

✓

**Restoring the Imprisoned Community:**  
**A study of Selected Works of H.I.E. and R.R.R. Dhlomo and**  
**their Role in Constructing a Sense of African Modernity.**

**Stephen Smith**

**Supervisor: Professor E. Gunner**

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the**  
**requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (English) in the School of**  
**Language, Culture and Communication in the University of KwaZulu-Natal,**  
**Pietermaritzburg**

**2004**

<u>Contents</u>	Page
	1
<u>Declaration</u> .....	2
<u>Acknowledgments</u> .....	3
<u>Abstract</u> .....	4
<u>Introduction</u> .....	6
<b><u>Chapter 1: Herbert Isaac Ezra Dhlomo: Reshaping a Warped Social Perspective</u></b> .	16
Alain Locke and Herbert Dhlomo: Harlem Lights Africa's Way .....	18
<i>The Girl Who Killed to Save: An Optimistic, Missionary Beginning?</i> .....	22
The Artist Must Fight for the Dawn .....	25
They will strike hard! .....	35
<b><u>Chapter 2: The Evils of Town and the Salvation of a Christian Modernity</u></b> ....	41
Modernity Cannot Be Bought And Paid For .....	45
The Evil City Claims Another Soul! .....	57
<b><u>Chapter 3 R. Roamer Esq., K.A. (Timbuctoo): Rolfes Dhlomo Casts a Roaming Eye</u></b>	
<u>On the Prejudices and Ignorance of South African Society</u> .....	68
Pseudonyms Gives to Birth R. Roamer Esq. ....	70
Satire: An Explosion of Freedom .....	75
R. Roamer Esq.: Savaging Injustice .....	77
<u>Conclusion</u> .....	96
<u>Appendix</u> .....	100
<u>Bibliography</u> .....	105



Declaration

**I hereby declare that the entire thesis is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other university or any other degree.**

**Student: Stephen Moore Smith**

**Signed: .....**

**Date: .....**

**Supervisor: Professor Liz Gunner**

**Signed: .....**

**Date: .....**

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Liz Gunner, for her insightful and expert advice, her time, and her enthusiasm. I have no doubt that without her assistance I would have needed another full year. I also wish to thank my mother and stepfather for their support, moral and otherwise, without which this year would not have been possible.

### Abstract

This is a comparative study of a selection of the works of H.I.E. and R.R.R. Dhlomo in an attempt to specify the ways in which both writers contributed to constructing a sense of African modernity. While the focus will be on the content of the writing, it will include an analysis of the form and style of the literature, as well as the historical and political setting of the work, and of the authors.

By employing the theoretical work of Alain Locke, David Attwell and Tim Couzens, I will address the issue of how Herbert and Rolfes Dhlomo negotiate the issue of a Christian modernity, as well as the ambiguous relationship between tradition and modernity. Another matter that I will focus on is that of the differences and similarities of their writing, in terms of aesthetics and their positions vis-à-vis tradition, modernity and the role of the Black subject, among other topics. Some questions that I will address are whether they are both contributing to an African modernity, and in what sense, and whether Rolfes' work complements that of Herbert, and vice versa. This will be done through a close reading of selected works across a range of mediums, from literary texts such as plays, poems and short stories to the print media.

In the Introduction I will outline the key theoretical work and definitions that I will make use of in my research, as well as give brief biographies of the two writers under examination.

**In Chapter One I will make a close reading of selected works of Herbert Dhlomo, and will attempt to show his changing role in the establishment of a sense of an African modernity.**

**In Chapter Two the focus of my work will be selected prose fiction of Rolfes Dhlomo. I will examine the major themes of these works, and show how they pertain to a sense of an African modernity.**

**In Chapter Three I will examine Rolfes Dhlomo's "R. Roamer Esq." column from the *Bantu World*. I have selected in particular the year 1941, and I will show how Rolfes Dhlomo used satire and topical issues to help in the creation of a sense of African modernity.**

**The Conclusion deals with the findings of my research on the role that Herbert and Rolfes Dhlomo played in the creation of an African modernity in South Africa.**

*We must begird ourselves like men and fight for the Dawn. The artist must rise and shine, for there is no one better placed and equipped than he. ... A whole nation in the throes of transition and rebirth, contending against both internal weaknesses of timidity, docility and ignorance, and the external forces of oppression and frustration – what rich material for creative living art! ... Cry not “Frustration”, shout, “What an Opportunity!”* (H.I.E. Dhlomo, “Masses and the Artist” 61)

### Introduction

It is my assertion that Herbert and Rolfes Dhlomo played an important part in the construction and maintenance of a sense of African modernity in South Africa. By doing so they helped to free the imaginations of local black people from the shackles of white dominance, and thereby aided in “restoring the imprisoned community” (Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 259).

Rather than two isolated founders of a movement, the Dhlomos became part of a national dialogue between such men as Sol Plaatje, T.D. Mveli Skota, John Langalibalele Dube, S.V.H. Mdhluli, Mark Radebe, B. Walle Vilakazi, Isiah Shembe and others, a dialogue that was to be continued by future South African intellectuals such as Lewis Nkosi, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Bloke Modisane and the other *Drum* journalists. These intellectuals also became part of an international conversation, using and exchanging ideas with other black intelligentsia, most notably those from the Americas, Europe and other parts of Africa. This dialogue was concerned with the plight of black people in their various, unequal societies, and discussed issues such as

individualism, literature, culture, a common humanity and industrialization; in short, **modernity and its effects.**

### Modernity, and an African Modernity

In the title I indicate my intention to examine the role of Herbert and Rolfes Dhlomo in constructing a sense of African modernity, and for this I will need to establish exactly what is meant by 'modernity' and, more particularly, an 'African modernity'. While modernity can be characterised by cultural and technological advances such as industrialisation and the Reformation, it is also associated with "the imperial regulation of land, the discipline of the soul, and the creation of truth" (B.S. Turner 4). While all of these factors have some bearing on the African situation, the "regulation of land" was most pertinent, by definition, to any colonial encounter.

With colonial expansion Europe's technological and military superiority was taken as cultural superiority, and Europe was able to construct itself as 'modern' and construct the non-European as 'traditional', 'static', 'prehistorical' (Ashcroft 145). Europe came to represent modernity, and modernity became the sole property of Europe.

The discourse of modernity frequently contained words such as 'traditional', 'primitive' and 'prehistorical', and this introduced a sense of differing temporalities: instead of an encounter between two cultures, the African encounter with the European was seen as an encounter between different time periods. The African present of early colonialism was seen as the European past, and the lack of African technological advancement led to an assumption of European superiority. In Europe

**“modernity was [seen as] a distinctive and superior period in the history of humanity”**

**and:**

**as European power expanded, this sense of the superiority of the present over the past became translated into a sense of superiority over those pre-modern societies and cultures that were ‘locked’ in the past – primitive and uncivilized peoples whose subjugation and ‘introduction’ into modernity became the right and obligation of European powers. (Ashcroft 145)**

**In Africa modernity was highly accelerated by external factors, and Africa was literally marched into ‘civilization’. Consequently, as Masilela explains, Africa became fixated on becoming part of this new power:**

**we Africans experienced the entrance of European modernity into African history as a great historic defeat. Invariably, “forced” modernization meant Westernisation in our instance. We encountered European modernity as a process of the colonial system and imperialist projection. The fundamental historical question became: what is it that enabled Europeans to defeat Africans militarily, and subsequently hegemonically impose themselves on us. The only serious response on our part could only be through the appropriation of that which had enabled Europeans to triumph: modernity. Hence the obsession with Christianity, civilization, and education by the new African intelligentsia. (90)**

**An African modernity, therefore, would be a way of reappropriating those aspects of modernity that gave it its power, and entering into modernity in a way beneficial to, and under the control of, the African himself, and not coerced there by a foreign power.**

**The African elite who wished to enter into modernity faced resistance from both sides, the modern and the traditional. Isabel Hofmeyr discusses this in the context of the African elite of the Eastern Cape:**

One of the major problems confronting this elite [the African elite in the Eastern Cape] was the routes it was to forge into a modernity from which many wished to exclude it. On the one hand, members of the mission elite had to distinguish themselves against a chiefly class and to invent new forms of authority for themselves. On the other, they chafed under white-dominated mission institutions, subject to the mixed message of nineteenth-century Protestantism, which preached equality of the spirit but seldom of the body... One pressing need in such circumstances was to fashion a public sphere through which an emerging elite might rehearse and refine a self-definitional repertoire of ideas, images, and discourses. (116)

This elite turned to *The Pilgrim's Progress* and this helped them to conceive of a present and a future that was both African and part of a broader, modern identity:

These issues were the sources of endless discussion around the themes of betterment, progress, improvement, "civilization," and so on. The landscape of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was to provide one site in which these debates were pursued.

The image of a familiar landscape dominated by a burdened man on a journey could collate a dispersed audience into a purposive public united by a sense of going forward, even if the destination imagined varied considerably. (Hofmeyr 116)

One of the problems facing black leaders was not only how *they* could become part of the discourse of modernity, but also to what extent their own culture could become part of it. Despite the fact that there was a group of black intellectuals in South Africa striving for similar goals (such as progress, social upliftment and on merging the traditional with the modern) this was not always undertaken in the same way. Perhaps the most famous (and impassioned) dispute in this field was between Herbert Dhlomo and B.W. Vilakazi in 1938 and 1939, which is comprehensively dealt with by David Attwell in "Modernizing Tradition/Traditionalizing Modernity: Reflections on the Dhlomo-Vilakazi Dispute". The argument, which began over the place of rhyme in Zulu poetry, became so overheated due to "the fact that the two figures involved were rivals, as interpreters of tradition and pathfinders in the development of a modern

Zulu literature... [but also] because it touched symptomatically on crucial questions for black writers of the day" (1).

Attwell maintains that when confronted with the decision on how to merge tradition and modernity, Dhlomo and Vilakazi had to choose "either to modernize tradition, or to traditionalize modernity, or at least, certain forms of modern literary culture" ("Modernizing Tradition" 99). Vilakazi chooses "to modernize tradition... passing Zulu expressive forms through what he often calls a "tempering" process, which gives them "psychic form," thus making them recognizable contributions to modern world literature" (Attwell, "Modernizing Tradition" 100). Dhlomo, on the other hand, chooses "to traditionalize modernity, not to pass traditional forms through a modern crucible but, as it were, to stamp modern literary self-consciousness with the seal of Africanity" (Attwell, "Modernizing Tradition" 100).

Christianity was a large portion of the 'civilisation' that blacks were aspiring to, but many fundamental facets of black society, such as *Ilobolo* and polygamy, contradicted Christian morals. The result was that black intellectuals were "torn between [their] enthusiasm for the history and traditions of [their] people, and [their] admiration for progress, Christianity and "civilization," which [they] identified with imperial expansion" (Marks 56). The dilemma was not an easy one to solve, for:

the cruelties and constraints of the precolonial African social order were not imagined, however much they may have been matched by the ruthlessness and exploitation of colonial rule, while "civilization" brought expanded opportunities and real advantages that could not be scorned. (Marks 56)

'Civilization', therefore, offered too much to be rebuffed, and "Christian Africans recognized both the meaningfulness of European 'progress' and the fearful price that

had to be paid” (Marks 57). At the same time, tradition is also used as a scapegoat. Black writers cannot write about the future, the progressive, the hopeful without having something to blame for holding them back from realising this ideal model. An African modernity, consequently, had to incorporate these concerns, namely what traditions could be dispensed with, and at what cost, and which elements of ‘civilization’ must be focused on to make these costs worthwhile.

### Explaining the Importance of English Literature in African Modernity

It is also important to examine why literature, and especially literature in English, was seen as being vital in the establishment of an Africa modernity. David Attwell helps to explain the importance of literature by saying that:

It seems safe to assert that the linkage of literary culture—colored by the legacy of romanticism—and modernity was a significant feature of this generation’s intellectual life. Or, to put it differently, one may say that one of the ways in which this intelligentsia encountered the culture of modernity was through the institutionalization of literature and criticism—“Literature”—first in the mission school, then later, in civil society, namely the press, philanthropic organizations, and the universities. (Attwell, “Modernizing Tradition” 99)

Thus, it is understandable that if this intelligentsia first encountered modernity and religion through literature, they would place a high regard on the value of literature in the creating of an African modernity.

While this explains the significance of literature, it does not explain why it had to be written in English. For insight into this, perhaps it is fitting to read the words of Herbert Dhlomo himself:

The opening chapters of the story of English literature are not unlike the story of African literature today. Before the year 1340 (about the time of Chaucer's birth) conditions in England were parallel to those in this country. England was occupied by several virile, belligerent races. There was no peace nor state of order in the country which suffered invasion after invasion. However, after some time, comparative peace and order were restored. At this time we find England a camp of different racial elements: Britons, Normans, Danes and Anglo-Saxons. Each of these groups spoke its own language or dialect. There was neither racial nor linguistic unity. Although noble efforts were made to write books, no great literature was produced until all the different groups combined to form one great race, and the various dialects merged into one common language. ("Language and National Drama" 8)

For the Dhlomos, writing in English, therefore, was born more out of practicality, than out of a love for the language. Herbert Dhlomo went as far as to say that "English [would be] the universal language of the future by force of commanding factors" and "that all this talk about bilingualism and Native languages in this country is futile" (Unknown title, 1948, In Peterson, *Monarchs* 188). He had realised that a nation is judged by its literature, and he therefore intended to create a great South African literature that would be internationally recognised. Similar sentiments were mirrored, although earlier, when:

In December 1923, a 'Special Correspondent' (most probably Rolfes Dhlomo) wrote an article entitled 'Towards Our Own Literature' in *Ilanga Lase Natal* in which he said that 'We must have our own literature here in South Africa sooner or later' and that, with such a movement, 'the prestige of black culture in general would be increased'. The author denied that he wanted to foster 'any narrow national or racial spirit' but rather wanted to 'identify common aspirations' and 'to establish a brotherhood of the heart' through 'the precision of Zulu and the elasticity of English'... (Couzens, *New African* 59)

The reasons for the Dhlomos choosing English as their medium of writing are repeated in their choice of writing in European forms, such as the play, novel and poem. Both Rolfes and Herbert Dhlomo realised the dilemma: if they continued to write in the vernacular, or even if they wrote in English but not in a conventional style, they would not garner that they were seeking.

