

PAROLE RUBATE

RIVISTA INTERNAZIONALE
DI STUDI SULLA CITAZIONE



PURLOINED LETTERS

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF QUOTATION STUDIES

Rivista semestrale online / Biannual online journal

<http://www.parolerubate.unipr.it>

Fascicolo n. 27 / Issue no. 27

Giugno 2023 / June 2023

Rivista fondata da / Journal founded by

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Autorizzazione Tribunale di Parma n. 14 del 27 maggio 2010

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GIULIANA IANACCARO

**“THE BOERS OR THE ENGLISH... THAT IS NOT
THE QUESTION”: THE SHAKESPEAREAN
TRAGEDY IN HERBERT DHLOMO’S “DINGANE”**

1. *Dhlomo and Shakespeare*

In his historical plays, the Zulu writer and journalist Herbert Isaac Ernest Dhlomo (1903-56) made reference to William Shakespeare’s dramatic works in more than one way. *Richard III*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest* are present in Dhlomo’s plays either as unattributed quotations – thus implying an ideal readership sharing a common literary background – or, even more conspicuously, as structural models, albeit thoroughly recontextualised. In the particular case of *Dingane*, a historical tragedy depicting the parable of the eponymous nineteenth-century Zulu King, prophecy, betrayal, murder and vengeance constitute the main *topoi* around which the action revolves; the backbone of the play is clearly *Macbeth*, even if explicit references to

Julius Caesar and *Hamlet* can also be found.¹ Among Dhlomo's other dramatic historical works – *The Girl Who Killed to Save*, *Ntsikana*, *Cetshwayo*, and *Moshoeshoe*² – *Cetshwayo* is the play that engages with Shakespeare the most. The motifs of power, conspiracy, dissimulation, betrayal, and revenge – together with the potency of prophecies, curses, and ghosts – all find their place in a tragedy that stages the rise and fall of the last independent king of the Zulus, before the final victory of the British forces in 1879. The quotation in the title is taken from *Cetshwayo*: it is unequivocally built on Hamlet's "To be, or not to be; that is the question" (III, 1, 58), arguably the most famous line in the whole Shakespearean dramatic corpus. In Scene Four, Bafikile, a young Zulu woman, tries to suggest caution in dealing with white people to the powerful but unwise Cetshwayo: "The Boers or the English... that is not the question. The question is, the white people or we. [...] Blood speaks to blood. The English and the Boers may fraternise in the end, and both stand against us".³ Before

¹ Tim Couzens remarks that "The play is modelled on *Macbeth*" and that "The equivalent of Macduff is Jeqe" in his groundbreaking monograph *The New African. A Study of the Life and Work of H. I. E. Dhlomo*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985, p. 318. Elmar Lehmann, following Couzens, mentions *Macbeth* as the source of *Dingane*, and argues that "nemesis rules over [the Zulu Chief's] reign" (*Colonial to Post-Colonial South African-Style. The Plays of H. I. E. Dhlomo*, in *Imagination and the Creative Impulse in the New Literatures in English*, ed. by M. T. Bindella and G. V. Davis, "Cross / Cultures", IX, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1993, p. 116).

² Dhlomo's historical plays were presumably written between 1935 and 1937; during his lifetime, the author succeeded in publishing only *The Girl Who Killed to Save*, which was issued by Lovedale Press in 1935. In addition to the five titles mentioned above, there is evidence of two lost plays by him, similarly dealing with the legendary life of great South African chiefs: *Shaka* and *Mfolozi*. See Couzens, *The New African*, cit., p. 125. Dhlomo also wrote less 'Shakespearean' plays dealing with coeval and highly controversial political and social questions, as some of their titles suggest: *The Living Dead*, *The Pass*, *The Workers*, and *Malaria*.

³ H. I. E. Dhlomo, *H. I. E. Dhlomo. Collected Works*, ed. by N. W. Visser and T. Couzens, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985, pp. 140-141. Dhlomo wrote his plays during the 'Union' years (1910-1948), when, in the wake of the South African War, the formerly

the girl's speech, Cetshwayo himself had addressed Bafikile in Shakespearean words: the Zulu king's lines "Thou art raging mad. Man's business unsexes you",⁴ are reminiscent of Lady Macbeth's cry to the evil spirits ("unsex me here", I, 5, 40), meant to render her masculine and merciless in front of the idea of murder.

Some of *Cetshwayo*'s Shakespearean echoes have been noticed by the relatively few critical investigations of Dhlomo's dramatic production; generally speaking, that play has drawn more attention than the others, probably because of its direct engagement with South Africa's early-twentieth-century political issues. The aim of Dhlomo in historical writing was artistic, didactic, and nationalistic at the same time: besides giving vent to his literary vein, he meant to provide a counter-discourse to the official, colonial version of the South African past, conceived and disseminated by white historiography. Indeed, his story of the last independent Zulu king, correctly situated in the second half of the nineteenth century, raises questions that pertain even more strongly to the following decades, when the white Union government (1910-1948) excluded native South African citizens from the possession of their land and took highly discriminatory socio-political measures. Tim Couzens dedicates ten pages to *Cetshwayo* in *The New African. A Study of the Life and Work of H. I. E. Dhlomo*,⁵ but pays no similar attention to *Dingane*, which is more briefly discussed.⁶ Bhekizizwe Peterson remarks that "In both *Dingane* and *Cetshwayo* the

independent provinces had been united under a coalition government shared by British and Afrikaners. Bafikile's words are thus meant to be prophetic and anticipate a grim future, which is, indeed, the playwright's present.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁵ T. Couzens, *The New African. A Study of the Life and Work of H. I. E. Dhlomo*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985, pp. 125-134.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 318-319.

influence of Shakespeare and Renaissance drama are fairly marked”;⁷ accordingly, he highlights the parallels between *Macbeth* and *Cetshwayo* and, like Couzens, dedicates almost ten pages to the exclusive investigation of the latter play. By dealing mainly with *Dingane*, I wish to bestow more critical attention on a play which is nevertheless one of the Zulu writer’s most ‘Shakespearean’ dramatic works – a play over which Shakespeare’s great tragedies loom as unavoidable presences, both as repositories of quotations and as structuring models, as we shall see.

