa
EsikaMhlangana noDingana
Ugwaz' abangenasiphephelo

(loc. cit.)

Alas! You are such a coward, death!
 When the army is sent out you withdraw
 Like Mhlangana and Dingane.
 You stab those who have no refuge.

Traditional Zulus would know that Dingane and Mbopha (at Mnkabayi's instigation) treacherously murdered Mhlangana. Dingane was noted for duplicity, hence his praise metaphor iziziba esinzonzo sinzonzobeke (The deep, silent whirlpool).

Yet Death is a dichotomy of parts because

Ngahamba ngifunana nawe
Ntombi yokufa, wen' ozandla
Zigcwele zonk' izinyembezi

(loc. cit.)

I went searching for you
 Maiden of Death, you whose hands
 Are filled with all tears

In NgePhasika, another poem on the theme of death, (in this instance through the crucifixion of Christ), the nails hammered through the hands of Jesus take on a personality of their own and are considered

"shameless" - a transferred epithet for whereas the nails are personified, the human attribute is surely of those driving the nails.

Lapho bekubethel' ogodweni,
Usungulo lungenamahlon' okungena

(Vilakazi, 1965, p.2)

There where they hammered you on the log
The spike entering without shame

There is symbolism, too, in Okomhlaba Kuyadlula (That of the earth must pass). Friedman, in her rather free rendition of Vilakazi's two anthologies, prefaces this poem with the following passage

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, (sic) the phantom Princess of Heaven, is the source of agricultural fertility

.....
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.

(Friedman, 1973, p.80).

Although water is a symbol of birth among many peoples of the world, Friedman's concept of the Ur-Mensch emanating from a river-bed "accompanied by his wife Mamlambo (a daughter of the river)" is one unknown to Zulu traditionalists whom I have questioned on this topic. Whatever the status of the mystical Mamlambo, the opening couplet is an invocation to her

Shay' ingoma weMamlambo
Shay' ingoma yemilambo

(loc. cit.)

Sing a song, O Mother of the River
Sing the song of the rivers.

Nomkhubulwane, the symbol of fertility, is also invoked in the second stanza. Although this poem deals with a traditional topic, it is in fact an example of a very modern poem. In the second stanza the persona states that his spirit is like a metaphorical bird.

Inyon' eyodw' ikhala endle
* * * * *
Ingazi laph' iqonde khona
Unjal' umphefumulo wami

(loc. cit.)

The solitary bird crying in the open veld
 * * * * *
 Not knowing where it is heading to
 That is what my spirit is like

We then discover that this bird is in fact the aforementioned Ncazane. The persona then asks the age-old philosophical question concerning the nature of man

Yin' impilo yomuntu, we Muntu ?
Ayinjengamahlamv' emith' eluhlaza ?

(loc. cit.)

What is the nature of man, O Everyman ?
 Is it not like leaves on a young tree ?

before answering his own rhetorical question by saying that it is

Njengephupho, olizw' ulele, ulalele,
Kodw' uvuke selishabalele njengomoya

(loc. cit.)

Like a dream which you perceive asleep,
 listening,
 But which on awakening has come to nought
 like the wind.

Because the nature of man is construed as the simile "like a dream", the hazy reverie in the aftermath of a dream is very meaningful:

Kodwa kusale unandi lokuphupha,
Nenkumbulo yobuthongo bukuzume phansi,

Nokuvakashel' ezweni lamathongo, phansi
kwaButhongo

(loc. cit.)

But what remains is the sweet aftermath of
the dream
And the memory of sleep taking you unaware
down
To visit the land of the ancestral shades,
down in the Place of Sleep.

It is this being stolen away in a dream which would be the
equivalent of crossing the River Styx in another age and culture.

In numerous other poems Vilakazi is a master of symbolism. In
Wo, Lelikhehla he evokes a world of meaning in the first word

Zinesithunz' izinwele zakho

(loc. cit.)

Your hair has dignity

yet Zinesithunz' also means that the venerable old man's hair has a
spiritual essence, a moral depth and influence such as that possessed by
chiefs and elders.

In the very alliterative line

Ngizazifisa zingisus' isizungu

(loc. cit.)

I want them (because) they remove my loneliness

he states that he wants what the aged hair of the old man symbolizes.

In the second stanza he comments on significant cultural artefacts
of the Zulus.

Endlebeni yakho ngibona lapho
Kwahamba khon' uphawu lukaZulu,

(loc. cit.)

In your ear I see where
There once was the mark of the Zulus

Although not expressly stated, one infers that the protagonist
bewails the passing of these symbols of cultural heritage

Namhl' iziqhaza zokuhloba
Uzikhiphile wazilahla phansi,
Awazi nalapho zasala khona,
Namanxiwa lapho zawa khona.

(loc. cit.)

Today your decorative ear plugs
You have removed and cast aside
You don't even know where they are
And where the deserted homesteads fell

Words such as iziqhaza (ear-plugs), intshengula (snuff-spoon),
ezizibeni zikaDukuza (at the pools of Dukuza) are rich in traditional
symbolism which the poet evokes in every stanza.

Even the last couplet of the aforementioned quotation is evocative
of the lines of Dingane's praises

Kuyofa abantu kusale izibongo
Yizona eziyosala zibalilel' emanxiweni

People will die and their praises remain
These then will be left to mourn for them
in the deserted homesteads.

The symbolic association with Dingane is again evoked in the fourth
stanza

Kukude ezihlangwini zawoShaka
Phansi ezizibeni zikaDukuza
Lapho amanzi ezonzobele khona

(loc. cit.)

It is far from the shields of Shaka
Down in the pools of Dukuza (i.e. Stanger)
There where the waters are deep and calm.

The oblique reference to Dingane was in the last two lines which were highly reminiscent of the

iziziba esinzonzo sinzonzobele

Deep silent whirlpool

praise of Dingane.

The symbolism of the following two lines

Ngamakhand' amadoda nemizi yawo
Nawo asengwevu njengawe phansi

(loc. cit.)

By the heads of the men and their homes
They too are grey like you down below

is again in an oblique reference to the death of Mhlangana who was caused to drown "even unto his head-ring".

There is also much symbolism in the poem Ugqozi which is the first poem of his second anthology. Vilakazi subtitled the poem "Power of Inspiration" which power was received in the following way.

Emasangweni akwaDukuza,
Emzin' omkhulu kaNdaba
Ngem' othangweni ngakhuleka

(loc. cit.)

Standing at the gates of Dukuza
At the great village of Ndaba
I stood at the fence and saluted

The symbolism of Dukuza, Shaka's capital, the then heart of the Zulu nation; as well as the reference to Ndaba, one of the earliest Zulu ancestors, would be easily discerned by those cognizant of Zulu culture and history. The persona was made to - khuleka (salute)

laze layoshona

(loc. cit.)