**The European, whose intervention 'begins' African literature, once more finds himself flatteringly represented as the 'author of progress', and it is now possible to speak of first- and second-generation African writers, who are alternately beatified and vilified, depending on their closeness or remoteness to this primal, 'traditional', African source, or what one writer calls 'the African personality of this literature'. The notion of 'progress', then, seems tied not to any internal logic, but to a sense of closeness or distance from European influence. (Snead 239)**

**Although the ideas of European intervention bringing about the birth of African literature, and of written literature being superior to an oral form might not be widely accepted today, the fact remains that this was the dominant thought for the period in which the Dhlomos wrote, and remained so until very recently. And while they might not have agreed, the Dhlomos were perceptive enough to realise that this was the scenario that they had to work in. If they wanted to write, have an audience, and help their society to be recognised as one capable of equal thought and eventually standing, they would have to write in accepted - meaning European - forms.**

The Demons of Bitterness and Revenge: The Birth of Nationalist Sentiment

The path to modernity does not necessarily include nationalist sentiment, although in the colonial system it is highly likely that it will come into play at some stage. In South Africa the early stages of modernisation were characterised by a faith in, primarily, Christianity and education. It was generally believed that progression through Christianity was attainable, and that if the black population embraced the main elements of this Christian modernity a prosperous and equitable future was possible for South Africa. Men like Herbert and Rolfes Dhlomo, educated at missionary schools, were intellectuals who believed in such a future, and used the tools of Christianity and a mission education to try to reach it. In time, however, their optimism was tempered, and eventually replaced by bitterness, disillusionment and despair, and this is when their work started to include a nationalist bent.

The definition of nationalism that I have found most useful, and that I will return to repeatedly, is that given by Ernest Gellner:

Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.

Nationalism as a sentiment, or as a movement, can best be defined in terms of this principle. Nationalist *sentiment* is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfilment. ...

But there is one particular form of the violation of the nationalist principle to which nationalist sentiment is quite particularly sensitive: if the rulers of the political unit belong to a nation other than that of the majority of the ruled, this, for nationalists, constitutes a quite outstandingly intolerable breach [sic] of political propriety. (*Nations and Nationalism* 1)

Nationalism therefore arises either when nationalist aspirations are realised and satisfied, or when optimism and a positive outlook are replaced with frustration and

bitterness caused by the realisation that the achievement of a congruent political and national unit (as Gellner puts it) is unlikely or frustrated. This is evident in the work of Herbert and Rolfes Dhlomo. Writing of this frustration, Herbert Dhlomo says that:

...Pain, Poverty, Frustration, combined with the will to live, have taught him (the unprivileged African)...many...lessons. Denied many avenues to lead a quiet, comfortable, secluded life, the African has discovered that he can find solitude, holiday, refreshment and seclusion within himself if he is to find them at all. How important it is, then, for him to keep the inner self clean, beautiful, full and fragrant! For unless he does so, he will find that when he retires into himself he will meet, not beauty, song, truth and peace, but demons of bitterness and revenge, despair and defeat. Pains and obstacles do heal, educate and invigorate; but there is a level beyond which they madden, poison and kill. ("The Falling Leaf" 1)

### The Dhlomo Brothers: A Brief Biography

#### Herbert Isaac Ezra Dhlomo\*

Born in Siyamu (now part of Caluza), Edendale in 1903 to a well-respected family, H.I.E. Dhlomo would become one of the most prolific black African writers in English in the period of modernisation in Africa.

Dhlomo's mother believed fervently in the importance of an education for her sons, and Herbert attended the American Board Mission School, and then studied teaching at the Amanzimtoti Training Institute. His mother's fascination with education was passed on to Herbert, who said "I'll concentrate and read and carry on later and go to universities but I must keep on my reading and writing and see what I can get"

---

\* My decision to start with H.I.E. Dhlomo in the introduction is purely an alphabetical one.

(Couzens 46). And this he did, never halting in his writing until his premature death in 1956.

Among Herbert's many achievements is the first English play by a black African to be published. *The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nongqause the Liberator*, based on the Xhosa cattle-killing tragedy, was published in 1935 by Lovedale Publishers. In 1941 he followed this up with the 40-page epic poem *Valley of a Thousand Hills*, published in Durban. Other than these two works, Dhlomo is known to have written a further 24 plays, 10 short stories, over 140 poems, essays and anthropological works and, literally, thousands of journalistic articles, as well as editing *Ilanga Lase Natal* with his brother, Rolfes. And writing was not his only talent; he was also a musical composer, a teacher and librarian, a politician and editor, affecting black South Africans in almost every sphere of their lives<sup>1</sup>.

#### Rolfes Robert Reginald Dhlomo

The elder brother of Herbert, Rolfes Robert Reginald Dhlomo was born in Siyamu, Edendale in 1901. Educated first in Siyamu and then at the Ohlange Institute before moving to Johannesburg with his family, Rolfes was to be an influential literary figure in black South African society.

While working as a clerk on the City and Suburban Mines in Johannesburg, Rolfes started to write articles for *Ilanga Lase Natal* under the pseudonym 'Rollie Reggie'. These articles covered a wide variety of topics, but were frequently heavily influenced

---

<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive biography of H.I.E. Dhlomo see *The New African* by Tim Couzens.

by his devout Christian beliefs. This religious tone was continued in his short novel *An African Tragedy* (1928), the first novel to be published by a black African in English.

While *An African Tragedy* was to be his only novel in English, Rolfes was a prolific journalist, writing thousands of articles from his beginning in 1923, and for the next three decades. 'Rollie Reggie', 'R. Roamer Esq.', and then 'Rolling Stone' became famous countrywide for his articles as he wrote for and edited *Ilanga Lase Natal* and *Bantu World*, and wrote for the satirical magazine *Sjambok*. As well as his plentiful articles, Rolfes also wrote a number of short stories, usually dealing with pertinent social issues, and often set in the mining life he had come to know so well in Johannesburg.

As well as his writing in English, Rolfes Dhlomo wrote in his mother tongue, isiZulu. The best known examples of this are his "semibiographical narratives about the Zulu dynasty" (Gérard 223), including "UDingane kaSenzagakhona (1936), Ushaka (1937), "UMpande ka Senzangakhona" (1938) and UCetshwayo (1952). These aim to recuperate a Zulu past, side-stepping modernity and focussing largely on a black nationalist agenda.

Chapter One:

Herbert Isaac Ezra Dhlomo: Reshaping a Warped Social Perspective\*

Texts: *The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nongqause the Liberator* (1936), “South Africa” (1941), “The Question: Beasts or Brothers” (between 1944 and 1948), “Because I’m Black” (1949)

In this chapter I will show how Herbert Dhlomo approached the issues of modernity and nationalism and how he played an important role in the creation of a space in which the black South African intellectual could work. Beginning with *The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nongqause the Liberator* (Lovedale, 1935) (hereafter referred to as *The Girl*), a play that to a certain extent shows what David Attwell calls an “implicit faith in the terms of the civilising mission” (“Reprisals of Modernity” 268), and then moving chronologically on to the poems “South Africa” (1941), “The Question: Beasts or Brothers” (1944 – 1948) and “Because I’m Black” (1949), I will show how Dhlomo’s creative work mirrored the changes and developments that his political stance underwent as he realised that there were significant “contradictions between [his] ideals and actual experience” (Attwell, “Reprisals of Modernity” 268).

A great deal has already been written about Herbert Dhlomo’s first work, *The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nongqause the Liberator*, by people such as Tim Couzens in *The New African* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985), Bhekizizwe Peterson in *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2000), and David Attwell in “Reprisals of Modernity in Black South African

---

\* This title is taken from “The New Negro” by Alain Locke, page 10.

'Mission' Writing" (*Journal of South African Studies* 25.2 (June 1999): 267-285). I will therefore only mention it in reference, and will instead look at three of Dhlomo's poems written at various critical times throughout his career, highlighting the development of his thought from the naïve, idealistic notion that it would be through the civilising mission that progress beneficial to his people would be achieved and at the same time constitute an entry into modernity, to the eventual bitter state of disillusionment and nationalist sentiment that marked his later work.

While *The Girl* has been portrayed as based on a naïve and idealistic notion that differs greatly from Dhlomo's later work, I intend showing that the text's theme was not as diametrically opposed to this later work as believed. Rather than a mixture of ideals that Dhlomo would later discard, *The Girl* is a collection of seeds of ideas that Dhlomo would continually return to throughout his career and develop further, and which would influence much of his later work. While there was a definite and perceptible shift in Dhlomo's stance on modernity, the ideals that he portrayed in *The Girl* continually resurfaced, albeit in more polished and complete and, on occasion, more extreme forms.

As an integral part of this chapter I will look at the influence that "The New Negro" by Alain Locke had on Herbert Dhlomo, and especially at the way Dhlomo used "The New Negro" as a model by means of which to create his own, African version of the modern black man in South Africa.

Alain Locke and Herbert Dhlomo: Harlem Lights Africa's Way

A well-noted connection between Herbert Dhlomo and the American Negro writers is his adoption of Alain Locke's concept of the 'New Negro', to the extent that Tim Couzens entitled his biography of Herbert Dhlomo *The New African*<sup>2</sup>. While Couzens and others have previously and comprehensively investigated this link, any paper that deals with Dhlomo and modernity cannot afford to ignore it. This relationship is a continuation of the substantial interaction between South African and African-American intellectuals as described by Ntongela Masilela in which he says that "the New Africans appropriated the historical lessons drawn from the New Negro experience within American modernity to chart and negotiate the newly emergent South African modernity" (90). I will now illustrate how Dhlomo used "The New Negro" as an inspiration and a model for his own theory, and then how he applied this theory to his own creative writing.

The essay "The New Negro" was written by Locke in 1925, as the introduction to a book of the same name that he had conceived and was editing. In it he describes and explains the metamorphosis that the American Negro underwent "in the last decade" (so, probably from 1915 to 1925), a metamorphosis from what he calls "the Old Negro" into "the New Negro". Dhlomo would almost certainly have come across and read this book quite soon after its publication, and much of it would have been highly applicable to his own situation in South Africa.

---

<sup>2</sup> For detailed proof that Dhlomo had read "The New Negro" see *The New African* 123n 104.

Locke portrays the 'Old Negro' as:

a creature of moral debate and historical controversy. His has been a stock figure perpetuated as an historical fiction partly in innocent sentimentalism, partly in deliberate reactionism. The Negro himself has contributed his share to this through a sort of protective social mimicry forced upon him by the adverse circumstances of dependence. So for generations in the mind of America, the Negro has been more of a formula than a human being – a something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be “kept down,” or “in his place,” or “helped up,” to be worried with or worried over, harassed or patronised, a social bogey or a social burden. The thinking Negro even has been induced to share this same general attitude, to focus his attention on controversial issues, to see himself in the distorted perspective of a social problem. (3)

Locke, then, sees the 'old Negro' as an image created by society, and further perpetuated by the Negro himself. He is seen, not as a man or a person, but as a social 'problem' that needs to be dealt with, in an either helpful but patronizing, or condemnatory way. The Negro has been 'othered' and dehumanised; instead of being seen as an individual or a person, he is seen only in so far as he affects the rest of society, white society. Dhlomo agrees with the way that a segregated society affects a black person's perception, even of himself:

the trouble is that their [whites] opinions and conclusions and pictures of African life often come to be accepted as the right thing. In this way, great harm has been done to race attitudes and relations, to the African himself, and, above all, to truth, values and the human personality. ("Bantu culture" 67)

Locke describes the emergence of the 'New Negro' as something that happened without warning:

Similarly the mind of the Negro seems suddenly to have slipped from under the tyranny of social intimidation and to be shaking off the psychology of imitation and implied inferiority. By shedding the old chrysalis of the Negro problem we are achieving something like a spiritual emancipation. Until recently, lacking self-understanding, we have been almost as much of a

problem to ourselves as we still are to others. But the decade that found us with a problem has left us with only a task. The multitude perhaps feels as yet only a strange relief and a new vague urge, but the thinking few know that in the reaction the vital inner grip of prejudice has been broken. (4)

In this passage Locke says that the New Negro is “shaking off the psychology of imitation and implied inferiority”, referring back to the “mimicry” (3) of the ‘old Negro’. From this portrayal it is evident that by ‘mimicry’ Locke means something very different from Bhabha’s use of the term in his essay “Of Mimicry and Man” (London: Arnold, 1989). For Locke mimicry is just that, an imitation that, importantly, implies inferiority; it contains none of the menace and mockery that it is charged with in Bhabha, and is certainly not a veiled form of resistance. According to Locke, the ‘New Negro’ has the self-confidence to resist mimicry, and to be himself, in life and in art.

Dhlomo recognises the same problem, although unfortunately he does not see the same solution:

The tendency is to look up to European [sic] in these matters. Even educated Africans still look upon certain European papers, individuals and groups as leaders and makers of standards in these matters. Men who hardly comment on articles, speeches, poems and books by their fellow Africans discuss heatedly, enthusiastically and “with learning” productions by Europeans even on African affairs and life. There would be no danger in this if it did not discourage and stifle African original and creative expression - and that means African culture, initiative and originality. (“Bantu culture” 68)

He does, however, propose an alternative:

. . . the modern African poets give us, as far as it is possible, poetry that is distinctly and truly African. Like our music, it should not be a mere imitation, an adulterated copy, of European poetry. It must be original and African in content, form and spirit. (“Zulu Folk Poetry” 57)

In his essay Locke also stresses the effect that the shift from countryside to city (from the agrarian South to the industrialised North) is having on the New Negro. They “hurdle several generations of experience at a leap”, and also gain experience in life-attitudes and self-expression “in his poetry, his art, his education and his new outlook” (5). The mass migration to the city also has distinct social ramifications, some of which actually benefit the Negro in terms of race relations. The Negro problem is “no longer exclusively or even predominantly Southern. Why should our minds remain sectionalised, when the problem itself no longer is?” (5). Because the migration city-ward is not peculiar to the Negro, but affects the whole American population, “the problems of adjustment are new, practical, local and not particularly racial. Rather they are an integral part of the large and industrial and social problems of our present-day democracy” (5). Another point that Locke raises in relation to this new process of urbanisation and industrialisation is that of class:

with the Negro rapidly in process of class differentiation, if it ever was warrantable to regard and treat the Negro *en masse* it is becoming with every day less possible, more unjust and more ridiculous. In the very process of being transplanted, the Negro is becoming transformed. (5-6)

Locke’s ‘New Negro’ also becomes more self-aware, and this permeates his art:

The migrant masses, shifting from countryside to city, hurdle several generations of experience at a leap, but more important, the same thing happens spiritually in the life-attitudes and self-expression of the Young Negro, in his poetry, his art, his education, and his new outlook, with the additional advantage, of course, of the poise and greater certainty of knowing what it is all about. From this comes the promise and warrant of a new leadership. (5)

When Dhlomo describes the ideal “New African” that he foresees emerging in South Africa, Locke’s influence is apparent:

**This class consists mostly of organised urban workers who are awakening to the issue at stake and to the power of organised intelligently-led mass action and of progressive African intellectuals and leaders.**

**The new African knows where he belongs and what belongs to him; where he is going and how; what he wants and the methods to obtain it. Such incidents as worker's strikes; organised boycotts; mass defiance of injustice – these and many more are but straws in the wind heralding the awakening of the New African masses. ("African Attitudes" 24)**

In Dhlomo's 'New African' we see the same urban, industrial origins as Locke's 'New Negro'. Like the 'New Negro', the 'New African' is educated and intellectual; with this education he becomes knowledgeable, and the group as a whole is guided into the future by a competent leadership.