It would be beyond the scope of this article to do justice to the pervasiveness of Shakespearean references and unattributed quotations in Herbert Dhlomo’s vast literary production. The line of investigation proposed here, after an introduction to the cultural context in which the author wrote, provides a reading of *Dingane* as a representative text, useful to explore both the extent and the typology of Shakespearean echoes in the Zulu writer’s dramatic works. Together with the literary investigation of the play, an inquiry into the political significance of the British canonical tradition in the writer’s literary production is also proposed. As we shall see, Dhlomo’s play is not built on the mere imitation of Shakespeare, but represents an autonomous and complex literary proposal, which is conservative *and* challenging at the same time. His choice to write in English was a deliberate didactic option to promote the emergence of a

⁷ B. Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals. African Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality*, Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 2000, p. 200. Peterson contends that the significance of Renaissance theatre for Dhlomo lay in “the dramas’ encapsulation of the Elizabethan-Jacobean interrogation and scepticism towards providential belief and their concomitant critique of social power” (*ibidem*); he also points out that “in a number of crucial moments in Dhlomo’s plays his language and style of representation are clearly indebted to English Romantic poetry” (*ibidem*). Indeed, Dhlomo’s historical drama also combines tragedy with romantic comedy and with other comedy-like features, both linguistic and thematic. The discussion of these aspects, however, lies beyond the terms of reference of the present article.

'new' South African citizen, spurred by literature to acquire the allegedly superior culture of the white man, overcome tribalism and superstition, and take over both the control of his life and the government of his country. Such an agenda was, in itself, relatively moderate: instead of racial conflict, Dhlomo endorsed integration between blacks and whites, and was highly suspicious of left-wing political proposals;⁸ at the same time, he was radically anti-racist. Likewise, through his imitation of Shakespeare and other canonical English writers (especially the Romantic poets), he acknowledged the worth of the British literary tradition and the importance to learn how to write from foreign models, in view of the creation of a national literary corpus; nevertheless, he was also able to re-invent Shakespeare's tragedies to celebrate the African past and advocate for unity and national pride. Dhlomo's political stances are fruit of compromises as well as of an idealistic vision of society; they cannot be understood in terms of 'conformism vs. radicalism', and the same can be said for his ambivalent use of the English language and literary tradition. Studying quotations can foster understanding of the ideological and cultural climate of those decades by discouraging oversimplified critical interpretations; indeed, the widespread practice of quoting from British texts on the part of early twentieth-century black writers and intellectuals cannot be easily classified according to well-defined political categories, like 'conservative', 'progressive', or 'radical'. By borrowing the words of Shakespeare, Bacon, Wordsworth, Coleridge, or Wilde, African authors both acknowledged (and

⁸ As early as 1929, Dhlomo the journalist would write: "The Natives should not mistake the disciples of destructive systems and doctrines as advocates of socialism. For while socialism aims at a properly organised society, Communism means a society where all men are equal in all things, and say and do what they please anytime, anywhere. Where Communism exists, pandemonium reigns". *Socialism*, in "Umteteli wa Bantu", January 19, 1929, p. 1.

reinforced) the cultural superiority of the establishment in power *and* appropriated its language and literary tradition to protest against oppression. Since the critical field revolving around the deliberate, political appropriation of the dominant cultural tradition by the dominated has been thoroughly investigated in the last decades, I will try to highlight the much more nuanced, and at times ambiguous effects that the use of Shakespeare on the part of mission-educated black intellectuals – living and writing between two worlds – actually produced.⁹

2. *Mission Shakespeares*

Before addressing *Dingane*, a brief introduction to the cultural panorama in which Herbert Dhlomo lived proves indispensable, since he was by no means the only mission-educated author who, in the first half of the twentieth century, wrote in English for both an African and a European readership, at the same time celebrating and questioning an imposed foreign cultural tradition.¹⁰ The figure of Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje

⁹ It is worth mentioning a few more and less recent contributions that focus specifically on South African Shakespeare and engage with the early 20th century: D. Johnson, *Shakespeare in South Africa*, Oxford [Clarendon Press, 1996], Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011 (chapters 3 and 4 deal with the early twentieth century and the 1930s in particular); N. Distiller, *South Africa, Shakespeare, and Post-Colonial Culture*, Lewiston and Lampeter, The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005 (chapter 3 on the first decades of the 20th century); B. Willan, *Whose Shakespeare? Early Black South African Engagement with Shakespeare*, in “Shakespeare in Southern Africa”, XXIV, 2012, pp. 3-24; A. Seeff, *South Africa’s Shakespeare and the Drama of Language and Identity*, London and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018 (chapter 3 on the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries).

¹⁰ On Herbert Dhlomo, his cultural and political milieu and his eclectic literary production, see, among others, *H. I. E. Dhlomo: Literary Theory and Criticism*, in “English in Africa” (Special Issue), edited by N. W. Visser, IV, 2, 1977; T. Couzens, *The New African*, cit.; N. Masilela, *The Cultural Modernity of H. I. E. Dhlomo*, Trenton, Africa World Press, 2007; B. Peterson, *The Black Bulls of H. I. E. Dhlomo: Ordering*

(1876–1932) is better-known to cultural and literary critics, both for his deep socio-political commitment to the South African cause and for his outstanding linguistic and literary accomplishments. Plaatje's translations of Shakespeare into Setswana promoted that language and its culture also among white intellectuals, besides bearing testimony to his love and regard for the Bard's works.¹¹ As for creative writing, Thomas Mofolo's novel *Chaka* allegedly draws on *Macbeth*, like Dhlomo's *Dingane*; written in SeSotho at the beginning of the century, it was published in 1925 and translated into English in 1931 with the title: *Chaka, an Historical Romance*.¹² Unlike Plaatje and Mofolo, Dhlomo adopted English as his

History out of Nonsense, in "English in Africa", XVIII, 1991, pp. 25-49; B. Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals*, cit. A very recent collective study of Dhlomo's works, investigated according to the literary genres they belong to (and their betrayal), can be found in *Thinking Out of the Box in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. by R. Coronato, M. Parlati and A. Petrina, Padova, Padova University Press, 2021, pp. 223-298.