Until the sun set

indicative of the little attention paid to him. Eventually the insila yenkosi (King's personal body-servant) appeared. At this point a surreal incident occurred

Kwangen' emakhalen' am' iphunga

(loc. cit.)

A scent entered my nostrils.

which had a profound effect on him because

Kwakhanya engqondweni yam' efiphele

(loc. cit.)

Something stimulated my blurred intelligence

and he had a supernatural visitation in the form of Shaka's paternal aunt, possibly the most influential woman to date in Zulu history.

Kwafika kim' uMnkabayi emuhle

(loc. cit.)

Beautiful Mnkabayi appeared before me

The symbolism of her injunction needs little explanation.

"Vuka wena kaMancinza
Kawuzalelwanga ukulal' ubuthongo.
Vuk' ubong' indaba yemikhonto,
Nank' umthwal' engakwethwesa wona."

(loc. cit.)

Awake, you of Mancinza
You were not born to lie in sleep.
Awaken and praise concerning martial
matters
This is the burden I have bestowed on you.

Vilakazi was, throughout his poetry, very conscious of the mantle placed on his shoulders.

In similar vein, in Imbongi, the poem immediately consequent upon Uggozi, the persona has a nocturnal visitation in the guise of the ancestral shade of poetry. Initially he is not sure whose voice it is calling out to him

Olukaban' ulim' olukhuluma ?

(loc. cit.)

Whose voice is it calling out ?

That this voice is not that of a mortal is soon obvious

Okhumela kude naseduzwe
Kodwa kuvele kufane
Okhuluma ngivuka nanxa ngilele
Nokho ngivele ngimuzwe ?

(loc. cit.)

Calling out far and near
 Yet it is all the same
 Who calls out and I awaken if asleep
 Moreover I hear and perceive ?

The symbolism of this voice is explained in the very next line

Olwembong' ebongel' abangekho

(loc. cit.)

It is of the Imbongi praising the deceased.

This action is carried out in all the corners of the earth

Ngizw' ikhuluma phans' entshonalanga;
Laph' imililw' ebomv' iqhamuka khona

.

Nalapho kuphuma khona uqwembe
Lwembes' umhlaba ngezinkanyezi

(loc. cit.)

I hear it speaking low in the East
 Where the red fires emanate from

 And also the whence emanates the bowl
 Which covers the earth with stars.

The poet's imagery with words such as imililw' ebomvu (red fires, i.e. the sun) and uqwembe which literally means a "meat tray of wood" is particularly effective because it is drawn from that which is totally natural to a traditional imbongi.

At this point biographical details of the supernatural visitor are given vis-à-vis the personified Earth

Mbong' ubong' umhlab' usakhasa
Wakhula won' uMhlaba wema . . .

(loc. cit.)

Imbongi, you praised when the earth was
still crawling on its hands and knees
You were adult when the Earth was
struggling to stand

That it is no ordinary imbongi is reiterated in

Ubikez' abaphansi bamathongo
.
Thina sikhuluma ngekhubalo

(loc. cit.)

You prophecy to the ancestral shades of the
spirits
.
(Whereas) we can only speak with (magical)
strengthening medicines.

This is a contrasting of status between the Thongo likaMbongi (Spirit of the Mbongi) and the persona. Whereas the former is proficient enough to foretell the future event to supernatural beings, the persona and other izimbongi are only articulate through the aid of strengthening medicines.

At that precise moment he becomes unsure whether he is speaking of his own accord or whether he is possessed with what some would consider something akin to a gift of tongues.

Konje ngaba yim' engikhulumayo ?

Noma ngabe nguwe Thongo likaMbongi ?

(loc. cit.)

But is it me who is talking
Or is it you, Spirit of the Imbongi ?

What the Spirit symbolizes is clarified in the conclusion of the poem.

Ngizwe umemeza, Mbongi, phambi kwami
Wangihola ngodondolo ngingaboni : ngabona.
Ngidedele ngibonge, ngivul' indlela nami kwaMhlaba.

(loc. cit.)

I hear you call me, Mbongi, from ahead of me
You led me with a staff, I being blind : I saw
Move aside so that I can bonga, that I
too can be an opener of the way on Earth.

Actually establishing positive contact with the Spirit of the Imbongi is the culmination of his symbolic search for inspiration. The analogy of the udondolo, an old fashioned staff used by the aged, is particularly appropriate in this context as it is in itself yet another symbol of an ancient Zulu tradition.

Another poem, almost identical in its symbolic search for inspiration is Ithongo Lokwazi (The Spirit of Wisdom).

The persona travels far and wide over the land of the blacks.

Ngabheka phansi eMkhambathini wamaXhosa,
Ngabheka phezulu eNtababusuku yabeSuthu,
Ngafumanisa abantu bakaNdaba

(loc. cit.)

I travelled down to Mkhambathini of the Xhosa
I travelled up to Thaba Bosigo of the Sotho
I found the people of Ndaba.

The people of Ndaba is a reference to the Zulus because Ndaba was a Zulu king. From his travels the persona ascertains that the people were

Bedukile balahleka ngosiko nomthetho

(loc. cit.)

Lost and having discarded custom and the law

However, in the concluding line of the first stanza and in the introductory line of the second, one realizes that the Spirit of Wisdom has what the persona wants

Kodwa wen' imilando yabo uyayazi
Ngiphe, ungicaphunele namuhla

But you know their history
Give it to me, and scoop up some for me today.

The "scooping up" takes place from a very symbolic source which is

Kuleyo ndebe oyigcin' ethala lobuzwe

(loc. cit.)

From that receptacle that you keep on the shelf
of nationhood

The physical aspect of the metaphysical receptacles is elaborated in the lines

. kulawo magobongo
Nezimbiz' ezithule, zingakathintwa muntu?

. from those shells
And silent pots which are not yet touched by
man?

Having partaken of the contents of the containers one is imbued with

Ikhono lokugcoba phansi lokhw' engikuzwayo

(loc. cit.)

The skill to write down (the knowledge) that I
gather

with the specific intention

Ngibekel' izimfaba nezinkedama zikaNdaba.

(loc. cit.)

That I may pass it on to the destitute
descendants of Ndaba.

Another poem redolent with symbolism is UMamina, the introduction of which is reminiscent of the Lotus Eaters. After inducing a gloriously soporific euphoria, the persona proclaims that

Uyofika sengiphansi kwezidoni,
Zithelile sezithe yeyeye
Zimnyama zijuz' umpe.

(loc. cit.)

You will arrive (and find me) underneath
the umdoni trees
Bearing and weighing down heavily
With black, dripping nectar.