One must keep in mind, however, the time-period in which Dhlomo wrote most of his theory. While *The Girl* was written in 1935 and published a year later, most of his critical work was composed in the period between 1939 and 1949, and indeed all of the above theory in the period between 1945 and 1948. *The Girl*, therefore, does not correlate directly with his concepts of the 'New African' or with Locke's 'New Negro', but in it one can find the beginnings of many ideas that Dhlomo would later develop and write about extensively - as I will show in the following section.

*The Girl Who Killed to Save: An Optimistic, Missionary Beginning?*

*The Girl Who Killed to Save* (1936) is, along with the epic 51-page poem *The Valley of a Thousand Hills* (1941), the most studied of Herbert Dhlomo's work. This is most probably because it is his first work and, more importantly, the first play in English by a black South African. Another, practical, reason for this is that these were the only two of Dhlomo's works to be published during his lifetime. Much of the criticism written about *The Girl* has been negative, condemning it because of its "sentimentality and because it inscribes the values of Dhlomo's petit-bourgeois Christian missionary education" (Steadman 16). *The Girl* has been described as having "all too obvious defects" (Gérard 227) and while it may be fairly mediocre as drama, its interest to the scholar of African literature extends far beyond its position as 'the first play in English by a black South African'.

In her discussion on Yoruba theatre Karin Barber describes modernity as meaning "not the rejection of the traditional but the possibility of selectively recuperating it" (424). An alternative way of voicing this same notion is "It does not mean to say that because you see civilised people and wish to become like them, that you should discard your own which is good" (Fuze, in Attwell, "Reprisals of Modernity" 272). *The Girl* is an example of just that. Dhlomo uses a well known historical incident that is popularly narrated, and appropriates it to tell his own message, 'selectively recuperating' certain elements of it, and turning it into an opportunity for the Xhosa people to enter into the discourse of modernity.

In *The Girl* Dhlomo writes about the great cattle-killing of 1956, in which the Xhosa people were brought to their knees and their nation effectively destroyed, economically and otherwise, by the prophecies of Nongqause, a teenage prophet. The story that Herbert bases his play on is both true and well known, and undeniably tragic. Nongqause hears voices, taken to be her ancestors', that tell her that for the Xhosa people to be saved from oppression and ultimate destruction, they must slaughter all their animals and destroy all their food. When this had been done, the ancestors would come to the Xhosa people's aid, and all white men would be driven into the sea. As we know, the Xhosas did as they were told, but the prophesised victory did not occur. It is estimated that as a result of this prophecy over twenty thousand Xhosa people died, as Dhlomo himself explains in the introduction.

One of the more prevalent theories is that *The Girl* is a dramatic representation of Dhlomo's belief in black progression into modernity through an adoption of Western culture and religion, or as Steadman puts it "it is not so much a conflict between benevolent missionaries and superstitious pagans, as between progressive modernism and retrogressive tribalism" (16). This also points to a vision of an inclusive nationalism as opposed to isolated tribal progression (as does the fact that this is a Xhosa story and Dhlomo a Zulu man). There is also a direct correlation between this and Dhlomo's own theory that "...the tribalism which so many people desire to protect and prolong, must be broken down at all costs and hazards. It is one of the most formidable foes to Bantu progress..." ("Native Policy", in Steadman, "Towards Popular Theatre 17).

There are other ways to interpret *The Girl*. At worst it can be said to be nothing more than an example of missionary literature showing that Christianity holds the true salvation of the Xhosa people, and that their own pagan beliefs will only lead them to disaster. The cattle-killing, according to this theory, is only important to Dhlomo because it forced the Xhosa into Christianity and into modernity. This is emphasised by Dhlomo by his repeated references to the Bible, and the Christian belief of a new life beginning after death. Another option is that in *The Girl* Dhlomo was in fact celebrating one of the first moments of African political resistance. It does appear, however, that Dhlomo sees modernity as a place where the ancestors and tribal belief do not belong. It is also obvious that Dhlomo saw Christianity as an important tool or component of the Africans' progression into western modernity. In Christianity was acceptance by the whites, a way of being educated, and a doorway into the mainstream economy and society. An example in point is the entry of Tiyo Soga, the model of an enlightened black man, into the play in the last scene.

David Attwell says that in *The Girl* Dhlomo is "less concerned with consolidating the missionary viewpoint than with establishing a nationalist narrative" and that "the event [the cattle-killing] will prepare the 'national soil – soul' for 'new intellectual and moral structures', not just the message of the missionary, but also scientific medicine, law, and literacy – in short, modernity" ("Reprisals of Modernity" 277-278). Attwell also says that "it is characteristic of this period [pre-1930s] that 'modernity' is represented by the church and the school – possibly also the justice system" ("Reprisals of Modernity" 278). If this is so *The Girl* exhibits a conscious attempt by Dhlomo to encourage the black population to grasp any opportunity presented to them to enter a modern society, an opportunity that had previously not been afforded them.

Despite the fact that the situation (of the cattle-killing) in which the opportunity is presented to them is far from ideal, and could even spell the end of Xhosa society, the only other option is to be once again left behind by modernity, and that, according to Dhlomo, could very well spell the end of an identifiable Xhosa culture.

### The Artist Must Fight for the Dawn

*The Girl* is Dhlomo's first attempt at serious fiction, and his first published work. It is not surprising, then, that in it Dhlomo is not always entirely certain of the message that he is trying to convey. Indeed, *The Girl* is at times fairly ambiguous, leaving the reader in doubt as to what exactly Dhlomo is proposing. As Dhlomo matured, however, his writing became more and more direct, and contained undeniable nationalist sentiment. With this more political creative work, he puts his own theory, laid out below, into action:

We must begird ourselves like men and fight for the Dawn. The artist must rise and shine, for there is no one better placed and equipped than he. Great art is born out of great material, profound experience and acute inspiration. A whole nation in the throes of transition and rebirth, contending against both internal weaknesses of timidity, docility and ignorance, and the external forces of oppression and frustration - what rich material for creative living art! ... It is small warped minds who remain detached from and aloof to the Masses ... Art for art's sake does not mean a cowardly and blind shirking of the burning questions of today, of the Mass struggle. It means the capacity to make virile honest art out of this bitterness and tragedy. ("Masses and the Artist" 61)

One of the changes that is most evident is Dhlomo's decision to stress nationalist sentiment in his poetry of this time period. For an understanding of nationalism, and nationalist sentiment, I refer once more to Gellner:

Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.

Nationalism as a sentiment, or as a movement, can best be defined in terms of this principle. Nationalist *sentiment* is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfilment. ... (*Nations and Nationalism* 1)

What is particularly applicable to the South African situation is Gellner's assertion that:

there is one particular form of the violation of the nationalist principle to which nationalist sentiment is quite particularly sensitive: if the rulers of the political unit belong to a nation other than that of the majority of the ruled, this, for nationalists, constitutes a quite outstandingly intolerable breach [sic] of political propriety. (*Nations and Nationalism* 1)

South Africa, with white minority rule and the oppression of a vast black majority obviously lent itself to an upsurge of nationalist sentiment, and this is realised in the writings of black intellectuals, of which Dhlomo was one.

Written five years after *The Girl*, "South Africa" was published as part of four "thematically interlinked" sonnets - "South Africa", "The Nile", "Poet at Durban Beach - Night" and "The Ocean" (*The New African* 217) and is an openly political sonnet about oppression<sup>3</sup>. It also signifies meaningful progression in Dhlomo's ideas on modernity to a position more closely in line with nationalism.

"South Africa" was either written as part of *The Valley of a Thousand Hills*, and then also published on its own as a sonnet, or it was written as a sonnet and then included in Dhlomo's epic poem. Since they were both written and published in 1941, it seems likely that "South Africa" was written as part of the greater project, but then published

---

<sup>3</sup> For full text of "South Africa" see Appendix, 1.

separately before the publication of *The Valley*. It begins in a tone of despair, but also with a reference to the beauty of South Africa, reminiscent of the beginning of *The Valley of a Thousand Hills* in which he celebrated the past glory of his country when it still belonged to his people. The first two lines particularly are an emphatic condemnation of the Natives' Land Act of 1913, which ensured that blacks had very few rights in relation to land. Because of this legislation, Dhlomo is unable to own land, and feels a stranger, "an outcast" in the land of his ancestors, or "a pariah in the land of his birth" (Plaatje, in Marks 64). This would have particularly affected people like Dhlomo who came from a family that was a part of the tiny black middle-class and may have been able to afford land, but was still not allowed to own it.

Dhlomo then moves on to attack those whites who claim to know the 'native' mind;

They call me happy while I lie and rot  
Beneath a foreign yoke in my dear strand

These lines bring into play not only a direct criticism of the whites who think they know the 'native' mind, but also the artistic implementation of Dhlomo's own theory:

Only Africans themselves given opportunities and means enjoyed by European experts can reveal the soul of the African to the world. Experts will write books on African languages and cultures, they will lecture on these and be recognised far and wide as the interpreters of what the African feels and desires, but the real African - the African whose soul yearns to translate the glorious past into the Present - the African who longs to reveal the cravings of his soul in creating - can only be discovered by himself. ("Let Africans" 11)

At the same time these lines also introduce a strong opposition to generalisation, another idea that is closely related to Locke's: "with the Negro rapidly in process of class differentiation, if it ever was warrantable to regard and treat the Negro *en masse*

it is becoming with every day less possible, more unjust and more ridiculous” (“The New Negro” 5-6). I feel that there is an element of this position in these lines of “South Africa”, that it is impossible and ridiculous to think of and treat all Negro (in this case, African) men the same, and as different equally from white men. Dhlomo is at once attacking this ideology, and calling for recognition of Africans as a part of the human race.

Another aspect of these two very rich lines is their references to slavery or forced labour, and to the huge influence that migratory labour had on black culture in South Africa. Here Dhlomo is condemning the hypocrisy of the western, ‘civilised’ world in regard to slavery and forced labour. While slavery was abolished in 1838, over a century before this poem was written, Dhlomo still sees himself and his people as slaves under foreign rule.

The first stanza of “South Africa” ends with a recapitulation of black South African history, another example of Karin Barber’s notion of selectively recuperating the traditional in order to establish it in the discourse of modernity (424):

Midst these sweet hills and dales, under these stars,  
To live and be free, my fathers fought.

An important consideration to take into account is whether one is looking at “South Africa” as a complete poem, or as part of the greater epic *The Valley of a Thousand Hills*. If one looks at it as part of the larger text, then these two lines would refer specifically to that natural feature of (now) KwaZulu-Natal, the Valley of a Thousand Hills, and the poem would be a poem of Zulu history, and the “fathers [who] fought” would be Dhlomo’s Zulu ancestors. In this case, however, I am looking at the poem as

a complete sonnet, and feel that I am given this option by the title, "South Africa", given to it by Dhlomo. The difference is that "South Africa" as a complete and autonomous work is a poem of nationalist tendencies, as opposed to the tribalist bent it would have had as a small part of *The Valley*.

In the following lines of the poem Dhlomo then begins to question what must be done to win freedom for black South Africans:

Must I still fight and bear anew the scars?  
Must freedom e'er with blood, not sweat, be bought?

Dhlomo obviously does not want to turn to violence; his entire career advocated a merging of societies, where black people and culture become integrated into white 'civilisation,' usually through Christianity. However, at this stage Dhlomo has obviously lost that optimism and even naïveté that was a mark of his earlier work, *The Girl* especially. In these words one can sense the frustration and disillusionment of a man whose dreams remain unfulfilled, and who longs for freedom and equality, and even recognition, for both himself, and his people. He has given up on a peaceful transition to a unified, multicultural society, and wonders in despair if violence is the only answer. An interesting link that Dhlomo makes in these lines is with the past, when he writes " must I ...bear anew the scars," for here again he is referring to his ancestors and the time when they fought for and won this land. By so doing, he reaffirms his place in this land, not only as a part of it, but also as a rightful owner of it, and this also emphasises the injustice of the land ownership policies on the part of the white authorities.

The last six lines of the poem circle back to (once again) attack whites who thought that they knew 'the African mind', and who are surprised at the degree of anger and hatred that this mind produces:

You ask me whence these burning words and wild;  
 You laugh and chide and think you know me well.  
 I am your patient slave, your harmless child,  
 You say. . . . So tyrants dreamt as e'en they fell!  
 My country's not my own – so will I fight!  
 My mind is made, I will yet strike for Right!

Dhlomo uses this mistaken assumption of knowledge to mock the white people who claimed to have it, and he also inserts examples of this stereotyped knowledge, such as 'the patient slave' and most notably the 'harmless child', an allusion to the paternalistic mentality of the authorities who believed that the 'native' was a simple, childlike figure who needed someone (white) to look after them, or as Locke put it: "a something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be 'kept down,' or 'in his place,' or 'helped up,' to be worried with or worried over, harassed or patronised, a social bogey or a social burden" (*The New Negro* 3).

In these last six lines Dhlomo is mocking the folly of anyone who thinks that they know the black people, and this is an issue that he felt strongly about, and also expressed in his theory: "Many so-called experts on African life and affairs know very little about the Soul, feelings and mind of the African people" ("Bantu Culture" 67). He is especially incensed by those who think that the black person is happy or content or better off being oppressed, and includes in these lines a caution. This notion, Dhlomo warns, is what 'tyrants dream' and by believing it those tyrants are ignoring the warnings of their own demise. Dhlomo, however, will not take responsibility for the violence that he is warning of, for, as he writes, it is only because his country has

been stolen that he will bear arms: "My country's not my own – so will I fight!" While Dhlomo begins "South Africa" in a despairing and mournful tone, it becomes more and more bitter, militant and angry, and ends with a direct threat, a "strike for Right".