¹¹ Plaatje allegedly translated five plays by Shakespeare into English, but only his *Diphosho-phosho* (*The Comedy of Errors*) and *Dintshontsho tsa Bo Julius Kesara* (*Julius Caesar*) have survived. The first was published in 1930 in the *Bantu Treasury Series*, a series of 'Bantu literature' volumes issued by the Lovedale Press (see R. H. W. Shepherd, *Lovedale and Literature for the Bantu. A Brief History and a Forecast*, Lovedale, Lovedale Press, 1945, p. 35); the second appeared posthumously, published by the University of the Witwatersrand. On Plaatje's Shakespeare there is a distinguished body of scholarship; among others, see S. Gray, *Plaatje's Shakespeare*, in "English in Africa", IV, 1977, 1, pp. 1-6; T. Couzens, *A Moment in the Past: William Tsikinya-Chaka*, in "Shakespeare in Southern Africa", II, 1988, pp. 60-66; N. Distiller, *South Africa, Shakespeare*, cit., chapter 3; B. Willan, *Whose Shakespeare?*, cit.; A. Seeff, *South Africa's Shakespeare*, cit., chapter 3. Plaatje also wrote *A South African's Homage* in *A Book of Homage to Shakespeare*, ed. by I. Gollancz, Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1916, pp. 336-339, commemorating the tercentenary of William Shakespeare's death in 1916; on Plaatje's contribution, see D. Johnson, *Shakespeare in South Africa*, cit., chapter 3 and B. Willan, "A South African's Homage" at *One Hundred: Revisiting Sol Plaatje's Contribution to the Book of Homage to Shakespeare (1916)*, in "Shakespeare in Southern Africa", XXVIII, 2016, pp. 1-19.

¹² The novel was also translated into French in 1940. See M. Chapman, *Southern African Literatures*, London, Longman, 2003, p. 211 and *passim*; C. Heywood, *A History*

literary language for didactic and political reasons, as mentioned before; yet, it is worth noting that his historical plays, *Dingane* included, are interpolated with greetings, exclamations, whole sentences, and even complete poems in isiZulu. The writer was also careful to uphold the oral tradition of the ‘izibongo’ (praise poem) by introducing many songs and poems in praise of people, animals, and landscapes in his dramatic works.¹³

The mission-educated generations of African intellectuals who lived and wrote before the apartheid period came in contact with European literary icons of the stature of Shakespeare very early in their school years, probably using the same reductions, adaptations, and ‘readers’ available to young children in the missionaries’ mother countries. Within the anglophone missionary context, children were introduced to Shakespearean plays through the more and less recent ‘stories from Shakespeare’ that were being massively exported worldwide. For instance, in the 1938 bulletin of the Transvaal branch of the Carnegie Non-European Library,¹⁴ the librarian

of South African Literature, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 95-96; B. Peterson, *Black Writers and the Historical Novel*, in *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*, ed. by D. Attwell and D. Attridge, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 296. L. Balogun draws on Heywood and discusses the parallel between the Zulu epic story and *Macbeth*, highlighting the dramatisation of power, violence, and the role of the supernatural in the novel; see *Violence and Xenophobia in South Africa: Shakespeare, Thomas Mofolo’s Chaka, and Welcome Msomi’s uMabatha: The Zulu Macbeth*, in “Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies”, X, 2017, pp. 36-54.

¹³ In *Dingane*, Scene Two is almost entirely devoted to the celebration of the beauty of Zululand and its language: Jeqe’s beloved, Nosi, who is a Swazi young woman, gives voice to an enraptured commendation of the Zulu tongue, which is paradoxically uttered in English and in response to a long ‘Zulu’ poem in hexameters recited by Jeqe in English: “Nosi: How wonderful the Zulu tongue! It is both strong and full of stabbing music” (p. 74).

¹⁴ The Carnegie Non-European Library was a branch of the Carnegie Corporation, a philanthropic trust founded in New York in 1911 by Andrew Carnegie for the advancement of knowledge. A. Seef, in chapter 3 of her *South Africa’s Shakespeare*, remarks that the miscellaneous volumes that reached the Cape Colony from Britain already in the 1830s “included the ‘Beauties of Shakspeare’ [*sic*], Lamb’s

lists Thomas Carter's *Stories from Shakespeare* in the children section, together with U.W. Cutler's *Stories from King Arthur and his Knights*, S. Cunnington's *Stories from Dante*, and H. L. Havell's *Stories from Don Quixote, Stories from the Aeneid, and Stories from the Odyssey*.¹⁵ The compiler of the 1938 bulletins was very probably Herbert Dhlomo himself, who had been appointed librarian-organiser of the Carnegie Non-European Library in Johannesburg from 1937 to 1940. As Tim Couzens remarks, that cultural institution was in operation in the Transvaal since 1931 and provided books for both educational and recreational reading.¹⁶

Teenagers and young men, instead, both at a secondary level of education and in teacher training colleges, read Shakespeare's literary production in unabridged editions, and the practice of quoting by heart lines from his plays was widespread. Dan Twala, a contemporary of Herbert Dhlomo who studied at the Lovedale missionary school in the 1920s, still remembered the syllabus at the time of an interview he had with Tim Couzens (July 26, 1979); the reading list, according to Couzens, was very likely similar to the Amanzimtoti Training institute where Dhlomo studied, because "the educated elite was receiving very much the same schooling and values all round the country".¹⁷ The Shakespearean syllabus at Lovedale consisted of plays such as *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, and *The Tempest* – Shakespeare and the Romantic poets being "the most important section of the course"¹⁸. In Twala's words:

Tales from Shakespeare, The Shakespeare Gallery, 'elegantly bound,' and Bowdler's *Family Shakespeare*" (cit., p. 51).

¹⁵ Bulletin of the Carnegie Non-European Library, Transvaal, n. 1, May 1938, pp. 3-4. On textbooks and readers in the Eastern Cape mission schools see also B. Willan, *Whose Shakespeare?*, cit., pp. 17-18 and *passim*.