One of the rare descriptions of nature worship in Zulu poetry is found in

Oqhamuka zikhothama ziwe
Zigebis' amakhand' enhlabathini.

(loc. cit.)

When you appear they (the flowers) bow down
And lower their heads to the ground.

The flowers are not alone in their symbolic adulation.

Ngibuzwa bunkwela, kukhal' udwani,
Lukubingelela mntanenkosi

(loc. cit.)

I hear the rustling of the dry grass
Greeting you, child of the chief.

In metaphorical terms he tells Mamina that

Uyinkosikazi yenhliziyo yami wedwa

(loc. cit.)

You alone are the Queen of my heart.

and in a paralleling of similes Mamina is told that

. unjengobhaqa
Olukhanya luxosh' umnyam' exhibeni;
Uwedwa njengomkumb' untwel' olwandle

(loc. cit.)

. you are like a torch
 Shining and chasing away the darkness in a
 make-shift hut.
 You are alone like a ship sailing on the sea.

However, to compound matters she is also visualized as a reed in a reed bed and as a snake, symbols of creation and of the ancestral shades, respectively

Ngiyawubon' umzimba wakh' usuluza,
Njengohlanga ludlaliswa amanzi
Nekhand' elincance, elintamo
Njengembumbulu yemamba yehlathi,
Ihub' emagatshen' ingabonwa

(loc. cit.)

I see your body swaying
 Like a reed being played with by the water
 And your small head, and neck
 Like that of a mamba of the forest
 Gliding unseen through branches

There is again a juxtapositioning and paralleling of similes in the reed-snake imagery. The symbol of a snake is one uppermost in Nguni thought patterns, as has been shown by Axel Ivor Berglund in his Doctoral thesis.

In the ninth verse Mamina is seen in sexual terms, as a beautiful lover giving herself to the persona

Mamina Mamina,
Usuzinikela kimina ngemepha (sic).
Lokhu-kuzinikela kwakho kimi yimfihlo
Kwaziwa nguwe nami,

(loc. cit.)

Mamina, Mamina
 You are giving yourself to me, indeed
 Your giving of yourself is a secret
 Known (only) by you and me

Then in lines reminiscent of the fig-eating incident in one of Lawrence's novels, the persona describes his lover as the beauty of bursting buds

.ngikufanisa
Nobuhle bemiqumb' eqhuma
Kusihlwa yangiwe ngamathons' amazolo

(loc. cit.)

. I liken you
 To the beauty of bursting buds
 In the evening kissed by drops of dew

The Freudian symbolism is extended in the tenth verse when Nomkhubulwana (The Princess of Fertility) is said to sense her fragrance and envelop her

NoNomkhubulwan' ukuzwile
Ngephunga lamakh' elikulandelayo,
Wakwengula ngesiphuku sakhe,
Wakulandela wakulondela mina

(loc. cit.)

Even Nomkhubulwana perceived you
 By your scent which lingers after you
 and she enveloped you in her kaross
 And fetched and saved you for me.

The effects of this are not entirely pleasant and he is driven to the brink of insanity.

Ngoba ngivukwa yikhamb' okohlanya
Ngihlanya ngihamba ngingenabhungane,
Ngihawula ihungulo lamangwe,
Ngadakwa yimunyamunyan' okwenyoni

(loc. cit.)

Because I am awakened by a seizure of insanity
 I rave and I go about behaving like a madman
 I am transported by a charm
 Drunk with nectar like the birds.

In the fourteenth stanza he describes his own spirit with a metaphor

Umlalane ngumphefumulo wami

(loc. cit.)

Thick, dry grass is my spirit.

He then describes Mamina as a beautiful maiden alluringly playing a musical pipe

Ngithi ngivumel' igekle lakho;

(loc. cit.)

I responded to your reed whistle,

but in the very next stanza one discovers another aspect to this once voluptuous, musically inclined maiden. The persona uses strange symbolism to describe his lover because a witch, a universal symbol of evil, is killed in Nguni society.

Ngivumele ngang' imiyeko
Engiyibon' idilik' ekhanda lakho
Ekufihl' ubuso ngingabuboni,
Kuphela ngibone kukhanya izimbulunga
Zamehl' omthakathi kaNtandose.

(loc. cit.)

Allow me to touch the fringes of your diviner's
 hair
 which I see falling down over your head
 Hiding your face so that I cannot see it
 And all I see are the shining spherical objects
 Which are the eyes of the witch of Ntandose.

He initially sees her as a diviner, which is not a symbol of evil in Nguni society, but on closer inspection he sees her eyes glowing like coals of fire and which identify her as a witch. Yet for all that it does not stop other suitors from paying court. In the nineteenth stanza the persona's rivals are described but they, too, sense something awry. This is shown in the following simile

Ngabon' imizimba yaz' ihwaqabala
Njengomangob' ethuswa yinja

(loc. cit.)

I saw their bodies scowling
Just like cats afrighted by a dog.

But the star-like metaphors that are her eyes, dispel their fears

Keph' izinkanyezi zamehlw' akho
Ziwuphebezil' umnyama kwasa

(loc. cit.)

But the stars which are your eyes
Have dispelled the darkness and its dawns

Dawn is normally associated with a realisation and not a deception,
unlike in this instance.

In the twenty-eighth stanza one is told definitely that Mamina is a
supernatural spirit, and this would explain her unnatural ability to
assume a variety of guises.

Manje ngiyabuza kuwe, Mamina,
Wen' engibon' ukuth' ungomunye
Wale-mingcwi yamathongo

(loc. cit.)

Now I ask of you, Mamina,
You who I see are one
Of these ancestral shade apparitions in human
form.

In all of Vilakazi's poems in search of inspiration there is a
great deal of symbolism. Even this highly symbolic poem is concluded
with the invocation

Ngidonse siye kwelakini, Mamina,
Siyophekeza lemfi hlo yothando ngiyazi
Mamina, ngiyazi njengamathongo.

(loc. cit.)

Draw me to your place, Mamina
That we can split open this secret of love and
I know it,
Mamina, and I may know it like the ancestral
spirits.

The "splitting open of the secret of love" symbolizes access to the fount of knowledge.

Analogous to this attaining of wisdom are the following lines of KwaDedangendlale where the persona's search for inspiration is contrasted with trees in winter

Imikhambathi yakhona
Nasebusik' iyathela
Kant' imith' iphundlekile
Kayinamandl' okuvuka.

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.18)

The camel-thorn trees of that place
 Bear fruit even in winter
 Whereas the trees are bare
 And have no strength to come to life.