The next poem that I will examine is "The Question: Beasts or Brothers"<sup>4</sup>. Unfortunately, no precise date can be given for its composition, and it remained unpublished until Visser and Couzens included it in *H.I.E. Dhlomo: Collected Works*. But by taking the subject and tone into account, it can be estimated that it was written in the mid-1940s, between 1944 and 1948. As the title suggests, "The Question" is a probing interrogation of white South Africans' motives in their treatment of black South Africans. To this end it is constructed in pairs of strongly conflicting alternatives of racial interaction, and the relationship between races. One is the inevitable consequence if South African society continues on its then current path. The opposing alternative is the ideal that could be attained through mutual racial respect, resulting in harmony and cooperation.

The first of these questions, which are designed to make the white authorities look ridiculous and are in reality both hypothetical and satirical, relates broadly to the ideal of racial equality, and is reflective of the poem's subtitle, "Beasts or Brothers":

Would you have me as a brother?  
Or a revengeful beast?  
Would you have us help each other,  
Or have our hates increased?

---

<sup>4</sup> For full text of "The Question: Beasts or Brothers" see Appendix, 2.

In this introduction Dhlomo sets out his objective for this poem: he wants to understand, for he cannot, the motivation behind the whites' actions. In "South Africa" Dhlomo used the term "yoke" to stress the way that whites regarded blacks as nothing more than beasts of burden, and this theme is again used in "The Question" when Dhlomo uses the term "beast". Dhlomo, however, is proposing an alternative to the extremely segregational laws of the white government; a unified brotherhood of man. He is also implying that this rift is not a natural one, but has been created by the government. At the same time Dhlomo states what he believes will be the consequences of each option; if South Africa continues to be run in the same way, race-hatred will increase, particularly on the side of the oppressed. But if a unified society is established, black and white can work together for mutual benefit, or so Dhlomo believes.

The second stanza is a key one, for it directly relates to progress, the progress of both black and white society:

Would you have us stay your progress,  
Grip, bruise you like a chain?  
Is your aim to halt our progress;  
Why? How? What end? What gain?

The theme of progress is particularly important because of its prevalence in Dhlomo's theory as well as in his creative works, and it is that to which he strives to contribute through his art, to create a national black literature of South Africa that proves to the world that 'black genius' is not a paradox. This, then, is a concrete example of Dhlomo putting into practice the social responsibility of the artist that he so often theorizes about, as in the following extract:

African art must deal with the things that are vital and near to the African today... We want dramatic representations of African Oppression, Emancipation, Evolution. To do this, the African dramatist must be an artist before being a propagandist; a philosopher before a reformer; a psychologist before a patriot; be true to himself. (1936, 7)

Dhlomo's ideal of a symbiotic progress which benefits both black South Africa and white South Africa is true not only for literature, but for society as a whole. He sees that for black South Africans to enter modernity successfully, they have to embrace the technologies and social ideals already successfully implemented in the west. An important aspect of the black man's view of modernity is that of the 'primitive' versus the 'modern', or the "temporalities of modernity" (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 151). In this view, black culture is portrayed as a primitive version of European culture; European culture is portrayed as a more evolved version of a similar society. This breeds a sense of inferiority in the black culture, a feeling of being 'backward', and of underachievement. This contact between 'primitive' and 'advanced' also results in a sense of "accelerated time" or "temporality spinning out of control" (Attwell "Reprisals of Modernity" 272), and a resultant feeling of loss of control over one's life, culture and destiny. It would be impossible to return to traditional black culture after so much exposure to 'Europe', and so a new, hybrid and South African culture needs to be developed, an important aspect of which would obviously be a national literature.

Like "South Africa", "The Question" includes subtle warnings from Dhlomo to the oppressors. If they are not willing to live together as "free men co-operating", they risk the black population being forced to "Starve, kill, revolt and die". This theme is repeated in the fifth stanza:



Would you have us work together  
And live and build in peace?  
Or prefer us fight and blather,  
And racial hell release?

An element that Dhlomo introduces in these lines, for the first time in the poem, is that of Christianity (“hell”), a reminder, perhaps, to the devout Christian whites of their moral beliefs, which they are ignoring by oppressing their black fellow man. This religious undercurrent is strengthened in the following stanza with Dhlomo’s use of “neighbour”, a reference to that Christian principle of “love thy neighbour”. In the final stanza Dhlomo again calls on this ideal, this time by making direct use of the Bible:

Brother I am not your neighbour...  
Was fatal Cain’s philosophy:  
As thyself so love thy neighbour...  
Is to be strong, great, wise and free!

While this may seem to be mere missionary-influenced religious moralizing, it does serve various purposes. Firstly, it plays upon white Christians’ consciences, hoping for change because of guilt. Secondly, Dhlomo hopes to exploit their fears of divine retribution by pointing out Cain’s fate. Thirdly, using the ultimate authority to many Christians, the Bible, intertextually in the work of an African, Dhlomo hopes to point out the similarities of the black mind and the white. Finally, this also emphasises Dhlomo’s own belief that the only way for black culture to progress into modernity is through embracing Christianity.

They will strike hard!

In the 1940s South African society became more politically conscious, largely as the result of World War Two, which forced people to become more aware of world events, and of the politics involved therein. Dhlomo's writing mirrored this change, becoming more disillusioned and bitter, and culminating in works such as "Because I'm Black", first published in *Ilanga Lase Natal* on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, 1949<sup>5</sup>. In this poem Dhlomo addresses the idea of racial prejudice, prejudice that was the basis for the entire society in which he was living. When analysing Dhlomo's work one must take into account the dominant thoughts and political trends of the time. The timing of "Because I'm Black" is even more relevant than to most of Dhlomo's other writings, because it was written in 1949, no more than a year after the Nationalist Party first came to power, an occurrence that could only have been seen as tragic by Dhlomo and his peers.

As is well documented, the African races in South Africa were the victims of structured oppression, and had no practical political, or individual, rights. "Anthropologists", says Gérard, "know that in any mixed society, the weaker group tends to accept and internalise the image of itself which is offered by the stronger group, with nearly psychopathic self-disparagement as an inevitable result" (235). If this is true, then the barriers that needed to be crossed by artists such as Dhlomo and his contemporaries, were not only social, or even racial, but extended to their own minds and thoughts. It is not enough, though, to hope for a classless society, for, as Terry Eagleton writes: "To wish class or nation away, to seek to live sheer irreducible

---

<sup>5</sup> For full text of "Because I'm Black" see Appendix, 3.

difference *now* in the manner of some contemporary post-structuralist theory, is to play straight into the hands of the oppressor” (5).

On colonialism and oppression, Eagleton writes that “However fundamentally indifferent colonialism may be to the nature of the people it does down, the fact remains that a particular people is in effect done down *as such*. And it is this fact that the truth of nationalism illuminates” (10). This does not, however, quite give justice to the extent of the white South African’s belief in their own superiority over the indigenous people of South Africa. It was one of the most notable characteristics of Apartheid that the differences inherent between the two races were not only recognised, but were actually turned into a field of Science. A feature of Western thought at this time, a similar ideology was practiced in the United States of America in the early twentieth century, as is evident from “Race Intelligence” by W.E.B. Du Bois, written in 1920, in which he savages such science, and calls it “utter rot” (Du Bois 197). This is of particular interest not only due to the similarity of thought, but also because it further strengthens the ideological tie between the African-American intellectuals, such as Du Bois, and the black intellectuals of South Africa who would later be influenced by their work.

The history of racial relations in South Africa is full of studies of the nature, character and mental capacity of the ‘native’. As early as 1904 books had been published stating the inferiority of the black person, thereby justifying the oppression that they were subject to. In Dudley Kidd’s *The Essential Kafir*, under a description of ‘Mental Characteristics’ he wrote:

The whole mental furniture of a Kafir's mind differs from that of a European. His outlook upon life is completely different; his conception of nature is cast in a different mould. It is quite common for Europeans to think that they can soon sound the depths of a Kafir's mind; but maturer experience always reveals a shallowness, not of the Kafir's thoughts, but of our first and hasty impressions. ... He is a complete stranger to Western conceptions of clear thinking, and is as ignorant of logic as he is of the moons of Jupiter. His conceptions of cause and effect are hopelessly at sea, and, as all primitive religions are based on such conceptions, his religion is a confused mass of ancestor-worship coupled with dread of magic. He cannot distinguish between coincidence and causation; he will argue that because he had a headache yesterday and a cow did something unusual, therefore the headache was caused by the weird action of the cow. (Kidd 277)

A particularly telling choice of subject matter in the above passage is that of religion, magic and logic, for these are characteristics often used in distinguishing between the 'primitive' and the 'modern'. Another claim, made in Kenya:

by a government pathologist, F.W. Vint, and a physician, H.L. Gordon, suggested that the cerebral development of Africans was unlike that of Europeans in crucial respects. Vint claimed that the cortex in African brains was narrower and the overall brain weight significantly less than that of Europeans, and that the average African only attained the stage of cerebral development of the average seven- or eight-year-old European boy. (In Dubow 201)

Views like these were ingrained into white, and even black, ways of thinking in South Africa after generations subjected to their proclamation, and it was this sort of mindset that Dhlomo was attempting to challenge with "Because I'm Black".

"Because I'm Black" is also a good example of the continued African-American link with South Africa, and the inspirational influence that Negro literature had on South African black intelligentsia, for it is, as Couzens pointed out, a response to Langston Hughes's "Minstrel Man" (Couzens, *The New African* 112)<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>6</sup> For full text of "Minstrel Man" see Appendix, 4.

Hughes refers to the misconception by whites that black people are content with the situation of master and slave, of oppression and inequality. He writes of an ignored “inner cry” that whites do not hear, perhaps even choose not to hear. This inner cry is not only mirrored in Dhlomo’s “You do not see their suffering”, but also with Dhlomo’s theory on the matter, written a full ten years before “Because I’m Black”:

How often one hears people say the African is happy and care-free because he smiles – ignorant of the fact that behind those smiles and calm expression lie a rebellious soul, a restless mind, a bleeding heart, stupendous ambitions, the highest aspirations, grim determination, a clear grasp of facts and the situation, grim resolve, a will to live. (“Nature and Variety” 32)

It is evident in “Because I’m Black” that Dhlomo had become more angry and bitter over time, and had lost the romantic optimism that he showed earlier. This progression, which was perhaps inevitable in a state as draconian as South Africa, has similar parallels to “The Fact of Blackness” written three years later (in 1952) by Frantz Fanon. In this essay Fanon talks of the progression from the optimism of logically proving that racial prejudice is wrong - “I intended to rationalize the world and to show the white man that he was mistaken” - to bitter anger - “My cry grew more violent: I am a Negro, I am a Negro, I am a Negro. . .” (Fanon, *Black Skin* 138).

Another interesting similarity between Fanon and Dhlomo is the importance of tradition, or the concept of having a tradition, for a culture. Fanon writes “Without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood. Not yet white, no longer wholly black, I was damned.” In a similar vein Dhlomo writes that:

The African dramatist cannot delve into the past unless he has grasped the

This poem, published in 1955, illustrates the lasting legacy that Herbert Dhlomo left for the black intellectuals of South Africa. Not only was he still remembered, but he is missed as an inspiration and as a leading figure in the South African literary nationalist movement. By adapting the ideas of African-America, and Alain Locke in particular, to the South African situation, and then using them for the inspiration of black South Africans, he played an important role in the creation of a body of black, African thought. In "Reprisals of Modernity" David Attwell uses Alain Touraine to define the passage into modernity as "not a transition to a bloodless rationality, but an adaptation to a world that is continually changing from 'reason that discovers eternal ideas to the action which, by rationalising the world, liberates and recomposes the subject'" ("Reprisals of Modernity" 274). With his creative writing Dhlomo was able to do just this, to liberate and recompose the subject, and to be one of those to give future South African intellectuals a base from which to continue the establishment of a national culture and the passage into modernity.

Agreeing with Leopold Senghor, Abiola Irele goes so far as to write of “Négritude as a synonym for ‘African personality’” (91).

Because of the time difference, Dhlomo would obviously not have read or been aware of the concept of Négritude. In fact, Dhlomo’s choice - to use Christianity as such a dominant aspect of his writing - could be said to be in direct opposition to the concept of Négritude, a concept that would become “the most overt and explicit phase of cultural nationalism to be found in modern African literature” (Chabal 41). Instead of emphasising and celebrating the differences and distinct characteristics of African culture and African people, Dhlomo instead focussed on the similarities to be found in humanity, and especially Christian humanity.

It has been said that:

Critics of African literature tend to be racists, nationalists or individualists. The racists devoutly believe in the *africanité* of African Literature and usually seek to demonstrate that black African writers think alike, feel alike, and therefore write alike... so long as he is black and African his writing is regarded as an expression of *négritude*, a verbal manifestation of the negro African soul... (Snead 238)

The above quote is not a true reflection of the concept of Négritude, but one given by Snead as an example of racist thought towards African literature, whereby all African literature is Négritudinal, and proves racial differences. According to this example, not only is everything written by a black African “a verbal manifestation of the negro African soul”, but this African soul is also viewed as inferior to a European one. He is, at best, a primitive form of the modern European; an example of what a European must have been hundreds of years previously. Dhlomo lived in a racist society, and had much experience facing this sort of thinking. His choice of Christianity is

therefore an appeal to the opposite; he is reacting to this racism that exacerbates differences, and instead he chooses to focus on the similarities, on the possibilities of assimilation.

By choosing the opposite of this racist example, Dhlomo attempts to show that by using something so undeniably European and at the time, in South Africa, ideologically unassailable as Christianity, he is able to prove that he, a black man, is a part of the civilised world, has the same beliefs, and must be treated as such. He does, in effect, use this sort of racist argument of difference against itself: if a black African can write like a white European then, according to the above logic, they must think alike, feel alike, and therefore be alike.

#### Modernity Cannot Be Bought And Paid For

In "Bought and Paid For" (*The Sjobok*, 16 May 1930) Dhlomo deals with alcohol abuse, polygamy, child abuse, wife abuse, bridal payments, swearing, murder and even divine retribution, to mention a few moral standpoints. That is quite a feat for a three-page story. His Christian character is the model of good behaviour, and is juxtaposed with vile and savage ones. By constructing the Christian and savage dichotomy, Dhlomo creates an 'other' from which to distance himself, and to highlight the weaknesses of heathen life, all the time trying to persuade his reader that it is only through Christianity that they will be able to join in their country's future.