¹⁶ T. Couzens, *The New African*, cit., pp. 101 and 199.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

“I used to boast being able to quote to the other students,’ says Dan Twala. ‘*Et tu, Brute*. All those little things we got from Shakespeare, we used to repeat them outside. *How now, Malvolio?* [...] Since the scholars were being ‘civilised’ and the language of civilisation was English, a knowledge of the ‘peaks’ of the literature of that language was a distinct status symbol.’ Asked how this all came about, Dan Twala replied, ‘It was our teachers influencing us more than anything else because everybody thought if you can’t say anything about Shakespeare then you don’t know English’”.¹⁹

Isabel Hofmeyr’s essay *Why Mandela Quotes Shakespeare*²⁰ helps investigate the conception and the role of literature in missionary-school classrooms and in the so-called ‘debating societies’, created within the most distinguished and well-resourced educational institutions. Literary quotations were, as Dan Twala remembered, “a sign of erudition and eloquence”;²¹ moreover, the most politically-engaged African students tried to convert missionary literary societies into political forums, in order to

“develop and practice the requisite rhetorical skills so as to take their place as scions of the African elite. In this configuration, literature came to be defined as a source of maxim and motto, a domain for fossicking quotation. By contrast, for most teachers, literature properly functioned as a secular evangelical force, a quasi-religious domain which would moralize leisure time, instill virtue, and uplift its readers”.²²

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ I. Hofmeyr, *Reading/Debating, Debating/Reading: The Case of the Lovedale Literary Society, or Why Mandela Quotes Shakespeare*, in *Africa’s Hidden Histories. Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*, ed. by K. Barber, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006, pp. 258-277.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 260-61. On the spreading of debating societies in South Africa in the 1930s, see Rev. Ray E. Phillips’s comment in the above-mentioned “Transvaal Carnegie Non-European Library’s Bulletin” (n. 2, July 1938, p. 1): “There is a rapidly increasing interest among African men and women in the Transvaal in debate. On the Witwatersrand there have been formed a dozen Gamma Sigma Clubs which foster debating among other things. Other clubs are being formed on the Reef; at Pretoria, and at Lady Selborne”. See also T. Couzens, *The New African*, cit., pp. 82-124.

Hofmeyr's identification of three main strategies for using quotation by Lovedale alumni is indicative of how African writers and public speakers took advantage of their Euro-centric schooling: quoting a famous sentence at the end of a speech gave emphasis to the whole rhetorical performance, and could be "used as a final flourish which epitomize[d] the key message of the speech".²³ Likewise, dropping in a quotation from time to time without identifying its source "signif[ied] an ideal readership, namely one that [would] instantly recognize these quotations and where they come from".²⁴ Finally, authors could also adopt, besides direct quotations, a specific style or narrative strategy in patent imitation of the mode of writing of a well-known literary forefather (Hofmeyr makes the example of John Bunyan's allegorical narrative in *The Pilgrim's Progress*).²⁵ The present analysis of Dhlomo's *Dingane* brings to the fore the multiple ways in which the Zulu playwright refers to the Shakespearean corpus in his historical works: through faithful or 'distorted' quotations, by imitating the style and lexicon of specific characters in Shakespeare's plays, and, above all, by alluding to the plot and motifs of one or the other Shakespearean tragedy – among which, the story of *Macbeth* is the most consistently followed dramatic pattern in *Dingane*.

3. *Dingane and the great Shakespearean tragedies*

The historical Dingane's reign, which lasted from 1828 to 1840, began in treachery and blood: he killed his half-brother Shaka to seize power over the Zulu tribes, recently united under the latter's 'iron fist';

²³ I. Hofmeyr, *Reading/Debating, Debating/Reading*, cit., p. 272.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

soon after, Dingane also betrayed and murdered his other half-brother, Mhlangana (his accomplice in Shaka's assassination) thus rising to the status of paramount chief of the Zulus. In the eponymous play by Dhlomo, Dingane is equally guilty of double fratricide: in Scene One we see him, together with his brother Mhlangana and Shaka's main servant Mbopha, treacherously murdering the Chief – the import of the almost sacrilegious deed being underlined by Dhlomo through a clear reference to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, as we shall see. In Scene Four, the arch-villain Dingane has both his fellow murderers killed in an escalation of violence that rivals Macbeth's heinous crimes against his king, his kinsmen, and his friends. Both the historical and the fictional Dingane are finally defeated by yet another half-brother of theirs, Mpande, himself a traitor who had sought the alliance and protection of the Afrikaner Voortrekkers to gain power. However, Dhlomo's protagonist does not manage to run away at the end of the decisive fight, as the historical figure allegedly did, but dies off stage at the hands of the hero of the play, Shaka's faithful body servant Jeqe, who is finally able to avenge the untimely death of his great Chief.

Even from a concise outline of the plot, it is not difficult to deduce that *Dingane* is a play deeply soaked in blood and built on conflicts, internecine fights and betrayals; the driving forces of action, as in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, are both greed for power and revenge. In addition, there is yet another essential element that links the tragic parable of the Scottish medieval baron with that of the Zulu nineteenth-century king – namely, the inscrutable force of destiny, personified from the very beginning in both plays by uncanny and amoral figures, clearly reminiscent of the inexorable Greek and Roman goddesses of Fate (the Moirai or Parcae). Shakespeare's witches, or “Weird Sisters”, famously open *Macbeth*, and their prophecies set in motion the ruinous train of events that

leads to disaster. Dhlomo, similarly, has Scene One preceded by a Prologue in verse staging non-specified weaving forces who sing collectively, in the mode of a Greek chorus, the power of indifferent Fate and the vanity of all human endeavours:

“We weave!
We weave!
We sing!
We sing!
The song ‘Tomorrow’,
Of joy or sorrow.
Blind are we,
Weavers free.
[...]
Why wail your anguish?
It is but Fate’s wish.
And no strife
Change it can!
In calm or storm cape,
No soul can Fate ’scape”.²⁶

In the section “Introducing African Authors” of the Carnegie Bulletin, Dhlomo associates the Weird Sisters’ prediction that Banquo’s issue, and not Macbeth’s, would reign over Scotland²⁷ to the nineteenth-century line of Zulu paramount chiefs: “Among the Bantu tribes of South Africa there is no greater succession of kings, perhaps, than the line beginning with Shaka and ending with Dinizulu. [To] Senzangakona

²⁶ H. I. E. Dhlomo, *H. I. E. Dhlomo. Collected Works*, cit., pp. 69-70. This play’s opening recalls *Macbeth*’s first scene also stylistically: Dhlomo chooses short verses, often trochaic, for his emissaries of Fate, possibly in imitation of Shakespeare, whose opening scene is in tetrameters, but who has the witches speak in even shorter lines throughout the play. The latter’s fast trochaic pace and incantatory verse are also strongly alliterative, and the same can be said for Dhlomo’s pressing couplets. *Dingane* is written mainly in prose, but it is interpolated by many songs and poems.

²⁷ See *Macbeth*, I, 3, 65 and IV, 1, 128-140.