Paralleled with the trees is a persona's own fecundity

Yebo, nami ngiyothela
Ngicwal' amajikijolo,
Ngiyethe njengamasundu
Agcwel' izihlekehleke,
Ngay' inyanga yomkhambathi
Phansi kwelakithi kwaZulu

(Vilakazi, 1962, pp. 18-19)

Yes, I too will bear fruit
 And be full of mulberries,
 I shall droop like palm trees
 That are full of bunches
 During the same season of the camel-thorn tree
 Down in our country of Zululand.

Whereas this symbolic acquisition of knowledge was likened to trees bearing fruit, in the verse immediately consequent upon this one, the result is in the simile

Ngiyokuma ngithi phuhle
Ngifuzane nezintaba
EzikwaDedangendlale,
Ezinekhambi lobuhle

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.19)

I will stand upright
 Just like the mountains
 Of the Valley of a Thousand Hills
 Which have a magical charm of beauty.

The magical charm of the hills inebriates him

Nami kaningi nginjalo
Ngidakwa yilezintaba,
Ngilahleka ngingatholwa
Ngedukile ngezigodi
Eziqhakaz' izimbali

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.19)

Even I, on several occasions, am like that.
 I am inebriated by these mountains
 And go astray without being found
 Having strayed in the valleys
 Which bloomed with flowers

This emotionally drunken state is reiterated in the fifteenth stanza

Ngidakwe ngaphuphutheka
Ngaze ngaficwa yinkungu
Ngiphakathi namahlathi

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.19)

I became drunk and wandered blindly
 Until I was caught up in a mist
 Being right in the middle of the forests

Eventually even the heightened emotional state succumbs to nature
 and one reads of his metaphorical kaross and pillow

Ngalala phansi kwenyanga
Ngibelethwe ngumhlathini.
Isiphuku kungutshani
Ngacamel' esiqundwini.

(Vilakazi, 1962, p p. 19-20)

I lay down under the moon
 Being carried by the earth
 (My) kaross was grass and
 My pillow a bunch of grass with roots

That this was no ordinary sleep is evidenced in

Ngashayana nongqimphothwe
Ngibukel' izinkanyenzi

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.20)

I slept facing up with my legs drawn up
Looking at the stars.

It is only once he has attained this state of heightened animation that he converses with the ancestral spirits and requests of them full knowledge of Zulu cultural heritage to preserve in a symbolical pot.

Ngiph' indaw' enjenga lena
Wena Thongo likababa,
Lapho ngiyoba namandla
Ngiqoq' umqondo kaZulu
Ngiwuvalel' embizeni

(Vilakazi, 1962, p.20)

Give me a place like this
You, Ancestor of my father,
Where I can get strength
And gather the wisdom of the Zulu nation
And preserve it in a pot.

Much symbolism is also found in Xhosa written poetry such as Jolobe's Umlambo (The River) and Yako's Aa! Nobantu where river water and the sea represent a spiritual renaissance and purity, respectively. Umlambo is a poem in Jolobe's anthology, Umyezo, (An orchard). In the opening stanza one immediately discovers that this is no ordinary river.

Mna ndingumntwanana
Wesibhakabhaka.
Ikhaya likwelaa zulu liluhlaza.
Ndandihambahamba
Ngenqwelo yomoya,
Ndinxib' ezimakhwezi, ezimhlophe qhwa.

(Jolobe, 1972, p.45)

I am a little child
Of the firmament.
Home is in yonder blue sky.
I was going about a little
With the wagon of the wind,
Wearing those of the morning star, being snow
white.

In the sixth stanza the personified river continues its narration

Ndifuman' umsili,
Edinw' ephelile, athi, "Khawuncede,
Mandlandini, Mlambo."
Ndifinyez' ingubo.

(loc. cit.)

 I meet with a milker
 Completely tired out, who says, "Please help,
 You division, River."
 I draw up my garment.

The miller addresses the river as Mandlandini. It is not clear what is meant by this because amandla means strength in Xhosa but Kropf also cites the following:

um-Mandla, n.6. The environs, surrounding district; a region, tract of land, division.

(Kropf, 1915, p.222)

Indeed, it is a strange river because in the following stanza

Ndibulel' uMdali

(loc. cit.)

I give thanks to the Creator.

The associative symbolism of water with ritual cleansing propensities is one common throughout many cultures of the world and it is not surprising therefore to find this in Mqhayi's poem entitled Imvula (The Rain). Qangule in his 1973 article has already commented on the symbolism of water in Xhosa literature, citing Xhosa poems such as Huna's Amanz' eendonga (Ditch water) and Manyase's Umlambo (The River), as examples. He also quotes from Jolobe's poem UNomhi a line where snow symbolizes chastity and he cites an example from Mesatywa's collection of Xhosa maxims.

The sea is used to describe the unfathomable character of a person :

Umntu lulwandle (Vide Mesatywa. No.610).

(Qangule, 1973, p.3).

The above line literally means "a person is a sea" and is a very apt metaphor to convey the Shakespearean sentiment, "There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face".

In Qangule's article on Tshaka's Xhosa poem Igqili (The Orange River), he quotes the poem in its entirety without translation. The lines evidence many examples of similes, metaphors and symbolism, as in the following examples. In the ninth line of the poem the river is referred to as

Nguginya - ngembamb'

(loc. cit.)

He is Swallower - with - the - Ribs

and this praise image beautifully illustrates the supposedly habitual action of drowning those unable to swim - yet another example of a praise name coined from a personal characteristic based on habitual action.

In the thirteenth line the river is metaphorically referred to as a deadly yet paradoxically toothless reptile.

Yinyok' ebulalayo nok' ingenamazinyo

(loc. cit.)

It is a snake which kills whereas it has no teeth

This paradoxical reference is paralleled in the sixteenth line in the sentiment

Iliso ling' aliboni, kanti liyabona

(loc. cit.)

An eye (which is) as though sightless,
Yet it sees

The river is personified in the twenty-first line

Ihamb' ihlek' imiful'

(loc. cit.)

The rivers go laughing

before it is once again poeticized in a paradoxical simile in the
twenty-fifth line

Ngathi yinyoka kodwa ngemikhw' aligqibi

(loc. cit.)

It is as though a snake, yet it is different

Indeed, in a beautiful metaphor it is revealed as a wonderful
marvel

Inyok' inomsila, ndawonye nentloko,
Kodwa lon' ilis' entabeni nomlom' elwandle

(loc. cit.)

A snake has a tail (attached) to the same
place as the head
But this one has an eye on the mountain
And a mouth on the sea

The "eye" is obviously a reference to the fountainhead whereas the
river - mouth is also a common metaphorical allusion in other languages
and cultures. In fact, Tshaka's entire poem is an extended metaphor
with the river being alluded to as a "snake", with brilliant efficacy
and aptness. Qangule comments on the eighteenth line

Ayizali mantshontsho kodw' ukuhlutha

(loc. cit.)

and says of it

The sense could also be "It bears no young,
its fruit is violent deprivation."