Perhaps one must first question whether such a notion as 'their/our country' exists at this time, 1930, in South Africa. At this stage the idea of a unified nation would be a

relatively distant concept, and would definitely not be widespread, although early organisations such as the South African National Native Congress and the African National Congress, both formed in 1912, would have had established ideas of an 'African nationalism'. Gellner has told us that "Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" (*Nations and Nationalism*, 1). The violation of this principle, however, does not automatically lead to nationalist sentiment, and it was this that Dhlomo and his ilk needed to foster, as they would in time. One of the two main sources of nationalist sentiment is described as "the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle", a violation made even more intolerable when it is perpetrated by a minority against a majority (Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* 1). In South Africa in 1930 this was precisely the case, with the majority of the 'national unit' being excluded from the political one. From the present-day perspective, the conditions, then, seem perfect for a writer to capitalise on this, and to take issue with the apparent lack of a 'people's nation'.

Dhlomo, however, at first omitted this step from his writing, for he did not make any serious attempt at fostering nationalist sentiment until much later, when he would focus on just that in his newspaper columns. Instead of fostering this nationalist sentiment he seems to have neatly skipped it and focussed instead on the less politically sensitive issue of modernity. Whether this can be attributed to a lack of confidence, perhaps due to youth, or the possession of an optimism yet to be shattered, or even to fear of repercussions, I cannot say. Personally I would argue that it can be attributed to Dhlomo feeling the need to start somewhere, and beginning

with the more politically acceptable notion of modernity seemed far less daunting than the volatility of nationalism.

The story begins in the form of a very confrontational dialogue between two characters, Mali and his wife, Nanana. Mali is a particularly vicious man, with all the physical and habitual characteristics of the archetypal “heathen”, and absolutely no redeeming features. He is an alcoholic and a wife-abuser, a bad father and a bully, “a big, ugly looking man, with evil eyes” (25). By portraying Mali as he does, Dhlomo creates a heathen ‘other’. Nanana, on the other hand, is a virtuous and kind woman. She is a caring mother and a devout Christian, and does not touch alcohol at all.

From the outset, then, Dhlomo creates two very distinct positions. This is not a moment of strife in an otherwise happy marriage, but another example of a strict and irresolvable dichotomy that has once again been brought to a head. Mali and Nanana are diametrically opposed in belief and character, and their union can never be successful. Nanana bearing a daughter instead of a son in a male-orientated society can be seen as a tangible expression of this failed union. If, then, the reader were to take this story as an allegorical representation of the then-current South Africa and the ‘Native’s’ place in it, it would seem that Dhlomo’s message is clear: traditional life and modernity cannot live together in harmony, but will repeatedly come into conflict over everyday matters.

Nanana has been educated at a mission school, as her father tells us, and Dhlomo repeatedly emphasises this point in the story. This education, however, is very seldom mentioned in a positive light. The first time we are made aware of her background is

when Mali questions her wifely obedience: "Because you have the ways of white people, you think you can disobey me without fear?" (26). In traditional Zulu society a wife disobeying her husband is, at this time, still unheard of, and by placing the blame for such a transgression on Nanana's education Mali is being particularly condemnatory of the modern, 'white way'.

Later in the story the difference between Nanana and the other characters is illustrated, and blamed on her education, in: "Mali's other wives were heathens and as soon as they saw that Nanana had many ways of the white people they hated her the more and did all to make Mali neglect her" (26). Here there is no single, significant faux pas that causes discord, but a sense of difference that Nanana's education has introduced into the kraal life.

In this example, Nanana is discriminated against, or even hated, for belonging to an educated, Christian class, and for having European mannerisms. She is not judged as an individual, but instead is homogenised into a member of a collective other (Ashcroft 172). In postcolonial terms the process of 'othering' "describes the various ways in which colonial discourse produces its subjects", although it can be seen as a "dialectical process because the colonizing *Other* is established at the same time as its colonized *others* are produced as subjects" (Ashcroft 171). Othering, therefore, occurs in the designation, construction or invention of a barrier separating one social group from another, usually in the context of establishing a discourse of power. By focusing on Nanana's differences, the "heathen wives" illustrate an excellent example of 'othering', this time the colonized (the 'heathen wives') identifying Nanana and her

educated ways as the embodiment of the perceived threat of progress to their culture. This threat they then resist by driving it away.

Even Nanana's own father, the person whom we assume is at least partly responsible for her education, despairs at what she has learnt: "Girl, you are a fool, a silly fool. This is what comes of sending our children to Mission School. They learn there to disobey our laws – wonderful!" (27). Here his sarcastic despair stems, like Mali's anger, from the laws of their traditional society being disobeyed. With Mali, Nanana challenged the male right to be dominant. By returning to her father she is challenging another pillar of Zulu society, that is *ilobolo*, or bridal payment. In a society where daughters are no more valuable than the number of cows they can fetch, she has asked her father to attack the system from within, and again he places the blame squarely on the shoulders of the 'Mission School' that educated his daughter.

Of acute importance, however, is the identity of the character who denounces the mission education. In the first instance it is Mali, an incorrigible individual at the best of times. Then, it is the many 'heathen wives' who abuse her because of her mannerisms. Her father is the next to berate her over them, and he is cut from similar cloth to Mali. A cowardly alcoholic who murdered his wife in a drunken rage, he is interested only in hiding his own 'shameful' secret, an Indian wife, from the rest of the world.

However, when it is the obviously educated narrator who speaks of the mission education and the mannerisms that are taught there they are presented in a very different light. In a description of Nanana the narrator speaks of the "refined ways she

had learnt from the white people” (26) as what had attracted Mali to her in the first place.

The negative views, then, are never from someone who has first-hand experience of a mission education, or who can relate to Nanana, but come from those characters who are most diametrically dissimilar to Nanana, and have reason for resentment. Dhlomo, I believe, has given each of these characters the understanding that they are, until saved by the Lord, inferior in some way to the worldly and educated Nanana. When Mali sees the ease with which Nanana is able to resist alcohol he becomes incensed, as that is his particular weakness. It is, perhaps, jealousy that provokes his reaction, as he knows how destructive alcohol is to his life, and how it controls him.

The ‘heathen wives’ are another prime example of this jealousy and sense of inferiority. They are stuck in the same position that Nanana refuses to succumb to; they are unequal partners in marriage, they have no control over their own lives, and are at the socially acceptable mercy of a violent drunk. Not only are they jealous of Nanana for her “white ways”, but for the control that she has over her own destiny, and the courage to take a stand against their husband, even if it is ultimately an unsuccessful one. At the same time they resent the fact that she is unhappy with her lot in life; is the life that they lead not good enough for her, just because she has a few years of education at a mission?

It is interesting to note that while Dhlomo is undoubtedly a progressive man when dealing with issues of racial inequality and assimilation, he is not prepared to deal with gender equality in a similar manner. In both *An African Tragedy* and “Bought

and Paid For” all of the women characters fulfil traditional roles. Women are either portrayed positively as mothers and wives, doing things such as cooking or producing and caring for babies, or they are portrayed negatively as ‘good-time girls’ interested in nothing more than sex, money, alcohol and dancing. By the time Dhlomo writes his Roamer column, discussed in the following chapter, he has accepted that the roles of women may be extended into the work place, but even here it is in a limited capacity, such as becoming nurses or owning shebeens.

The father, perhaps, has the most to lose if Nanana succeeds in her resistance of the traditional system of polygamy and *ilobolo*; if she were to return home to his kraal not only would she discover his “guilty secret”, but he would have to return the *ilobolo* that Mali had paid him, and according to the narrator “he evidently thought more of *ilobolo* cattle... than for his only child’s pitiful condition” (27). It is fear, then, of both shame and financial loss, that drives Nanana’s father to insult his daughter, her education, and the institution that gave it to her.

A key concept in this short story must be the disruptive effect that an accelerated break from the past has on a society. When a society is changed at an unnatural rate, or when change is forced upon that society, the effects can be devastating, either to those who change or to those who resist that change. By illustrating this so clearly, and giving the story such a tragic ending, is Dhlomo suggesting that any attempt to break from the past is futile? Is progress seen as something beyond the capacity of the average ‘Native’, and will it destroy any black individual who attempts it? Or is the ending tragic to the point of becoming a satirical melodrama? By dramatically exaggerating the far reaching consequences of Nanana’s brief education, is Dhlomo

mocking the fears of conservative black South Africans who think that tragedy and destruction are the only possible fruits of education and modernity? Is Dhlomo agreeing that progress will be difficult and painful, but that it is worthwhile? Admittedly, Nanana's education earned her nothing more than a pitiful end in an asylum, but was she not given the pride and strength to stand up to her husband and break an abusive cycle? The fact that Nanana ends up in an asylum is in itself fascinating. This could be an allusion to society trying to control and silence dissidents by removing them from itself, thereby reducing the chances of their contaminating the rest of society with their ideas. If Nanana's father had had the strength to value his daughter above cattle, and had taken her back into his life, the ending would have been very different, and perhaps even happy. It is not the failing of the educated heroine that leads to her destruction, but the failure of one of society's most important relationships, that of father and child.

The plight of Nanana introduces the ambivalent effect that a mission education has on the colonized subject. While she has not yet become a true mimic (almost the same but not quite - Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man" 235), she has already become caught in a state of flux between her black, traditional culture, and the white, European cultural norms to which she aspires. A far more passionate and emotionally charged precursor to Bhabha's concept of mimicry was Fanon's cry that "Without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood. Not yet white, no longer wholly black, I was damned" (138). And like Fanon, Nanana has been damned by her partial introduction into European ways. She finds herself excluded by her husband and his other wives to the point that she can no longer function in their community. But at this time there is only a tiny 'middle class', and

by this I mean a class comprised of educated blacks, and especially, educated black women, as a possible alternative. There is also no class that lies between the traditional, uneducated 'native' and the educated white coloniser, which is accessible to members of both.

As I have already mentioned, Christianity, both as a religious establishment and as an educational one, plays a very important role in Dhlomo's thinking and his writing, as well as in his own upbringing. Robert Moffat, a missionary writing in the mid 1800s, writes that:

the Gospel of Christ is the only instrument which can civilize and save all kindred nations of the earth... and we only have to publish it through the length and breadth of that great Continent, in order to elevate and cheer its degraded and sorrowing inhabitants, and introduce them to the fellowship of civilized Nations. (ii, in de Kock 37)

This, then, is the type of education that a black Christian would receive from a mission, the only education available at the time. His own race and his culture would only be taught as an example of how it had failed to reach the heights that Europe had reached. Christianity was seen and taught by missionaries as a tool of salvation, and the hope of Africans to escape the depths of depravity in which they existed. As Leon de Kock indicates:

Moffat would continue to read the cultural manifestations of otherness, which he had no way of understanding, in terms of difference and lack. He was therefore engaging in a classic act of "erasure", in which subjects are both constituted (textually objectified) and effaced (given meaning in terms of difference) as they are reconfigured in language. (Spivak 11, in de Kock 37)

I argue that Dhlomo continues in the same vein, furthering this manifestation of otherness. In "Bought and Paid For" each representation that he makes of the

traditional Zulu culture is one of 'difference' from the Christian one. Nanana's marriage is not described in any detail, but merely as having been structured "according to the Native custom" (26), meaning it was arranged and that a payment was made by the groom to the father of the bride. In a similar way Mali's wives are not described as traditional or old-fashioned, but as "heathens", which might as well be "non-Christians", and so their differences are masked by a blanket term.

Yet another example of this effacing is the dialogue used when referring to alcohol abuse. In the first line of the story Mali calls Nanana a "Christian fool", essentially because she refuses to drink 'utshwala'. Here Dhlomo, a proud teetotaler, focuses on the tendency of the uneducated and irreligious to succumb to the evils of drink due to lack of moral strength, and on the strength of character (he implicitly claims) that converted Christians possess, enabling them to resist these temptations. It is Nanana's faith that is the difference here, and it is that that Mali resents, using drink as an excuse to force her into obedience.

A significant element of "Bought and Paid For" is the position of the narrator, the 'Christian me'. As I have discussed, the story is largely dependent on the interaction between the 'heathen wives' and 'heathen' Mali on one side, and the partially educated and incompletely converted Nanana on the other. Where, then, is the narrator situated in relation to these two extremes? The narrator is obviously a Christian, as proved by the positive light in which he portrays education and Christianity, as well as the negative portrayal of the 'heathen'. The narrator also uses references to practices of the 'heathen', such as polygamy and *ilobolo*, to reinforce this disapproval, and traits of the educated (white) to illustrate refinement and civility.

Again, though, difficulties arise in the construction of the ending of the story, and these difficulties are perhaps an indication of colonial ambivalence.

The story concludes with Nanana being certified insane, and Mali reclaiming his *ilobolo* oxen. The marriage between traditional and modern has failed spectacularly, and it is the traditional that has survived. If the narrator firmly and unequivocally believed that a modern, Western society was the answer, surely Nanana would have been the victorious heroine? With this ending, there is not even a hint of redemption, or a hidden moral to be learned: modernity has failed! The colonial authority of modernity, of superiority, therefore, is incomplete. While the narrator seems to be in favour of colonialism and the attendant modernity, he does not suggest that this need be at the total expense of his own culture. According to Ashcroft, "ambivalence suggests that complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject" (12-13). The narrator mirrors this fluctuation of complicity and resistance, although he does favour acceptance and appropriation of the modern by the traditional over resistance.

As a writer, a Christian, and an educated 'native' (a term of the time), Dhlomo does not use this story to highlight the inadequacies of 'natives.' How could he, seeing himself as proof of their latent promise? Instead he focuses on the differences between the Christian and the heathen, encouraging his readers to convert, and be saved. His argument, however, is a complex one, as is evident from the ending to "Bought and Paid For". Nanana has been converted, and educated, but is pulled back into the depths of heathen life by the backward beliefs of her father and her husband. So conversion and education are not enough, unless the society as a whole is changed.