[Shaka's father] as to Banquo, the fates decreed, 'Thou shalt get kings' and what kings came from those loins!"²⁸

At the end of the Prologue, dramatic action begins under the banner of violence and prophecy. The stage directions recite: "*The scene shows Dingane and Mhlangana holding assagais dripping with blood. Mbopha, who has just drawn out his assagai from Shaka's body, springs back and joins the other two assassins while Shaka says, 'And you, too, Mbopha!'*"²⁹ Shakespeare's Julius Caesar has just three more words to say before dying, besides "Et tu, Brute?", which are: "Then fall, Caesar!" Shaka, instead, is granted one last, though brief, prophetic speech: "Shaka: You kill me, my brothers! You will not reign long. I see foreign white swallows and strange, coming to rule over you. I shall be avenged. Jeqe, my guard, remember me. By Zulu! I speak and swear it! (*He dies*)"³⁰ The prophecy would come true, both historically and fictionally. Mpande's betrayal at the end of *Dingane* and his alliance with the whites is a clear sign of the progressive downfall of the Zulus; in *Cetshwayo*, the unnatural "white swallows" – that is, the Boers and the British – finally defeat the eponymous King's warriors in 1879, thus putting an end to the long series of sanguinary fights called the Anglo-Zulu wars. Shaka's white swallows, by the way, are reminiscent of various Shakespearean avian omens. *Macbeth*'s "temple-haunting martlet", in particular, which nests in the interstices of the murderer's castle, is a kind of bird very similar to the swallow: the fact that its presence is considered a good omen by Duncan, *Macbeth*'s first victim, ironically emphasises the King's total blindness in

²⁸ "Bulletin of the Carnegie Non-European Library, Transvaal", n. 4, December 1938, p. 3.

²⁹ H. I. E. Dhlomo, *H. I. E. Dhlomo. Collected Works*, cit., p. 70.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

front of his kinsman's heinous designs.³¹ Shaka's brothers are equally blind to the danger of internal strife and division among the tribes. Towards the end of *Dingane*, the wise Jeqe asks the crucial question: "But must we destroy ourselves, partner the white man and let him come between us? Will this not give him the chance forever to divide and weaken us?"³² This is one of the many instances in which the playwright indirectly spoke to his contemporaries: by putting prophetic words in the mouth of his nineteenth-century characters, he meant to remind his fellow citizens that foreign rule, in history, is frequently preceded by the well-known political strategy of 'divide et impera'.

For the same reason, it is no surprise that Shaka dies honourably at the beginning of the play, since the paramount chief of the Zulus represented, for Dhlomo, a potent symbol of unity among fragmented tribes.³³ Even if he leaves the stage almost immediately, his shadow hovers over both *Dingane* and *Cetshwayo* very much like the ghost of Caesar, who, appearing to Brutus at Sardis and Philippi (Acts IV and V), shows his undiminished power to the fighting republican: "Brutus: 'O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet. / Thy spirit walks abroad, and turns our swords / In our own proper entrails'" (V, 3, 93-95). Dingane feels haunted by Shaka's shadow from beginning to end and at last perceives his antagonist Jeqe as the living manifestation of the great Zulu king: "Dingane: (*In despair*) Ah!

³¹ Lady Macbeth, of course, knows better – in her soliloquy, the bird who welcomes her victim's arrival to the castle is a well-known ill-omen messenger: "The raven himself is hoarse / That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan / Under my battlements" (I, 5, 37-39).

³² H. I. E. Dhlomo, *H. I. E. Dhlomo. Collected Works*, cit., p. 105.

³³ Dhlomo used Shaka Zulu's image more than once as a symbol of unity among the Bantu peoples, even if he stigmatised the Chief's violent methods and destructive militarism, which dissipated the energy of the Zulus and caused massive migration. See his article *Tshaka. A Revaluation*, published in the journal "Umteteli wa Bantu", June 18, 1932, http://pzacad.pitzer.edu/NAM/newafire/writers/hdhlomo/umteteli/18_6_32.gif.

It is the shadow of Shaka! It has hunted and haunted me ceaselessly, and has tracked me down at last! 'Tis Jeqe! Shaka lives: he is not dead".³⁴ If Shaka is Caesar, then Dingane can be associated with Macbeth in many respects: both traitors are crushed by the bloody images of their victims appearing vividly before their eyes and scaring them to death. If Banquo's ghost shakes his "gory locks" (III, 4, 50) at the usurper during the banquet, Dingane, "*muttering madly to himself*" and "*staring into space*",³⁵ re-experiences with horror Shaka's and Mhlangana's assassinations. Both traitors are shocked by the unnaturalness of their visions and feel mocked by the vexing apparitions; the dismayed Macbeth bursts out:

"The time has been
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end. But now they rise again
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
And push us from our stools.
[...]
Hence, horrible shadow,
Unreal mock'ry, hence!" (III, 4, 77-81 and 105-106).

Similarly, Dingane exclaims in a raving mood: "Horror! O living mockery! O walking memory! Soul that art no soul! Men that are no men! Shadow that is life!"³⁶ At the end of the play, despite their treachery and cruelty, both traitors are granted a dignified death: they face their last fights with martial courage, and the once treacherous Zulu chief, who finally understands that his brother Mpande is giving up his people to the whites, is even elevated to the status of defender of the fatherland: "Dingane: (*Shaking himself from stupor, stands erect and dignified, and raises the*

³⁴ H. I. E. Dhlomo, *H. I. E. Dhlomo. Collected Works*, cit., p. 108.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

³⁶ *Ibidem.*

royal assagai and shield.) 'Tis we or they! Arise, Zulus! Forward! Fight!"³⁷

Before realising his mistake, though, Dhlomo's Dingane plays the part of the ruthless tyrant, like Macbeth; only, he is brutal from the very beginning of the play: his displays of cruelty are untempered by the anguish that Macbeth's conscience inflicts on his vivid imagination both before and after Duncan's death. Immediately after killing his half-brother, Dingane decrees the extermination not only of Jeqe, the fugitive servant, but also of his innocent relatives: "Go now and send warriors to capture him and burn his kraal and kill all his people!"³⁸ In the case of Macbeth, instead, the brutality against his enemies' families emerges only in III, 3, when he hires killers to murder Banquo and his son Fleance, and most notably in IV, 2, when he has Macduff's whole family ruthlessly slaughtered to punish the head of the household's 'betrayal'.