(Qangule, 1973, p.7).

The snake (i.e. the river) does not bear fruit, on the contrary it carries away the fruits of the earth enveloped within its raging torrents. Although not commented on by Qangule, this line is vaguely reminiscent of the Biblical injunction in the paralellism

For whoever wants to save his own
life will lose it; but whoever loses
his life for my sake will find it.

(Mathew 16 : 25).

There is a host of evocation of associations in this Xhosa poem. As a statement of fact one can say that some people who accidentally fall into a raging flooded river will be drowned, yet this river is seen as a mythical, destructive monster literally willing people to destruction in its watery clutches. In this sense I totally disagree with Qangule's sentiment that

Impossible occurrences are characteristic
of praise poems and they have a powerful
effect; because they are impossible, they
suggest disturbed emotions on the part of
the praise singer.

(Qangule, 1973, p.7,
my underlining).

On the contrary, it is my belief that they merely reflect poetic creativity on the part of the praiser - after all, the concept of the monster which lurks in pools and streams magnetically drawing people to their destruction, is one very prevalent in both Nguni and Sotho folklore.

6.3 CONCLUSION

It is generally held that imagery is indispensable in good poetry, even though a few critics (some of great stature) hold, quite correctly, that there are examples of excellent poems that do not contain a single

image. Again, much differing and thereby confusing terminology has been used to discuss the same poetical elements.

Factors previously not acknowledged about Zulu modern poetry are that similes depict similarities and not precise exactitude and that certain similes are deliberately chosen for their emotive impact, which can consequently sometimes offend those with sensitive dispositions.

"Natural" images, that is, metaphors and similes drawn from the realms of nature, are extremely prevalent in both Xhosa and Zulu praise poetry. Thus, chiefs and other dignitaries are, for example, compared to the sun, a rushing wind, or lightning which can strike unexpectedly.

A great influence on most subsequent researchers was that exerted by Cope who hypothesized that prior to the Shakan-era, chiefs were portrayed by images of smaller, more innocuous animals. The turning point was Shaka's military rule. Such was Cope's influence on this score that other scholars such as R.M. Kunene and Mzolo paraphrased him almost verbatim. Possibly as a result of exposure to Western (mainly English) Romantic poetry, modern day Zulu poets such as Guma and Khumalo have subsequently not been averse to "gentle" flower imagery.

One of the problems that has beset present day critics is on an assessment of that body of modern poetry that "borrowed" unacknowledged lines of famous preceding poets, possibly with a tacit understanding that these borrowed lines would automatically be recognised as such. Even in the absence of any records on this issue it would nonetheless appear that oral poets did not have the same strong emotive feelings about plagiarism that their present day literatre counterparts hold.

Concerning the choice of imagery of Zulu and Xhosa poets, there appears to be no distinction between the two. Both Zulu and Xhosa oral bards metaphorically allude to people as being inter alia hard, fire-resistant wood; or alternatively as people of the uncrossable sea or river (obstacles which can only be crossed by eyesight, swallows or people in ships).

Modern poets naturally used images drawn from the wealth of technological wonders that they had newly encountered and poems commemorating trains, aeroplanes and other modern-day marvels were common in both vernacular newspapers and in poetical anthologies. Vilakazi skilfully used a train as a vehicle to convey feelings of exploitation at the hands of whites in his poem Woza Nonjinjikazi! The train symbolises all the adverse aspects of industrialization, transforming idyllically happy rural blacks into disillusioned industrial workers before it itself is metamorphosed into a swallowing monster - an entity often encountered in traditional Nguni and Sotho folklore. Vilakazi was a past master in the art of symbolism and poems such as Ezinkomponi, Aggrey weAfrika, UNokufa and UMamina are redolent with elements thereof. The first mentioned of these contains possibly the most explicitly stated political symbolism in Zulu poetry with mine machines being symptomatic of all the deleterious aspects of industrial urbanization. The protagonist bewails the foregone Zulu military machine that rocked the empire of the Indlovukazi, itself a metaphorical allusion to Queen Victoria. Considering that such poetry was published four decades ago, it is all the more remarkable.

Death is symbolically alluded to in poems such as Nayaphi ?, UNokufa and NgePhasika and it appears that Vilakazi had a certain preoccupation with death, having lost various members of his family during his own lifetime.

In the poems such as Wo, Lelikhehla! more mundane cultural artefacts such as ear-plugs and snuff-spoons symbolize the wealth of cultural and historical value that is the Zulus.

Throughout Vilakazi's poetry there are constant reminders that he felt that he had been entrusted with a duty to poeticize about the cultural heritage of the Zulus and this chapter has given examples of his being approached in dreams with visitations from the shades who constantly remind him of this. However they do not expect him to perform the task unaided and he is endowed with supernatural powers on occasion to enable him to do. These powers are conveyed with sexual symbolism in a poem such as UMamina, and by being possessed almost with a gift of tongues in a poem such as Imbongi where the persona is not certain whether the voice emanating from his body is his own or that of a supernatural body. All such poetry is representative of some of the most beautiful symbolism and imagery of the Zulu language.

7.1 Rationale for the study

Part of the motivation for this work has been a genuine concern for the passing of things of value among the Nguni. In my Master's dissertation (1979, p.56) I commented on the poetry of Victor Thubeni (a prominent imbongi at the ERPM Gold Mine) who bewailed the effects of modernization and the concomitant falling away of traditional custom. As Opland has also pointed out

there are school children in the cities who have never heard an imbongi - for them an imbongi is a poet whose books they read in school.

(Opland, 1973, p.201)

It has been my finding that urbanized blacks are almost embarrassed if asked if they can declaim poetry. It is as though they believe that

to let one's feelings get the better of one, to stand up and yell at the top of one's voice, is to act like an uncivilized iqaba.

(loc. cit.)

Aspects of the cultural heritage are either passing into disuse or being ignored. In the final sentence of my previous dissertation I stated that the imbongi evidences such a wealth of poetic devices that his poetry must rank among the foremost oral literatures of the world. Whereas my faith in the value of Nguni oral poetry has not diminished one jot; I nonetheless can hear times wingéd chariot which takes with it ever increasing facets of their cultural heritage. Partly for these reasons, then, the present work was undertaken, with the hope that it might one day be of use to those interested in things African. Indeed, studies such as these are only scratching the surface and many more

in-depth studies are required before the true nature of Nguni poetry can be appreciated.

7.2 The need for further research

In the final page of his Doctoral thesis Ntuli concluded that

Studies into aspects of Zulu poetry are very limited.