A troubling and confusing element of "Bought and Paid For" is Nanana's father's "guilty secret" (26). A known murderer, he still has some "guilty secret" that he doesn't want revealed. This, the reader learns at the end, is a "dirty stooping Indian woman" for a wife, and it is a secret that is bad enough to make Nanana utter "a cry of horror" (28). Why does Dhlomo describe the father's secret wife in such a way, and why is this secret bad enough to drive Nanana insane? Dhlomo "was often critical of 'coloureds' and Indians for distancing themselves from blacks and was virulently abusive of 'poor Whites'" (Couzens, *The New African* 58). With this in mind, his inclusion of this Indian woman and his derogatory description of her is even more confusing. One would think that if his problem with Indians was that they distanced themselves from blacks, then he would praise an Indian woman who married a Zulu man. Does he actually believe that this mixed marriage is offensive, as he makes out? Or is he again censuring the narrow-mindedness of his culture? It cannot just be the uneducated 'heathen' he is condemning, because it is his clean-cut Christian Nanana who is driven insane by the idea.

It is very difficult to find an answer to these questions. The reader would like to think, I am sure, that Dhlomo is criticising racist tendencies as a whole, especially if one looks at his Christian ethos and his previously mentioned ideal of a Christian unity. However, this may not be the case at all. Tim Couzens has shown that on more than one occasion Rolfes's brother Herbert Dhlomo criticised the economic practices of Indians, and also "strongly disapproved of dancing between African girls and Indians", saying that he wanted "unity but not promiscuous social relations" (*The New African* 289). Couzens also establishes that Rolfes Dhlomo supported Herbert in this,

and said that while they didn't blame the Indians, "to blazes, in this case, with co-operation and unity among the Front members" (*The New African* 289). Rolfe Dhlomo also made derogatory references about Indian politics in his Roamer columns, as examined in Chapter 3. Couzens continues to give other examples of "tinges of prejudice and grievance in [Herbert's] writings" (*The New African* 289). While no further evidence can be found with regards to Rolfe Dhlomo's own prejudices, it appears from this single occasion that it is very possible that his "dirty stooping Indian woman" description expresses just that: racial prejudice.

### The Evil City Claims Another Soul!

The work that R.R.R. Dhlomo is most famous for is *An African Tragedy* (Lovedale, 1928). This is another tale of Christian values and the corrupting influence of alcohol and the like, but it is one:

which confounds somewhat its own 'missionary' predispositions concerning the 'pilgrim' Robert Zulu who predictably falls into bad habits in Johannesburg. With Robert's father-in-law, a Christian, manipulating African custom, the moral difficulties set up tensions between the religious and social commentaries. (Chapman 218n 12)

While "Bought and Paid For" is a fairly one-sided argument in favour of Christian morals over traditional values, *An African Tragedy* is particularly interesting because of these "tensions between the religious and social commentaries". Christianity is the predominant theme throughout the story, but it is tempered by the realities of an incredibly complex transition from a sheltered, rural existence to the exciting temptations of a modern city. Homi Bhabha writes that "it is the city which provides the space in which emergent identifications and new social movements of the people

are played out. It is there that, in our time, the perplexity of the living is most acutely experienced" (*Nation and Narration* 320), and with *An African Tragedy* Dhlomo voices his agreement with this notion. It is only when Robert Zulu moves to Johannesburg that he experiences moral doubt and cannot rely on his faith for guidance. When he is first faced with temptation he hears a warning, perhaps the voice of conscience: "Do not! You will be ruined! Think of your duty to God" (3). If he were in his home village this voice would have saved him, but here in Johannesburg vice and pleasure overcome it with no great resistance.

Even before the actual story starts, Dhlomo tells the reader just what to expect. In the Preface he writes that he has "tried to investigate some of the causes which seek to undermine the peacefulness and blessedness of the newly-founded homes of the young married people", as well as the young's "grim struggles for existence in this tumultuous city of Johannesburg." An unsubtle condemnation of city life, therefore, is sure to follow. In the titles of each chapter ("Evils of Town Life", "The Sins of the Fathers", "A Christian Home", "Sinless Child of Sin" and "God and the Sinner") Dhlomo couples this view of Johannesburg with the huge influence that Christianity has on both his life and his work.

In *An African Tragedy* Dhlomo deals with three central concerns that he saw as contributing to the downfall of many young black South Africans of the time, namely the vices of the city ("Evils of Town Life", as he puts it), the rigidity of traditional customs, and the failings of moderately committed Christians. These he then juxtaposes with the overall message of a possible Christian salvation.

The irony of the chapter's title is most evident when the Christian parents take Jane to a *Nyanga*, or traditional healer who, "like the rest of his kind, subjected the poor girl to various, humiliating and disgusting examinations and questions" (28). Not only does this incident question the depth of the Nhlauzeko's faith, as well as show the shifting attitudes towards modernity at the time, but it is also a fairly direct damning of the traditional *Nyanga*, so important in Zulu culture. Clearly this sort of witchcraft has no place in Dhlomo's modern world.

Dhlomo continues his description of the *Nyanga* by saying that "Native doctors never spare their patients. The poor girl drank bitter herbs, was cut on the body and rubbed with a black powder in the incisions" (28), which again suggests an 'othering' gaze. Like in "Bought and Paid For" Dhlomo is upholding the colonial stereotypes of the primitive, savage, unscientific 'native', and effacing key elements of traditional Zulu culture. By doing this he highlights the weaknesses of the traditional, and compares these weaknesses to the civilised concept of a modern, Christian way of life where witchcraft has been replaced by technology.

The first chapter is entitled "Evils of Town Life", and Dhlomo lists and describes these in great detail, but groups them together under that very un-Christian attribute; 'pleasure'. Instead of acting like a responsible Christian man and banking or sending home money, Robert's "first thoughts now were always on pleasure. That sort of pleasure for which Johannesburg is so notorious. Pleasure that has caused the sudden, terrible death of many a promising young man or woman" (3). And it is here where Dhlomo first introduces the limitations of both an education and Christianity, for he says that "this error is so seemingly innocent that many young people still fall into it

daily in spite of their education and faith" (3). While an education and faith are vital, he says, even they are fallible when faced with such devious temptations as those that abound in Johannesburg.

The Johannesburg that Dhlomo portrays is a cesspit of vice and temptation with absolutely no redeeming features. He calls it at various times "that unreliable city of Johannesburg" and "this tumultuous city of Johannesburg", but reserves his greatest disgust for the "revolting immoral place" (5) that is the township. Here, I believe, is one example of Dhlomo's socio-political commentary, where his revulsion for the actions of his fellow black South Africans is combined with a hatred for the political situation that has created these townships.

Even his description of Johannesburg as "a gay, rollicking city" (3) is an ambivalent one. While at first glance it appears to be a positive representation, it is probable that in the eyes of a devout Calvinist for whom self-indulgence is a sin, it is in fact a derogatory one. The two most often used examples of this self-indulgent pleasure are drink and loose women, and often the combined effect of both. In "Evils of Town Life" these two vices are mentioned repeatedly, on almost every page, as Robert begins his steady slide to depravity. Dhlomo writes that in Prospect Township "Murders and assaults are committed here with animalish ferocity, through the influence of drinks and faithless women" (5), and we shall indeed see that this is the case in the next chapter where Robert witnesses a murder after a drunken argument about gambling (another vice). It is also the combined effect of booze and women that is the downfall of Robert. He is taken to a shebeen "reeking with the evil smell of drinks and perspirations" (6) where peer-pressure, especially from women, makes him

give in to the temptations of drink. Like in "Bought and Paid For" the person not willing to drink is called a fool, and even then only takes a drink under considerable duress.

The effect of drink, according to Dhlomo, is instant and devastating. Robert Zulu eventually takes a drink, and immediately is under its control. As Dhlomo says "Robert Zulu was now lost. From that night, he had drunk and drunk until he became a hopeless drunkard" (11). This led to mixing "with loose women; enjoying their company when their husbands were at work" (11). So again it is the double-edged attack of drink and loose women that Dhlomo describes as the downfall of a Christian man in the city.

With the first drink that Robert Zulu takes, amidst a scene of such pleasure that he "shivered involuntarily" (6), he is lost. Drink and women drive all thought of his home and his fiancée from his mind, and from here he continues to lead a depraved city life. We are warned in the second chapter that "Murders and assaults are committed...through the influence of drinks and faithless women" (5), and in "The Sins of The Fathers" we see this to be true. Due to unforeseen circumstances Robert ends up at a friend's room in Ferrairastown where four young men are playing cards and drinking heavily. Unfortunately, "the stakes ran high, when it became a real gamble of life and death" (16), and a "Xosa man" (sic) is stabbed to death. In terror Robert flees Johannesburg for his hometown, his fall from grace complete. His change in character has been so great that he has turned from a highly thought of teacher who greatly wanted to marry Jane, to a man who:

did not care if his parents-in-law rejected him. If they did, there were many girls in the mission station waiting for heroes from Johannesburg. These, he felt sure, would gladly jump at him. He had money, which is all that a modern, educated girls cares for in a young man. (22)

Dhlomo does not even allow the fact that Robert has achieved his goal, of returning to Natal with money, to justify his actions, for this money was won through sin (by gambling), and his success is a degenerate success. This dramatic story shows just how dangerous Dhlomo considered the trappings of modern life to be to his culture. In a short time and with no real difficulty the city has, by leading him into sin and to disease, destroyed the life of an educated, Christian man. This emphasises the ambiguity with which Dhlomo regards modernity, seeing it as both a threat and a possible salvation. He is convinced that in order to survive black South Africans have to become part of modern society, but that it is not without its dangers, and that the Christian ideals do not always correspond with actual experience. An interesting correlation that could be drawn here is between *An African Tragedy* and Alan Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country*. Both engage with the issue of migrant labour, urbanisation, and the resultant disastrous consequences. A strong Christian influence can also be found in both, although Paton's is a more optimistic form. While *Cry, The Beloved Country* contains "the ultimate ideal of redemption, as African society is saved from its fall into the demonic world of the cities" (Rich 133), in *An African Tragedy* Robert Zulu brings back part of that demon, in the form of a venereal disease (Couzens, *The New African* 60), to the country. Similarities and differences aside, it would be fascinating if one could find out if Paton had read *An African Tragedy*, written 20 years before, and thereby establish just how great a direct influence Rolfes Dhlomo had on the literature of South Africa.

Despite all the examples of Dhlomo's beliefs in a 'unity through Christianity', a Christian redemption, the evils of the city and the weaknesses of his traditional culture, *An African Tragedy* is not without obvious contradictions. He preaches a unified future, but the narrator says "No wonder Black Africa is cursed!" (5) when referring to the "Loose, morally depraved women, who parade the Township with uncovered bosoms; clothed in dirty robes" and "strong and violent drinks [that] are brewed and sold in broad daylight" (5). On the one hand, then, he is claiming that only the Church can save Black Africa, on the other he states that it is no use, and Black Africa is cursed.

These statements which seem to run in opposition to the theme of the novel are not isolated, and at times Dhlomo seems to be caught in a genuine dilemma, criticising his Christian flock as much as the traditional society from whence he came. At the very beginning of the novel, Dhlomo criticises *ilobolo* as an outdated and unfair practice that often has tragic consequences. Robert Zulu points out to his future parents-in-law that he can only afford to pay the *ilobolo* asked if he goes to Johannesburg, unless they reduce their asking price. However, for Jane's father's part, he:

wanted money for his daughter. He had said: "What business has Robert to ask my daughter's hand in marriage if he has no money to pay for her?" This is unfortunately the parrot-cry of many Christian fathers, the costly mistake which, in many cases, results in poor, and financially stranded homes, or driving the young lovers to the terrible alternative of a "Special License," or running away from their homes with disastrous results all too-well known. (2)

As the story progresses Dhlomo develops his view on 'modern Christianity', as another similar example is given later on in the novel, where Dhlomo again reproaches modern Christian parents:

Jane was taught to listen to and do whatever her parents chose to call their will. This is a common error of many Christians to-day. They rarely encourage their children to voice their own feelings, even in matters which concern the children themselves. Many marriages are still arranged and conducted by many modern Christians without consulting the contracting parties. (25)

Again Dhlomo provides the reader, in almost sermon-like form, with an example of how modern Christians destroy the lives of their children. Despite being Christians these people continue to sell their children into arranged marriages, thereby ruining their lives. This leads to the problem of trying to understand how Dhlomo foresees the marriage between the traditional customs of black South Africa with the ideals of a modern Christianity. Zulu Christians who go to the city, such as Robert Zulu, fall prey to drink, women and even gambling. Zulu Christians who stay in the country revert to their own, often unchristian, traditions when it suits them, as Jane's parents do. Jane, however, is the character who best illustrates Dhlomo's ideal.

Jane, a devout Christian girl who stays in the country and does nothing wrong, is led to the brink of disaster by her Christian parents and husband. She is trapped in a terrible marriage with a womanising alcoholic, and when she eventually gives birth after two years her child is blind (due to a venereal disease Robert brought back from Johannesburg), and then dies a month later. It is here that true Christianity is first revealed to the reader:

God's power of protection only saved Jane from losing her brains at all. God manifested His love for her – by strengthening her soul against the terrible results that would have followed such terrible exposures.

Were it not through the fact that Jane had been brought up as a God-fearing girl – she would have certainly gone mad under the strain of her physical and spiritual tests.

“God moves.....” (34)

In this passage there is an interesting link between Jane and Nanana, of "Bought and Paid For". Jane is almost driven insane, unable to reconcile her limited experience of modernity with her traditional culture, but is saved by her faith. Nanana, despite her missionary education, is not portrayed as a Christian, but merely as 'educated'. Her contact with modernity has been entirely educational, without the benefits and the fortitude of Christianity. It therefore seems fairly clear that in *An African Tragedy* Dhlomo is condemning not Christianity, but rather the failings of uncommitted Christians, or people who are Christian in name but not in practice. Jane is the only true Christian, and this is her salvation.

The story ends with Robert Zulu's death. He is stabbed by the jealous boyfriend of one of his conquests, but confesses his sins and asks for forgiveness on his deathbed, the faithful Jane still by his side. After his death a Minister reads Psalm 139 of the bible, and the narrator ends the novel asking "Had the Boundless Love of Jesus revealed itself to Robert Zulu during that brief hour of his visitation? Who knows? "God moves in a mysterious way....." (40). Dhlomo's message, then, is an optimistic one. It is never too late for salvation, and if one becomes a true Christian, God will help you to succeed. In the same way, unflinching Christianity is the only way that black South Africa can become a successful part of the modern world, and some customs will have to fall by the wayside.