Dingane appears not only as a bloody murderer, but also as an irritable, impulsive, and therefore unreliable king: for instance, he has his own warriors suddenly executed in Scene Four without even giving them the possibility to plead for their lives, because they have been unable to find out the hiding place of Jeqe, Shaka's avenger. Dingane's emotional weakness and irresolution find a Lady Macbeth-like counterpart in his paternal aunt Mkabayi, herself a historical figure who took part in the conspiracy against Shaka. The warlike and politically shrewd woman towers on her male relatives from her first appearance on stage to the end, when she is finally poisoned by Dingane's enemies; she spurs her nephew to action and scorns him for not being manly and steadfast enough. Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth blames her husband for not behaving like a

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

man more than once in the play,³⁹ Mkabayi does the same, but, unlike her Scottish counterpart, she does not eventually succumb to the weight of guilt. On the contrary, in Scene Five, she even takes military action against the Boers, unbeknown to Dingane and his men, whom she considers timorous as children. “There speaks a child!”⁴⁰ exclaims the scornful Mkabayi, just as Lady Macbeth had stigmatised her husband’s fear of Duncan’s stabbed corpse: “Infirm of purpose! / Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead / Are but as pictures. ’Tis the eye of childhood / That fears a painted devil” (II, 2, 50-53).⁴¹ Mkabayi’s figure, her sinister power and intrigues, are also reminiscent of *Macbeth*’s witches: in Scene One, right after Shaka’s murder, she enters the stage “*roaring with laughter*” and announced by thunder and lightning, just like the Shakespearean Weird Sisters. On that occasion, she immediately makes fun of her nephews’ fear of the rage of the elements, thus setting the tone of her future role in the play, between stateswoman and sorceress:

“Mkabayi: Fools! [...] Why should the elements not rage when such a great one as Shaka dies? You begin your reign as frightened children – and you will remain so always. Ha! Ha! Ha! Kings helpless before the process of nature! (*The two men stand crestfallen while her mad laughter and the raging elements mingle*)”.⁴²

³⁹ See I, 7, 35-61; II, 2, 50-53 and 62-63; III, 4, 72-73.

⁴⁰ H. I. E. Dhlomo, *H. I. E. Dhlomo. Collected Works*, cit., p. 96.

⁴¹ Lady Macbeth’s lines resonate in other passages of *Dingane*: the Zulu King, finally crushed by violence, solitude and fear, loses himself in visions of death and utters the following words: “Who ever thought so white and fair a skin had spots all black beneath its surface fair?” (p. 95); the sleep-walking Lady Macbeth betrays her murder by saying “Out, damned spot! out, I say! [...] What, will these hands ne’er be clean? [...] all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand” (V, 1, 33, 41, 48-49). Indeed, the dichotomy ‘white and fair’ / ‘black’ is also reminiscent of the witches’ “foul and fair” in *Macbeth*, and it pervades the lines of *Othello*.

⁴² H. I. E. Dhlomo, *H. I. E. Dhlomo. Collected Works*, cit., p. 71.

Before passing on to the figure of Jeqe, who presents many traits in common with the Shakespearean Macduff, it is worth remarking that *Dingane* stages another strong female figure next to Mkabayi, who plays double roles. Indeed, Mawa is Mkabayi's counterpart for several reasons: firstly, because she is her sister but lives under the false name of Ntombazi in another country, Swaziland; secondly, because of her part in the conspiracy against Dingane, whom Mkabayi instead supports; and lastly, because she is at the same time a healer (presented as a "Renowned teacher of herbal lore" in the list of characters) and the vengeful Senecan woman, who lives only to punish Mkabayi and Dingane, "as foul a pair of nation-breakers as ever lived".⁴³ She is the one who welcomes the fugitive Jeqe in the land of the Swazi people,⁴⁴ where she herself had found refuge to escape Dingane's rage, and helps him, in the end, to go back to Zululand and avenge his murdered chief, Shaka. The character of Mawi-Ntombazi wavers between the irrational fury who precipitates disaster and the tragic figure who loves her land, tries to redress the mistakes of its leaders, and honourably kills herself in the last scene. However, in order to take revenge on Dingane she chooses the wrong ally, Mpande; at the end of the play, her potentially heroic role is belittled by Jeqe, who is finally confirmed as the only rightful moral authority in the play.⁴⁵

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁴⁴ Swaziland plays an important role in Dhlomo's play, which is set in a period of increasing tension and warfare among the many competing forces for the ownership of the region: the warlike Zulus, the equally expanding Swazi people, the Afrikaner Voortrekkers in search of land and cattle, and the British colonising forces. For the relationships between Zulus and Swazis under the historical Dingane's reign and the following chieftainship of his brother Mpande, see P. Bonner, *Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires. The Evolution and Dissolution of the Nineteenth-Century Swazi State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, chapters 3 and 4.

⁴⁵ To the twenty-first-century reader, the sexist undertone of Jeqe's words sounds gratuitous: on the one hand, he acknowledges the nobility of Mawa's intentions and her

The characters of Jeqe and Macduff are similar in many respects, as anticipated above, and not only because they oppose the usurping Kings and ultimately kill them, but also because they flee from the tyrants' rage and seek help in another country: Macduff reaches Duncan's firstborn Malcolm in England, at the court of Edward the Confessor, and Jeqe flees to Swaziland to King Ngwane, where he finds refuge and plans Shaka's revenge. Both of them are perceived as harbingers of death by the regicides: Macbeth sees his own fears reflected in the first supernatural Apparition's warning, "Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth, beware Macduff; / Beware the Thane of Fife" (IV, 1, 87-88); Jeqe depicts Dingane as a coward in front of an equally pusillanimous Swazi King: "Jeqe: My lord, he is a cracking, shivering reed! He fears me as he fears death".⁴⁶ The two 'angels of death' fight and kill the usurpers at the end of the play; the real Dingane managed to escape after Mpande's victory in 1840, but of course his death on the battlefield at the hands of Shaka's avenger was dramatically much more effective than the historical truth. Having Shaka avenged by Jeqe, just like Macbeth is executed by Macduff, allowed Dhlomo to capitalise on Shakespeare's figures and elevate his hero to the role of an instrument of Nemesis.

courage; on the other, he downplays her heroism and even attributes the futility of seeking revenge to her being a woman: "To think that she still thought of love and loved its kingdom false! Ah! sex is sex and woman is woman! [...] To think that such a noble life was lit and held together, dominated and propelled by this one flimsy common thing – revenge! Ah! vanity of all!" (p. 112). A survey of Dhlomo's conception of and relationship with women exceeds the scope of the present article, but T. Couzen's literary biography of the Zulu writer, *The New African* (cit.) provides several insights into his private life. Moreover, Dhlomo's (controversial) opinions on women can be inferred from many of his journal articles; see, for instance, *Bantu Womanhood*, published in "Umteteli wa Bantu" (May 10, 1930), where he writes: "They [women] should know that though physiologically, emotionally, and perhaps psychologically different to [*sic*] man, they are none the less man's equal".