(Ntuli, 1978, p. 285)

The situation has not changed much in the nine years since that finding was reached, however in the final paragraph of the same thesis he wrote that

It is our hope that this study will stimulate further analysis of the works of the other Zulu poets.

(loc. cit.)

Indeed, this work has attempted an analysis of both Zulu and Xhosa poetry and has focussed on some of the inadequacies of previous research findings concerning this body of poetry. The criticism I have levelled has hopefully been constructive. Certainly it was without rancour because I am well aware of the often poor physical conditions under which the poetry was studied and analysed - sometimes by candle-light in overcrowded rooms. Yet it is on the printed word alone that the writers can be judged. All else is irrelevant, notwithstanding the fact that my own criticisms were made humbly and in good faith, which also naturally does not preclude the possibility of my own writing being attacked for certain hypotheses postulated. Of that there is little doubt, but hopefully as expressed by Ntuli, it too will act as a springboard for further research. It is hoped that it will be judged as well meaning even if occasionally misdirected. Some of the conclusions reached are

admittedly controversial but then slavish concurrence contributes little to what is by common cause considered a limited pool of knowledge on Nguni poetry. The various considerations in the study of oral and written literature have been well summarized in the following sentence.

Though the study of oral literature has its own peculiar problems, those of transmission and social setting, its fundamental problems, without doubt, are shared with written literature; and there is a continuity between oral and written literature which has never been interrupted.

(Wellek and Warren, 1954, p.39)

This work could be criticised on the grounds that in tracing the relationship between praise poetry and poetry in Zulu and Xhosa, more attention was paid to the oral poetry. However, the effects of urbanization show quite clearly that there certainly is a more pressing need to study the oral art simply because what has already been published in anthologies naturally stands less chance of being lost. Nonetheless, there still remains a definite need for future researchers to analyse the many brilliant poems, by numerous creative artists, that exist in Zulu and Xhosa anthologies. By doing so they will find much interesting material on which to base additional theories on Nguni poetry.

Greater emphasis has been placed on the traditional poetry for the additional, following reasons. It is my conviction that it, and not the modern poetry, represents the epitome of Nguni verbal art. One therefore tends to dwell more on the positive aspects of an art form and furthermore, I cannot apologise for my own particular love of traditional izibongo.

In die geval van die moderne Zulupoësie, is dit egter opmerklik dat die kritici en studente van hierdie genre uitsluitlik die

poësie van B.W. Vilakazi gebruik as voorbeeld.

(Taljaard, 1979, p.10)

In the case of modern Zulu poetry it is quite remarkable that the critics and students of this genre use exclusively the poetry of B.W. Vilakazi for examples.

The reason for this is again fairly obvious. Human nature, being charitable, tends to dwell on what is positive and Vilakazi's poetry is positively the best there is in Zulu. Furthermore, there was an additional factor.

Die feit dat hy onteenseglik 'n merkwaardige figuur in die Zululetterkunde was, wat nie net 'n nuwe rigting aangedui het nie, maar self daardie rigting gevolg het op 'n wyse wat hom verhef bo sy tydgenote en ook bo diegene wat na hom op die toneel verskyn het nie, kan nie betwis word nie.

(loc. cit.)

The fact that he was unquestionably a noteworthy figure in Zulu literature, who not only indicated a new direction, but also followed that course in such a way that lifted him above his contemporaries and also above those who followed him on the scene, cannot be disputed.

7.3 Summary of research findings

This work has attempted to show the profound Western and more particularly, the Romantic influence, on Nguni poets but the basic core elements of the best modern Nguni poetry remained essentially African.

Want; in watter mate ookal Westers - geïntereerd, in watter mate ookal beïnvloed deur sy Westerse opvoeding en omgewing, kan die Zuludigter nie wegkom van sy eie taal en kultuur nie.

(Taljaard, 1979, p.86)

Because, in whatever measure Western oriented, in whatever measure influenced

by his Western upbringing and surroundings, the Zulu poet cannot get away from his own language and culture.

It is my conviction that to date the best modern Nguni poetry is that which is a synthesis of the old and the new - that which follows on as a logical progression from traditional style izibongo. A similar conclusion has been reached by others

Another significant point is that Vilakazi is able to synthesise various styles of traditional and Western art to produce something new. The izibongo style is used very well even in non - izibongo poems.

(Ntuli, 1978, pp.280-281)

This propensity of a great poet was one recognized by Shelley

..... every great poet must inevitably innovate upon the example of his predecessors in the exact structure of his peculiar versification.

(Sitwell, 1943, p.27).

Taljaard also concluded that generally, in Zulu poetry, the answer lay in a synthesis of traditional and modern, with a bias toward the former.

Die antwoord lê blykbaar in 'n sintese van bogencemde, maar die tradisionele sal in sommige opsigte meer prominent wees, veral aangesien baie van die moderne digters van die tradisionele vorme en voorbeeld gebruik maak.

(Taljaard, 1979, p.8)

It appears that the answer lies in a synthesis of the abovementioned, but the traditional (aspect) will be more prominent in certain instances, especially since many modern poets utilize traditional forms and examples.

For Zulu modern poets it was again Vilakazi who led the way by showing what the relationship between praise poetry and poetry should be

Vilakazi here indicates to the aspirant poet the possibility of developing a new blend of Zulu poetry.

(Ntuli, 1978, p.281)

Unfortunately the adage about whom the Gods love most still holds true today and Vilakazi died in 1947, at the age of 41 and at the prime of his literary career. None has since been able to reach the level that he did.

Opland in his Doctoral thesis touched very briefly upon his hypothesis that

the individual works are mutually contradictory and confusing.

(Opland, 1973, p.63)

This work has attempted, as constructively as possible, to clarify what has been seen as confusing and that which at times has undoubtedly been contradictory. To quote Opland again

Yet on one point all commentators are unanimous by default : no-one mentions any musical accompaniment, nor, indeed, does anyone mention a woman singing poetry.

(Opland, 1973, p.64)

This work has highlighted Elizabeth Gunner's research on women as composers of izibongo and has also mentioned my own encountering of female praisers, for example, one reciting the praises of her son when he received deferred pay sent to his home village from the gold mines. I have also recorded women praisers on public occasions such as the Transkeian Independence celebrations, but such instances are rare by comparison with the incidence of male iimbongi at such events.

Discussion has centred on the blurred dividing line between traditional oral izibongo and modern written poetry because it is not as simple as stating that the differences between oral and written are obvious. Much oral poetry has been "reduced" to writing (with loss of much poetic effect) and furthermore much supposedly modern poetry has been a continuation of the traditional style. One general distinction, however, is that oral poetry can be narrative, laudatory or a combination of the two whereas modern poetry can and does cover themes and concepts obviously outside the experience of traditional poets. Oral poetry is (initially at least) also aural poetry whereas modern poetry is not usually read aloud.