So far I have discussed *An African Tragedy* very much as a story of Christian morals battling the evil temptations of the city. But there are occasions where Dhlomo's voice is more political, dealing directly with the effect of segregation laws on black South Africans. The reader is under no illusion that alcohol and women are the cause

of Robert's slippery descent into sin, but for the direct cause Dhlomo uses the infamous Pass Laws. It is only because Robert is caught in Newclare Location without a 'special Pass' that he is chased by Zulu policemen, flees to a friend's house and witnesses the murder. As Robert himself puts it "To think I've been through all this trouble through forgetting this slip of a paper behind" (20). While Dhlomo does mention the pass a few times, he nevertheless refrains from becoming too politically aligned, preferring to rely on Christianity as his vehicle for progress, perhaps because this had a better chance of escaping the censor's pen.

Both *An African Tragedy* and "Bought and Paid For" are simple in style as well as plot, and are morally didactic stories focussing on problems caused by the juxtaposition between the old and the new, city and country. By writing about these areas of liminality between tradition and modernity, however, Dhlomo was able to construct for black South Africans a genuine path forward into modernity. While his vigorous Christianity, with no place for alcohol, *ilobola* or polygamy, might not be a popular choice, he was nevertheless offering what he believed to be a viable method of progress into mainstream South African society.

Chapter 3:

R. Roamer Esq., K.A. (Timbuctoo): Rolfes Dhlomo Casts a Roaming Eye On the  
Prejudices and Ignorance of South African Society

(Rolfes Dhlomo's "R. Roamer Esq." Column of 1941)

In this chapter I will examine the "R. Roamer Esq." Column of 1941, and show how Dhlomo used it to deride and mock social injustices. I will show how he did this, by using pseudonyms and satire as his weapons of choice. I will also show that by doing this Dhlomo opened up the media of South Africa for his fellow black intellectuals, both then and in the future, to use it to convey nationalist sentiment and as a weapon to fight for an equal, modern society.

Rolfes Dhlomo was not as prolific a writer of fiction, in English, as his brother, Herbert Dhlomo, and his work in this genre seems to be limited to the solitary novel, *An African Tragedy* and the short stories that were published in either *Sjambok* magazine or *Bantu World* Newspaper, a selection of which have been collected and published in a special edition of *English in Africa* (March 1975, 2.1) by Tim Couzens. As in the two texts that I have already discussed, a very strong and consistent theme in all of this writing is that of a Christian modernity, a progression into modernity aided and guided by Christian morals. Incorporated into these stories are Dhlomo's views on the traditional Zulu way of life and customs, as well as the moral evils and physical hardships that black South Africans face in the city.

While this view of an African Christian modernity is continued in his column, there are, however, significant differences between Rolfes Dhlomo's creative writing and his later journalism, differences other than the obvious ones of style and the actual type of writing. The columns that I will discuss were written a full thirteen years after *An African Tragedy* (1928) and eleven years after "Bought and Paid For" (1930), and so show Dhlomo's development as both a writer and an intellectual, as well as shifts in his preoccupations.

In these columns Dhlomo sets up a harsh opposition to the ruling white society, and the prejudices and generalisations that go along with it. By appropriating the English language as his tool, and especially very 'English' terms such as Esquire, Dhlomo establishes a point from which he can attack and mock any injustices, real or perceived, loaded with a savagery and humour that made him popular and well-read.

Before I begin to examine particular columns from 1941, it is important to take note of what had happened in Dhlomo's life in the interim, and for this I again turn to Tim Couzens (*The New African* 57-62). In 1928 when *An African Tragedy* was first published Rolfes Dhlomo was working as a clerk on the City and Suburban Mine in Johannesburg, and had been doing so possibly from as early as 1923. His contacts with Natal were kept intact, though, through visits and his fairly regular column, sometimes under his own name or initials, but usually under the pseudonym 'Rollie Reggie', in *Ilanga Lase Natal*. These early columns were usually didactic exhortations reflecting his devout Christian faith.

In 1929 Dhlomo came under the guidance of Stephen Black while writing for his satirical magazine, *Sjambok*, until Black's death in 1931. Black was a prominent figure in South African literary circles, as described by Stephen Gray, writing over a dozen scripts, three novels, and numerous free-lance articles in his career which lasted from about 1908 to the time of his death. Gray describes his theatre as topical, and as satirical comedy and only "semi-scriptable"<sup>8</sup>. As Couzens says: "Black had a marked effect over and above the injection of more vigour into Dhlomo's writing: this was the steering of his apprentice into the seas of humour and satire" (*The New African* 61). After Black's death Dhlomo became the sub-editor of *Ilanga Lase Natal* but only until 1932 when he became the assistant editor of the newspaper *Bantu World*, established that year. It was then that he began his "R. Roamer Esq." column and "really hit his stride" (Couzens *The New African* 61). Dhlomo wrote this column for ten years, before returning to *Ilanga Lase Natal* where he became editor in 1943 and wrote a new column under the name "Rolling Stone" and "Ezaneno na Phesheya" (This Side and Across The Way).<sup>9</sup>

#### Pseudonyms Give Birth to R. Roamer Esq.

Another point that must be discussed before the actual column is that of pseudonyms, and why Dhlomo chose to use them. A writer can choose to use a pseudonym for a number of reasons, as Tim Couzens illustrates in his essay "Pseudonyms in Black South African Writing, 1920 – 1950" (1975). Firstly, and most obviously, the reason may be that a writer wishes to hide his or her identity when writing something that is

---

<sup>8</sup> Gray, Stephen. "The Theatre of Stephen Black" 101-102.

<sup>9</sup> Couzens, Tim. *The New African* 60-61.

either “unpopular or in some way awkward” (Couzens, “Pseudonyms” 226). Another is to conceal the amount that a particular writer is writing. It is also possible that one writer might want to write in a few different styles, or contexts or on different subject matter, and so uses a different pen-name for each text. A pseudonym can also be used as a ‘brand’ or signature to increase the recognition and prestige of the column. Yet another reason could be to enhance or even comment ironically, as Couzens says, on the writer’s message.

Over the course of his career Dhlomo used a number of pseudonyms, as Tim Couzens’ meticulous research has been able to uncover:

In the Twenties he wrote for *Ilanga Lase Natal* under the names “Rollie Reggie” (his names were Rolfes Reginald Raymond), the “Randite” and “The Pessimist.” In the Thirties he was, as we have seen, “R. Roamer Esq.” In the Forties he moved back to *Ilanga Lase Natal* as its editor and wrote the regular column “Rolling Stone.” (“Pseudonyms” 228)

At other times he also wrote under his initials, R.R.R.D., also a form of pseudonym. Dhlomo used pseudonyms for, at various times, all of the reasons given above. Writing as he did in a country ruled by a draconian state, it was wise to avoid unnecessary personal attention, and his views would definitely have been seen as awkward, if not downright dangerous at times. A pen-name, therefore, would have given him far more freedom to air his views from his liminal position on the margins of intellectual society.

In this way the idea of a ‘pen-name’ is very similar to that of the ‘mask’. The ‘mask’ is used for hiding the identity of the speaker, although it is sometimes a symbolic ‘masking’ with the real identity already known, but is often also associated with

humour. A good example of this is the Shakespearian jester who is often masked and costumed, and because of this can get away with derogatory comments about the authorities that ordinarily would be punishable. At times the mask also “rejects conformity... is related to the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames” and is the originator of “parodies, grimaces, eccentric postures and comic gestures” (Bakhtin 39). In short, it is a versatile and complex weapon for mockery and dissidence, and therefore key in Dhlomo’s arsenal.

We also know that for ten years, from 1944 until 1954, Rolfes and Herbert Dhlomo wrote almost the entire content of *Ilanga Lase Natal*. While this makes the Dhlomo brothers vitally important, along with men such as Sol Plaatje, Tiyo Soga, B.W. Vilakazi and others, in the establishment and continuation of a black intellectual space, it could also give rise to the opinion that they had too much influence in black South African, and especially Natal, society. For this reason, then, it probably benefited Dhlomo to write at least some of his work under a pen-name.

Writing as much as he did, Dhlomo necessarily wrote on different subjects and in different styles. An obvious example is that in the late thirties he even edited the women’s pages in *Bantu World* at the same time as he was writing other articles and even short stories. The reader might doubt that one journalist is capable of writing authoritatively on such a wide variety of subjects. This is especially true of the women’s page (a man writing the women’s page!). The pretence of different identities would have overcome this problem, although in Dhlomo’s particular case the use of a pseudonym seems to be more than just a practical matter.

Rolfes Dhlomo's "R. Roamer Esq." column was placed in the same place every Saturday, and very frequently was headed in the formula of "R. Roamer Esq. On..." and then a topic, such as "R. Roamer Esq. On Timbuctoo University" (July 19, 1941). By doing this, and using a signature identity, Dhlomo created a regular feature that readers could expect, recognise and look forward to, and which became an immensely popular aspect of *Bantu World*. 'R. Roamer Esq.' is certainly a far more exciting name than Rolfes Dhlomo, and has a certain element of pizzazz and glamour to it, especially when written in full as 'R. Roamer Esq., K.A. (Timbuctoo)'.

The pseudonym is an important part of the voice and the persona that is being created, and is not chosen lightly. Rolfes Dhlomo could therefore also have chosen 'R. Roamer Esq.' as a pseudonym to enhance his message. The column dealt with all manner of subject matter, and 'Roamer' has direct connotations of being widely travelled, or worldly; knowledgeable about all and sundry, and entitled to his opinion. The connotations do not end there, though. The South African media at this time was heavily censored, and society was strictly segregated along racial and class lines. Roamer, therefore, probably also observed these artificially created social and legal boundaries which he challenged every week from the pages of *Bantu World*.

The "Esq." (Esquire) that followed "R. Roamer" was also not added without a particular effect in mind. This effect, I believe, was mimicry, as described by Bhabha in "Of Mimicry and Man", where the motive behind the mimicry is mockery of the colonialist power's society. Esquire is a very 'English' word, full of airs and a sense of superiority. It also highlights, and interrogates, the vast differences in social standing possible in English society, where one man is better than the next because of

his parentage. Dhlomo appropriates the title for his own use, and in using this 'mocking' pseudonym he immediately establishes his identity as both a dissident and a dissonant figure. He is definitely not in harmony with the society about which he writes (predominantly), and he usually disagrees strongly with their actions and decisions.

After his time with Stephen Black, Dhlomo was definitely no stranger to irony, and it is highly likely that his pen-name contained at least an element of it. For this purpose Dhlomo added to the end of his pseudonym "K.A. (Timbuctoo)." The most immediate and obvious reference is to those people who have a university education, and who wear it as a 'tail', thinking that, as David Attwell said of B. Walel Vilakazi, a "university position and degrees qualified him to speak *ex cathedra*" ("Modernizing Tradition" 108). In this case the K.A. stands for 'Know All', and Timbuctoo a university where this imaginary degree, K.A., was obtained (it is quite possible that Timbuctoo University is an analogy for South Africa, with his degree from the university really the education he has received from South Africa's 'school of hard knocks').

While 'K.A.' is a fictitious title, it is highly likely that Dhlomo was aware of the status of the actual University of Timbuktu in Mali, and was making a conscious reference to it. An ancient and great seat of Islamic learning, this University had an attendance of 25 000 students in the twelfth century, and so can be compared in the history of scholarship with any European university. An interesting fact is that on graduation day the students, who came from all corners of the African continent, were given a turban symbolizing "Divine light, wisdom, knowledge and excellent moral

conduct” and representing the “demarcation line between knowledge and ignorance” (Timbuktu Foundation, University Page, 30 November 2004). By using this African University as his ‘tail’ he is appropriating that quintessential facet of modernity, education, for his own, ‘primitive’ culture. He is also challenging the racist prejudice that the black person is unable to be educated. While this is as I have said, a challenge to racial stereotyping, it is also a positive affirmation of black culture, and therefore for his readers, most of whom would have been unaware of the existence of this great seat of learning.

In his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, James C. Scott writes that “subordinate groups must find ways of getting their message across, while staying somehow within the law” (238). To do this, he continues, they must “exploit the loopholes, ambiguities, silences and lapses available” (238), and “[carve] out a tenuous public political life for themselves in a political order that, in principle, forbids such a life unless fully orchestrated from above” (239). Disguise, he says, is essential, and he divides this into two simple groups, “those that disguise the message and those that disguise the messenger” (239). I have already dealt with how Dhlomo disguised the messenger by using pseudonyms, but he also managed to disguise the message.

### Satire: An Explosion of Freedom

A common element of each of the examples of message-disguise that Scott gives is mockery - be it sarcasm, exaggeration, ridicule, or any other of a number of possibilities. And Rolfes Dhlomo, too, adopts this indirect tool of attack in the form of

satire. Satire, Ronald Paulson writes, gives the writer an “explosion of freedom as he breaks out of (or discomfits) a stultifying, over-codified society” and can be useful in “break[ing] down the pompous and tragic assumptions about... the stature of man or of society” (*Satire xiv*). Arthur Marotti suggested that satire was a “literary form practiced by those whose ambitions were frustrated and who yearned to involve themselves more deeply in the social environments they pretended to scorn” (*Satire 141-2*). These observations thus make it immediately obvious how well this genre suited Dhlomo.

I feel that it is also important to state at this time that satire is not a form alien to Zulu (oral) literature, as Noleen Turner has argued in her thesis “Elements of Satire in Zulu Oral Traditions”. In *izibongo*, she contends, satire “concerns itself...with social transgressions” and “ensure[s] that certain patterns and modes of behaviour are adhered to” (6). Satire, therefore, is a device of social commentary that Dhlomo would be acutely aware of due to his Zulu parentage and background. While he may have learned much of the art of satire under Stephen Black’s tutelage, it was not necessarily an introduction, but a honing of skill and a lesson in working trans-culturally.

While it is relatively easy to identify the progressive tendencies of Herbert Dhlomo’s writing, it is not always as easy to recognise them in the biting satire of Rolfes Dhlomo’s journalism. It is this thought that led me to question the audience that Dhlomo, or rather R. Roamer, was targeting with his column. Satire is often indirect and complex, qualities that do not make for easy reading and understanding, especially for the uneducated, and in 1941-South Africa the proportion of blacks who

were *not* uneducated was tiny. Here again the information supplied by Turner is particularly illuminating. The knowledge that satire is an integral part of Zulu culture and tradition enables us to comprehend how Roamer was understood and appreciated by an audience larger than just the educated black portion of South Africa.

### R. Roamer Esq.: Savaging Injustice

By writing satirically about the authorities, Dhlomo was able to open up the literary world to other black writers. He was able to disguise his complaints sufficiently to avoid unwarranted attention, and yet at the same time was scathing of the South African government. “R. Roamer Esq. On His Talks” (March 15, 1941) and “R. Roamer Esq. On Raids” (January 18, 1941) were particularly effective.