⁴⁶ H. I. E. Dhlomo, *H. I. E. Dhlomo. Collected Works*, cit., p. 110.

Not only *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth* pervade *Dingane's* structure, themes, and language: through the character of Mpande, the most distinctive feature of Hamlet Prince of Denmark, that is his simulated madness, finds a place in the Zulu play. Mpande is 'Hamletic' in some respects, but not in others: he feigns madness to seize power, while the Shakespearean Prince shunned the court's intrigues and ostentation; nevertheless, Mpande's feigned madness to avoid suspicion allows him to conspire against his brother Dingane from within his kraal, not unlike Hamlet, who weighs up and finally opposes his own family as a distinguished member of the royal house. Mpande 'the fool', moreover, is suspected by Dingane's Induna ('advisor') Ndlela, who gives voice to his mistrust in words which, if not the exact citation of Polonius' lines, are still strongly reminiscent of them and have the effect of an indirect quotation: "I hate this Mpande, and see sanity in his insanity".⁴⁷ Of course, Polonius' aside, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (II, 2, 207-208), has the same function of detecting clear signs of rational, consequential reasoning in the Prince's seemingly rambling speeches.

If the fratricide Dingane understands his mistake and partially redeems himself before his death, the treacherous Mpande plays the part of the unrepentant Renaissance villain, the traitor of his people, who sides with the Boers and fatally divides the Zulu tribes. He paradoxically stigmatises his own execrable deeds in a long speech addressed to Jeqe, which is reminiscent of the various passages in which Iago lays bare to Roderigo, or to the audience, his devious ways and his ruinous plotting against Othello.⁴⁸ Yet, Mpande's self-incrimination has a strong moral

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴⁸ See *Othello* I, 1, 41-65; I, 3, 375-396; II, 1, 285-311; II, 3, 44-59; II, 3, 327-353.

undertone that Iago's lines do not even imply; the following passage ends up conveying a somewhat inconsistent picture of the villain of the play:

“Is it not sheer insanity to wreck and ruin my own King and brother; to win over and be a partner with the hateful, hating whites; to do something that must help destroy my own people – and all this in spite of great Shaka's wise words of warning? I do not like to do all these things, but I cannot help myself! I am not responsible for my actions. I am mad! Mad! Stark mad! Ha, ha, ha!”⁴⁹

This is not the only instance in which Dhlomo's dramatic characters are used as mouthpieces for relevant moral issues, no matter their role in the plot; Mpande had to formulate an unequivocal denunciation of his own deeds in order to send a clear message to the audience/readers of the play. The fact that the above-quoted lines impair the consistency of the figure of the villain – which remains inconclusive, since at that point Mpande leaves the stage for good – was less crucial for the playwright than the explicitness of the moral message he wanted to convey to his public.⁵⁰

Questions of character consistency also concern Dingane, not so much because he opens the play as a ruthless traitor of his King and dies defending his fatherland, but rather because his lines sometimes betray a tone of ‘unwitting foolishness’ that hardly matches his tragic role. In order to clarify this point, it is necessary to go back to Macbeth. The Shakespearean protagonist follows a regular ‘path of nothingness’

⁴⁹ H. I. E. Dhlomo, *H. I. E. Dhlomo. Collected Works*, cit., p. 105.

⁵⁰ Dhlomo believed in the superiority of plays written for reading, rather than for acting: “We must strive to build great, lasting literary drama, and not be carried away by the desire to produce plays that [...] act well and are good for immediate, commercial purposes only [...] the greatest drama of all time is literary” (*Why Study Tribal Dramatic Forms?*, in “Transvaal Native Education Quarterly”, March 1939, pp. 20-24; reprinted in *H. I. E. Dhlomo: Literary Theory and Criticism*, cit., p. 38). On the relationship between didacticism and character consistency in Dhlomo's historical plays, see G. Iannaccaro, *The Teacher and the Bard: Herbert Dhlomo's Historical Drama*, in *Thinking Out of the Box*, ed. by R. Coronato, M. Parlanti and A. Petrina, cit., pp. 225-242.

throughout the play, which brings him from an emotional and mental condition of puzzlement to utter nihilism: the "nothing is / But what is not" (I, 3, 140-141) of his first, perplexed soliloquy leaves space to the "To be thus is nothing / But to be safely thus" (III, 1, 49-50) of the anxious tyrant, and is finally substituted by the "Signifying nothing" (V, 5, 27) of the disillusioned nihilistic philosopher, who has reached a state of total indifference towards human existence, ultimately considered meaningless.⁵¹ Dingane's very long speech in front of his perplexed Induna, which is clearly meant to mimic (or to parody?) the philosophical profundity of Hamletic-Macbethian monologues, entraps the reader into a tangle of tautologies and antitheses that appear nonsensical and ultimately ludicrous. Given the length of Dingane's speech, only some exemplary excerpts can be quoted here:

"Dingane [after having decreed the search parties' death because they have come back with no news of Jeqe]: Now, what do the dying fools say? To report nothing means nothing. And failure means nothing. And nothing is nothing. It does not exist. It is not life. It is dead if it ever lived. Yet it could not have died if it were nothing and never lived. For nothing is void. But if death and the dead are not nothing, then life and the living are nothing. For death and life are opposites and not alike. If one is nothing, the other is something. Or are we wrong? Are they one and the same thing? If nothing is something, then what is something? [...] What, then, is nothing? It seems something. Nothing ever was. Nothing is. For we are nothing and yet we live. [...] And who here dares say I talk nothing and am nothing because I am dealing with nothing and saying nothing?"⁵²

⁵¹ Apart from the lines in which the main character utters the words 'nothing' or 'nothingness', many other passages in *Macbeth* keep up the play's peculiar structure based on antitheses and the progressive loss of life's meaning. For instance, after Duncan's murder Lady Macbeth observes: "Naught's had, all's spent, / Where our desire is got without content" (III, 2, 6-7); Macbeth's address to the witches in IV, 1, 66-77 contemplates universal destruction, as well as his "I 'gin to be aweary of the sun, / And wish th' estate o' th' world were now undone" (V, 5, 47-48).