The adequacy of the term "Nguni" has been discussed including the fact that one cannot refer to the Nguni language, but only to various Nguni languages, all of which are derived from the same source. It has been postulated that if people speaking various "languages" can effect mutual intelligibility, then the "languages" they are supposedly speaking are in reality dialectal variants of one language which for want of a better term can be called Nguni. But there are non-linguistic considerations such as historical, geographical and political factors which have led to these dialects being viewed as separate languages. It is my contention that if linguistic criteria alone were the yardstick, these "languages" would be seen as dialects of one language, namely, Nguni; but the averment is made with the full knowledge that it will be both controversial and unpopular in certain quarters when quite understandably, emotive factors such as national identity tend to cloud the issue.

In the second chapter the nature of poetry was reviewed including the philosophical viewpoint whether poetry should ever be instructive. It has been shown that Nguni poetry can, in fact, instruct and examples

were cited from Ilanga where poetry was used as a didactic instrument to propagate for example, Izibongo zo Bambiswano, the ideals of the "Bantu Co-operative Movement". The strong idealism of Nguni poets was shown, being as they were, imbued with the advancement of the nation and both Xhosa and Zulu poets in the prefaces to their anthologies evinced unbridled enthusiasm for their cultural heritage. In Vilakazi's poetry, particularly, his "calling" to do so is evidenced time and again. The, until very recently, lowly status of oral poetry has been indicated because in the minds of many researchers it has been synonymous with "inferior". Throughout this work I have attempted to show that it certainly is not inferior and I concur totally with Wellek and Warren who wrote that

Yet the study of oral literature must be an important concern of every literary scholar who wants to understand the processes of literary development, the origins and the rise of our literary genres and devices.

(Wellek and Warren, 1954, p.39)

It has been shown that praise poetry in various forms and with differences in context and recitation, is widespread throughout most regions of the Southern half of Africa and hypotheses have been posed concerning the development of praise poetry as an oral genre among the Nguni. In the absence of any written data to either prove or disprove such hypotheses, they remain largely speculative. Kunene (1962, p.57) has postulated that in the pre-Shakan era both the social and political organisation of the Zulu "was of a very simple type" (loc. cit.) and he consequently hypothesised that the poetry was also "relatively simple". What has enjoyed little recognition among many previous critics is that praising is not the sole prerogative of the specialists and it has been proposed that it was this very widespread knowledge of the art that has ensured its propagation. It has not been suggested that every Nguni person was totally proficient as a poet but it has been shown that

certainly most adult rural males have at some stage of their lives been encouraged to praise, whether it be the recitation of clan praises on religious occasions or the declamation of personal praises at secular, social gatherings.

The development of izibongo from the simple coining of a praise name, the progression to the explication of elementary praises and finally the declamation of fully-fledged praise poetry abounding in highly poetic devices, has been traced. It is extremely unfortunate that today, due to the in-roads of technological advancement, urbanization, Christianization, "civilization" and generally, what is loosely known as the Western way of life; has lessened the incidence of traditional praising among the Nguni - some urbanized blacks, both Zulu and Xhosa considering it "uncivilized" to profess an ability to recite traditional poetry. Such a situation, whereas understandable, is also regrettable and it is urged that other researchers (particularly blacks with their obviously greater proficiency in the language) conduct further in-depth studies into these largely untouched fields of poetry. This philosophy would have been confirmed by Wellek and Warren who wrote that

We must, however, endorse the view that the study of oral literature is an integral part of literary scholarship, for it cannot be divorced from the study of written works, and there has been and still is a continuous interaction between oral and written literature.

(Wellek and Warren, 1954, p.39).

Totally refuted is the averment that Zulu clan praises such as those of the Lala people

who slept with a finger stuck in the anus and got up in the morning, put it in the mouth and pointed at the sun

(Mzolo, 1977, p.143)

developed because this is what the (Zulu) Lala people would do on awakening because failure to do so would mean that they would individually be regarded

as a good-for-nothing person,
isinyefu, a Zulu word generally applicable
 to dirty, lazy, indolent slovenly person
 (sic).

(Mzolo, 1977, p.144)

Whatever postulations might have been cited by the researcher's informants, few scholars indeed would accept that Zulu clan praises of people such as the Lala originated through their actual practising of "peculiar customs" (loc. cit.). It must be remembered that such clan praises are not necessarily based on truth. To impute such illogical behaviour and bizarre rituals to Zulu clans would obviously be insulting. Some of these praises are based on prejudice and as such are attributed to the "peculiar customs" of those clans. I have posed the hypothesis that such praises could also be viewed as an indication of verbal artistry; a pun on the praised's name which in the above example would literally mean "Sleep", hence the burlesque allusion to farcical sleeping patterns.

The momentous influence exerted on early Xhosa and Zulu poets by missionaries, both in their religious philosophy and in their practical teaching in mission schools, has been shown. From being the first "teachers" of literacy to being the printers of the poetical compositions, they exerted a tremendous influence on Zulu and Xhosa poets.

In fact, Kunene (1962) believes that religious sentiments so pervaded modern Zulu poetry that the poetry was "clamped down" (p. 199). The poetry was "characterized by self-pity and some amount of religious

sentimentalism" (p.229) and the "result is that most of the works are immature" (p. 231). It is my contention that considering the great deal of valuable work done for countless black authors, such criticism of the missionary influence is somewhat harsh.

Mothoa's assessment (1963, p.371) in his "Tendencies in Bantu Literature" to the effect that the "Missionary Period is not of much importance to us here" has been disproved. Another inhibiting factor in the development of early Zulu poets was the inferior standard of schooling and Vilakazi (1938, p. 138) bemoaned the education he and his colleagues received.

The enlightened editorial policy of newspapers such as Ilanga undoubtedly stimulated both youthful and adult composers of poetry. Besides publishing the poetry submitted to the newspaper, the editors would often append short biographical details of the school-going poets, thereby certainly encouraging further contributions both from them and from other readers. In this regard it would appear that such editors had the idealistic enthusiasm and love of their language that the acknowledged poets themselves wrote about in the prefaces to their anthologies. In this regard the untiring energy of librarians of the Killie Campbell Archives also served to preserve what would have otherwise been lost to us today.

In some modern Nguni poems the composers were unconsciously influenced by Western poets whom they had studied at school. Others again consciously strove to emulate these poets and new themes and experimentation began to appear in their poetry. The question of "borrowing", or more harshly phrased, of "plagiarism", has been dealt with and broadly speaking it appears that oral poets had greater licence to incorporate the lines of famous composers within their own

recitations; the logical assumption being that the lines were so famous as to preclude the possibility of anyone not recognizing their original source. The issue was not as facile, however, for modern Nguni poetry and this aspect has been very comprehensively treated by Ntuli in his dissertation on imitation in Zulu poetry.