⁵² H. I. E. Dhlomo, *H. I. E. Dhlomo. Collected Works*, cit., p. 92.

The whole monologue is so awkward that only a humorous turn could redeem it; indeed, the comical lines finally appear and conclude Dingane's tirade, when he addresses the bewildered Nzobo: "'Dingane: Let us hear the nothing that is coming and examine it closely for it may lead to something. Nothing is the pregnant womb of everything. Nzobo, speak.' 'Nzobo: Nothing ... I – I mean s-something'".⁵³ A more Macbethian kind of 'nothing' appears in the next scene, when the Zulu King, aware of the impending disaster – a suicidal fight against the Boers and Mpande's allied forces – perceives the flimsiness of human life. His "I am a shadow – nothing!"⁵⁴ sounds like a reduced version of the much more imaginative and resonant soliloquy of the disillusioned Macbeth:

"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing" (V, 5, 23-27).

As anticipated, the end of *Dingane* is reminiscent of *Macbeth* (the murdered King is finally avenged), but also of *Hamlet*: as Fortinbras, Prince of Norway, lays claim to the sceptre of Denmark and puts an end to the court's internecine fights, likewise the much less valiant Swazi king Ngwane appears on stage in the last scene, and, thanks to Jeqe, defeats his old enemy, Dingane. Portraying Ngwane as a coward, terrified by the Zulus, allowed Dhlomo to uphold the image of his people's ancestors as undaunted warriors, in spite of their chiefs' shortcomings and fatal mistakes. Nevertheless, as in *Hamlet*, the play ends with the victorious entrance of a foreign army, which is heard offstage and announced in a

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

strongly alliterative conclusive sentence: "Like the roar of distant thunder, comes the mighty but muted music of the victorious Swazi warriors".⁵⁵ The last lines in the play are uttered by Jeqe, who, in that respect not differently from Horatio, is King Shaka's real and only friend. Likewise, the general tone of the ending – Mawa committing suicide, all onlookers falling on their knees in mourning – is in tune with the tragedy of the Prince of Denmark, which ends in fraternal blood and unaccompanied by the rhetoric of rightful revenge. Jeqe underlines the feeling of emptiness and lack of purpose that the victory over one's own people engenders, to the point of even declaring the vanity of revenge, as noted, despite his having tirelessly pursued it for the whole length of the play.

4. *Using Shakespeare, loving Shakespeare*

As we have seen, *Dingane* follows in the footsteps of well-known Shakespearean tragedies to stage the motifs of betrayal, murder, usurpation, prophecy, conspiracy, and final but fruitless revenge; some of the political and existential issues raised in *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth* are likewise tackled in the Zulu play and adapted to different times, circumstances, and authorial intentions. A thick net of Shakespearean references constitutes the backbone of a dramatic work that celebrates the English playwright's most renowned tragedies by drawing on their structure and plot, their very words and phrases, and the moral propositions attached to them. Albeit not fully rewarding from a dramatic point of view – due, as we mentioned before, to character inconsistency and the ill-timed blending of the tragic and the ridiculous – Dhlomo's historical tragedies remind us that it is not always possible to draw sharp

⁵⁵ H. I. E. Dhlomo, *H. I. E. Dhlomo. Collected Works*, cit., p. 112.

divisions between politically conformist and non-conformist literary texts, in spite of the appeal exercised by clear-cut dividing lines, which undeniably simplify the job of the literary critic. In other words, Dhlomo's Shakespearean plays can be considered oppositional insofar as they make use of a foreign, established literary tradition to denounce the reckless practices of that same colonial power, whose land grabbing, labour exploitation, and socio-political discrimination were in jarring contrast with the prospects of progressive assimilation into white society put forth by missionaries and philanthropic institutions. On the other hand, those same plays do enforce the idea of Shakespeare as the voice of established power: the power of sublime art and unmatched genius, which for Dhlomo and many other South African intellectuals was embodied in the English Renaissance poet, who, in turn, was the most outstanding representative of British civilisation and culture. Of course, the underlying aporia at the basis of such widespread admiration and imitation of Shakespeare on the part of African writers is that his works were among the most solid literary pillars, together with the Bible, on which the European settlers were building their cultural, religious, and ultimately political supremacy.

All appropriations are, at least up to a certain extent, legitimations; the legitimization of British culture through Shakespeare was particularly strong in the South Africa of the 1920s and 1930s. As Dan Twala's words made clear in the above-cited interview, being able to quote Shakespeare, both within and without an educational institution, gave the speaker prestige and authority. However, the functional use of quotations was not the only reason why South African writers studied, learnt by heart, translated, and rewrote the English playwright's works. Solomon Plaatje, Herbert Dhlomo, and many others also felt what Natasha Distiller calls "the

discursive power profoundly affective English works still assert”:⁵⁶ their relationship with Shakespeare and the British literary tradition, far from being merely instrumental, was firmly based on admiration, love, and reverence, mainly instilled at an early age and subsequently reinforced. Dhlomo, for one, would have fully endorsed the following observation by Robert Shepherd, principal of Lovedale: “No individual and no nation will reach their highest development without a thoughtful and reverent love for good literature”.⁵⁷ By ‘good literature’, Shepherd clearly meant Western Christian literature, considered by missionaries a vital tool to sustain their instructive and civilising effort. What Dhlomo wrote as early as 1929 in a journal article entitled *Words* could not be more in line with Shepherd’s statement and betrays an emotional involvement with Shakespeare’s art of writing which goes far beyond the deliberate use of the Poet’s words to gain authority and prestige:

“What is the difference between a liar and a scientist; a fool and a diplomat; a bore and a poet? Nothing but the words they use and the way they use them. Give Karl Marx 26 letters to form into words, and he sets people at one another’s throats, ruins countries, and overthrows governments and dynasties. But give the same letters to Shakespeare –, and the world looks as gorgeous as the hues of heavens, as odorous as all Arabia, and as merry as Fairyland”.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ N. Distiller, *South Africa, Shakespeare*, cit., p. 100.

⁵⁷ R. H. W. Shepherd, *Lovedale and Literature for the Bantu*, cit., p. 26.

⁵⁸ H. I. E. Dhlomo, *Words*, in “Umteteli wa Bantu”, September 21, 1929, p. 1.

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*Parole rubate. Rivista internazionale di studi sulla citazione /
Purloined Letters. An International Journal of Quotation Studies*