1986 saw the publication of an anthology that represented a watershed in Zulu poetry. This was the anthology of Zulu poetry with the English title of Black Mamba Rising. Composed by three trade union organisers, this poetry evidenced modern day people, events and union groupings being praised in the traditional izibongo style. An interesting development is that just as the traditional Nguni would praise their clan, some of their latter day counterparts would associate themselves with recent institutions such as trade unions. Their poetry certainly is worthy of note and it is a great pity that their publisher was so careless with typographical details in the rendition of their vernacular poetry.

Besides the extraneous influence of the introduction of themes from a totally new and strange culture, there was also a profound traditional influence on modern Nguni poetry which is rich in associations and symbols of days of yore. It is ironic that Vilakazi, a modern poet himself, was so scathing about written poetry in his assertion (1945, p.122) that "retardation of thought is caused by writing". In his role as critic and commentator on (other) literary contributions (1945, pp. 94, 101), he was not against excising excerpts of poetry that he considered unsuitable and advocated the re-arrangement of various lines within the poetry. Such a line of action is naturally unthinkable today. Indeed we are fortunate that sometimes other researchers annotated praises in toto, without any self-imposed censorship. Thus the lines that Vilakazi objected to are neither lost, nor would they by

today's standards have much likelihood of causing grave offence in a thesis.

NguSopasi.
UJukuty' amaphambili
phofu engawasingisi mntwini.
YiNtsundu yoNomsa.
UNgxowa inemilenze
yokufak' amadun' a kowabo,
ooPhatho nooSandile.

He is Father of the pass,
 Thruster-out-in-front
 but not in anyone's direction.
 He is Brown one (son) of Nomsa.
 Sack with leglike pockets
 for snuggling in the princes of his home,
 the Phatos and the Sandiles.

(Kuse, 1979, pp. 216 - 217).

What is unfortunate, however, is that some of the earliest izibongo of Nguni chiefs which suffered a similar fate at the hands of missionary publishers, is lost today. It is hoped that this work has also disproved Vilakazi's assertion that

Nguni art in poetry is laden with symbols
 intelligible only to the African

(Vilakazi, 1945, p.124)

by which term "African" he implied someone with a "black" skin.

One of the first South African critics to adopt a holistic approach in an assessment of the structure of poetry was Ntuli (1978, p.222) when he correctly stated that structural features could not be discussed in isolation from other components of a poem. This question of a "totality of elements" was one recognised by other critics such as Hrushovski (p.180) who likened the assessment of poetic structure to looking at a many-sided crystal which can show different emphasis in different directions.

Scholars of African poetry such as Uzochukwu (1978, p.291) and Anyidoho (1977, p.1) have stated that prose lacks the "unified structure" of poetry and postulated that this is what distinguishes between the two. South African researchers such as Taljaard and Ntuli have analysed the structure of modern Zulu poetry using paradigms (which for want of a better term) I have called symmetries of "arrow patterning". While not detracting in any way from the value of such empirical research, the mild irony has been pointed out that possibly the first time the poets themselves would become aware of such "arrow patterned" diagrams would be on reading academic dissertations citing examples from their work.

One of the most striking features in an assessment of Nguni poetic structure is the high incidence of repetitive elements within the poetry. It has been erroneously suggested that repetition is the definitively distinctive feature that distinguishes between oral and written poetry - a school of thought which surprisingly enough has had many adherents. It has also been erroneously suggested that repetition enhances understanding but this is naturally only correct if the audience did not hear what was originally said. If the audience does not grasp or comprehend a message, its mere repetition ad nauseam will not ensure understanding. Furthermore, in Nguni oral poetry the repetitive elements are often oral formulae, the symbolism of which is not always immediately comprehensible.

It has been shown how Vilakazi (1965, p.13) has used a repetitive rhyme scheme with very limited success and comment has been made on his avowal (1938, p. 129) that he did not believe in poetic form because it simply reduces everything "to mechanical standards and mathematical formulae" (loc. cit.). The arbitrary decision of what constitutes a verse in oral poetry has been examined and the structure of a modern

Xhosa poem has been dealt with. The fact that modern Nguni poets did not feel circumscribed to conform to poetic structure such as that of Shakespearean or Italian sonnets, has been examined and discussion has centred on the structure of Shakan-type stanzas, a feature so comprehensively dealt with by Cope, the first scholar to recognize it.

This study has also dealt with the structural development of Xhosa clan praises and shown how the simplest type of clan praises consists of a recital of the patrilineal lineage. Thereafter there is an addition of one or two lines of praise immediately consequent upon the invocation of the ancestors and the final developmental sequence includes the explication of lines which might not have been previously heard by the audience.

In the penultimate chapter of this work the nature, extent and efficacy of imagery and symbolism in Nguni poetry has been reviewed. Whereas certain critics have regarded imagery as indispensable to poetry, this is not the case, but it nonetheless certainly enhances poetic effect. Various types of imagery have been analysed and the close affinity between similes and metaphors has been shown.

Although a prominent critic has criticised the use of "inappropriate" imagery in modern Zulu poetry such as when a Zulu regimental leader is compared to a flower, I have argued that such imagery has the positive attribute of being the "unification of disparate ideas". It has been shown how Xhosa and Zulu clans can share the same praise imagery, the structure and content of the praises being very similar and the only obvious differences being in the use of interchangeable words such as umlambo and umfula (in Xhosa and Zulu respectively) to convey the concept of "a river".

The undoubted master of symbolism in Zulu poetry was Vilakazi who in poems such as Ezinkomponi, Ngombuyazi eNdondakusuka, UNokufa, Aggrey weAfrika, Imbongi and Ugqozi displayed his superlative skills. Considering the explicitly political symbolism of Ezinkomponi and the era in which it was composed, its publication is all the more surprising. Symbolism is also encountered in modern Xhosa poems such as Imvula, Amanz' eendonga, Umlambo and Igqili, the last mentioned being an extended metaphor where a river is depicted as a fabulous, mythological snake.

Throughout Vilakazi's poetry there are constant allusions to his conviction that he had an almost divine mission to compose poetry about the cultural riches of his people. There are numerous references to his visitations from the ancestral shades who constantly remind him of the sacred duty they have entrusted in him.

It would appear that many other Xhosa and Zulu poets were also imbued with a similar burning commitment to record for posterity that which they knew to be something of inestimable value, for in the immortal words of the imbongi

Kuyofa abantu kusale izibongo,
Yizona eziyosala zibalilela emanxiweni,

People will die and their praises remain,
It is these that will be left to mourn for
them in their deserted homes.

(Cope, 1968, p.67).

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