“R. Roamer Esq. On Raids” begins in a very sarcastic tone, with Dhlomo writing:

Do not be alarmed, dear friends and well-wishers in Afrika. The raids we are talking about are the simple location affairs in which European police armed with revolvers, accompanied by African police armed with kerries, raid houses at dead of night in order to discover “criminals” who sleep with friends without permits allowing them to do so.

In a similar way to the use of Timbuctoo University in the previous column, the use of the Afro-centric spelling of ‘Afrika’ (as opposed to ‘Africa’) is a telling choice. Again Dhlomo is appropriating the word for his own use, emphasising the local spelling for the ‘local’ inhabitants. This spelling, therefore, is a bold gesture of linguistic dissidence, challenging the authority of a foreign power and a foreign language. To a certain degree it could also be seen to point forward to the Bhabhaian notion of

mimicry, being almost the same but not quite, almost 'white', but not quite ("Of Mimicry and Man").

Immediately Dhlomo is attacking two issues central to social life in South African townships, which affect every black person either working or visiting in these areas, namely the 'raids', and the 'permits'. The title of the article might be "Raids", but Dhlomo uses this as an opening into a commentary on township life in general, and the dehumanising effect that these "raids" (and what they signify) have on the black population.

By referring to the raids in a casual and off-hand manner, and telling readers not to "be alarmed", Dhlomo stresses the frequency with which these raids take place; it is obviously a part of life that affects every black person in South Africa. Dhlomo also writes in a very clearly assumed air of casualness about the way these raids are conducted. They are "simple location affairs" where "European police armed with revolvers, accompanied by African police armed with kerries" raid houses. And yet, Dhlomo says, they should not be considered alarming! By so doing, Dhlomo is emphasising the obscene values of the society in which they live. South African society is extreme and dangerous in its treatment of blacks, and the black population is unjustly expected to tolerate events like this peaceably, and without a complaint.

As well as highlighting the violent nature of township life, where the police are the harbingers of terror, Dhlomo also manages to condemn the much-hated pass laws in this short introductory paragraph, mocking a society where people are considered 'criminals' for visiting friends without state sanction. Seven of the eleven paragraphs

in "Raids" deal directly with 'permits', as opposed to the actual raids, giving the reader the impression that Dhlomo has no problem with raids in general, as long as they are directed at actual criminals. In a tongue-in-cheek description of gaining access to a township Dhlomo writes of being granted "that rare privilege of visiting your friends." This is another instance of Dhlomo's pseudonym, Roamer, being particularly apt and effective, and at the same time ironic. At the time Rolfe Dhlomo was writing black people in South Africa were unable to 'roam'<sup>10</sup> their country, or even their townships, freely; it is only with his pen and his imagination that Roamer could do so. The most inexcusable example that Dhlomo gives is yet again presented tongue-in-cheek:

If you have dared to allow your son – your own flesh and blood son – to stay in your house when he is over eighteen without a permit, he is in danger of being arrested there and then. Fortunately, your daughter, if unmarried, is allowed to sleep under the roof of her father's house. But your son – no! What are the single men's hostels for? Your son must leave your roof and go and stay in a hostel.

By using satire here, Dhlomo is able to reproduce both a common situation and the argument that would be used by a European policeman or the government. In so doing he is easily able to show the reader the (cruel) absurdity of the situation, and allows the reader a moment of laughter at the expense of the authorities. This is at once both liberating and unifying to the black population, affording them a very rare chance to be the mockers, and not the mocked.

I have so far described the "R. Roamer Esq." columns as satirical and mocking, and for a large part they are. After the introductory paragraph, however, the tone of

---

<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to see Siphiso Sepamla's use of the verb 'roam' in his poem "To Whom it May Concern" (1975). Like Dhlomo's column, it deals with the restrictions placed on black South Africans.

“Raids” turns solemn, and Dhlomo begins to analyse these raids in a far more factual manner, juxtaposing harsh realities with his humour for effect. By changing his tone, Dhlomo becomes more neatly and obviously dissident, as opposed to the subtlety of his humour (subtlety of humour, not of criticism). Dhlomo begins his second paragraph with frank honesty, his message emphasising the humiliation of blacks in their daily lives: “Those who do not live in the “Zoos” can hardly appreciate what a humiliating thing these night raids are.” Again he is attacking the racist, segregational laws that govern South Africa. He refers to the townships as “Zoos”, emphasising how blacks are treated as animals, their human rights and dignity taken away from them, humiliating them. This disparity between black and white (animal and human?) is also accentuated by Dhlomo’s pseudonym, R. Roamer Esq.. The ‘Roamer’ portion I have already examined, stressing the meaning of being able to cross the artificial borders of segregation. The ‘Esquire’ portion is also important, for it is always ridiculing the classist policies of South Africa. By taking a term of status for his own, Dhlomo is forcibly claiming a higher class position than society allows him, and thereby challenging the legitimacy of the rules of this very society. Dhlomo reiterates this when he writes that:

The first signs of the “blitzkrieg” are hurried steps outside, punctuated by curses, if your gate is locked or your dog tries to be nasty. Of course, your gate is either pushed violently inside or jumped over. The dog just receives a kick and is let alone to protest to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals if it wants to.

While implying that the dog, in fact, has more rights than blacks, having the choice to “protest”, Dhlomo highlights the injustices that blacks face, and the disregard that the policemen have for their welfare or human rights. An interesting and poignant word choice that Dhlomo makes in the above passage is that of “blitzkrieg”. When this

article was written, in 1941, the German blitzkrieg would have been very topical because of the war. *Bantu World* actually covered the war extensively, and these articles were followed closely by huge numbers of black readers, as well as listeners to black radio stations. An effect of the war, then, was to stimulate black participation in a global readership, and therefore in the discourse of modernity, and by including an oblique reference to the war in his column, Dhlomo uses this point of interest as a draw-card and a common point of reference. Another point is that by using the word “blitzkrieg” Dhlomo is correlating the South African government’s policies and treatment of black people with the policies and atrocities of Hitler.

In a further description he writes satirically that “The ‘Zoo’ is a place where Africans are supposed to be allowed to enjoy their freedom and to live their lives happily far from Europeans”. Here he ridicules the government’s hypocritical positions on separate development. On the one hand the government insists that Africans should be allowed to live an entirely separate existence from Europeans, but on the other hand they forcibly enter this separated world to take part in it, to control it, and to disrupt it.

As with ‘permits’, Dhlomo turns repeatedly to the “humiliation” endured by blacks living in townships and subject to these raids. He writes that “We are talking about what we have actually experienced, members. These raids respect no person. They humiliate and brutalise our people.” Dhlomo’s use of the word ‘members’ is as in the following paragraph “members of the black community”, and by repeatedly using this notion he is reaffirming a belief of community and of solidarity amongst black readers, challenging the authorities’ attempts to place them on the margins of society. He follows this in the penultimate paragraph by saying that “The raiders had entered

the house as if it belonged to them and insulted us with that question of what we were doing in the house of a friend at night!"

This tone of indignation turns to anger and despair in the final paragraph when Dhlomo writes:

God, it is hard to be black!

We've never been arrested in our lives; we have not even been touched on the shoulder by a police. We can produce at any time concrete proofs that we are respectable and loyal members of the black community. But that night, for the "terrible crime" of being found in a friend's house without a piece of paper arrogantly termed "Permit" we were spoken to as if we were criminals.

God, it is hard to be black!

Not only is he angry at the treatment that he and other black people face at the hands of the policemen, but he also finds the entire "Permit" matter evil and absurd. As he writes, he is a "respectable and loyal [member] of the black community", and yet he is treated as a criminal. In fact, due to the ridiculous nature of South African legislation, he *was* a criminal. By questioning this practice Dhlomo also opens up the issue of black citizenship and the impossibility for a black person to be a true South African citizen in any real, modern sense. This is then another contradictory instance of the modern space being selectively modern, and excluding those whom it deems undesirable. In this passage Dhlomo cannot comprehend a society in which the policemen actually try to make criminals out of people who in any other society would be honest, respectable citizens. This he accentuates by always including 'criminals' in quotation marks. This, as well as the fact that the police do not give the black citizen any leeway, he encapsulates in:

The police begin these raids late at night so as to catch the “criminals” actually in bed. They don’t want you to say, “Oh, I was just about to leave.” No; they want to catch you, we repeat, actually in bed.

On Saturday March 15 1941 Rolfes Dhlomo wrote “R. Roamer, Esq. On His Talks”, in which he deals primarily with detractors of his column, and with the Non-European United Front. In the column Dhlomo writes about “people who call us clowns. They say this column is “clownish” and “useless””. It is most probable that this column is a follow up to one he wrote on January 25<sup>th</sup> 1941 titled “R. Roamer, Esq. On Non-European Front” for which he presumably was criticised or insulted, hence this column. According to Roamer:

the reason why we are called “clowns” is that we sometimes write what other people cannot digest. Now, when an African is faced with the opinions of another fellow which are unpalatable to him, he calls the other fellow all sorts of names.

He continues, writing that “to these Africans [members of the NEUF] if you voice opinions that are different to theirs, you are a traitor to your people. You are “selling” your people – as if anybody wants to buy your cheap, uncivilised people. You are a “good boy””. By “good boy” Dhlomo means a black person doing what white authorities expect of him. This is a very typical passage of R. Roamer. While he is discussing what Africans say about other Africans, he cannot ignore or pass up the opportunity of deriding the authorities, and makes a mocking commentary on their view of Africans as “cheap, uncivilised people”. This is another place where the image of the clown can be examined. The clown or jester, like the African jackal or hare trickster figure, is given leeway in social taboos, allowed to voice opinions that would otherwise be prohibited. Dhlomo’s intention in his column is just this, to attack

injustice from behind the protection of a clownish mask, and the irony of his being called a clown as an insult is not lost on him.

He continues this mockery in the following paragraph, insulting the authorities, but effectively disguising that he is doing so by denying it at the same time:

We people who have no courage to call the authorities 'exploiters', 'oppressors', 'thieves' and 'murderers' are known as 'good boys' or 'sellers' of our people. The people who have the wonderful courage of calling the authorities names are the real leaders of our people. They are the saviours of Bantudom.

In this passage, I feel, Roamer is being particularly clever, as well as particularly ambiguous. By listing the various names that the authorities *could* be called, he is insulting them, but in a disguised manner. At the same time he is showing his own courage to the readers, and to all of those people who call him a 'good boy'. On a further level, Roamer manages to mock his detractors. He is acting as a 'double-voice', fighting his own detractors and the system, often using the latter to reinforce the former. He does this by intimating that one does not have to use such obvious and (as he puts it) "teeth-grinding threats" to make one's point.

The real issue discussed in "His Talks", however, is the Non-European United Front, (NEUF) and more specifically the suggestion that this organisation would only be successful in fighting oppression if it had an Indian leadership. Formed in 1939, NEUF was an entirely non-racial political organisation, and one of its main concerns was that racial legislation applicable to blacks in South Africa would, in the future, be extended by the government to include Indians. Indian and black unity was therefore encouraged and in February 1941 (only a month before Dhlomo's article) "the Durban

NEUF sponsored what was described as the first joint African-Indian protest meeting in the city's history" (Johnson 48). NEUF obviously wanted Indian and black unity in fighting oppression, and Dhlomo doesn't question this. Dhlomo, however, questions their motives, for it is only when Indians are directly affected that they begin to act.

Roamer also questions why an Indian leadership of NEUF would necessarily be of more help to Africans than a black one, and says that if this opinion makes him known as a "clown", we rejoice in being clowns." African leaders, points out Roamer, have already achieved some success and "Many reforms have taken place through their representations." Because of this evidence, Roamer points out, he is sceptical about Indian leadership being the answer. As he says "You need not blame us, therefore, when, in the year 1939 or 1940 we are suddenly told that our salvation will be through the United Front under Indian leadership, we prefer to doubt this miracle."

This is not to say that Roamer is anti-Indian, or even anti an Indian leadership of the NEUF; far from it. He acknowledges that Indians and blacks must unite in their struggle, but that is must be from the grass-root level up, and that Indian leaders must help to encourage this:

If we are to be saved by Indian leaders of non-European Fronts let them save us first in everyday relationship with us. Let us write in their offices as we do in "Good boy" offices. Let us get decent wages from their pockets. Let us work in co-operation with them in businesses near our locations or reserves. Let them recognise our rights to trade among our people without trying to kick us out by competition and lawsuits.

In this passage Dhlomo refers to 'us' and 'our', and one gets a sense of an active and engaged readership with whom he is having an ongoing conversation. Here he is continuing the common theme in his columns of inequality, not only between

are asked who your chief is, do not say he is the municipality. Say he is Chief Mampara of Stupidorp. This will prove you are still developing along your own lines. You are not a menace to European ways of living; for Europeans have no chiefs.

Another example that Roamer uses is water; when you are asked what water you drink, never say tap-water. Taps, like municipalities, are reserved for Europeans, and “if you claim them as your ways of living then you are not developing along your own Lines. You are menacing European culture, forcing yourself into their ways of Living!!!” Not only is Roamer illustrating the hypocrisy, cruel selfishness and absurdity of separate development, but also the impracticality. Why is something good enough for whites, but totally unsuitable for blacks? How can something as practical as taps be detrimental to the development of blacks, as it is said to be? Through his biting humour, Dhlomo is therefore forcing his readers to address issues that would otherwise be left untouched, and un-discussed.

Roamer then moves on from giving sardonic examples of separate development, and towards a derisive over-view of the theory behind separate development. He takes the South African government’s argument, that separate development is in the best interest of blacks, and begins to ridicule it. As Roamer says:

These Lines of Development should not be despised, brothers and sisters. They are the special property of Black people of Timbuctoo City. No other race has them. No other race is good enough or bad enough to have them. They are only good for you, for they help you to march forward without forcing yourselves into other people’s ways of living.

In saying that “no other race is good enough or bad enough to have them” Roamer is obviously drawing attention to the fact that South African blacks are, despite what the government says and thinks, just the same as any other race. The fact that the

government is hypocritical about separate development is also highlighted; at times the government states that the purpose of separate development is to preserve European civilisation from the tainting black influence. At other times it says that its purpose is to protect the blacks' culture from a European influence.

Roamer focuses on the ambiguous and often contradictory thoughts behind native administration and separate development, proving that the only result from such a muddled and dishonest system is further confusion, with nothing really being achieved. In one given example he argues that the government suggests that "family disputes are settled according to age-old customs" by the "uneducated chiefs". At the same time the government supplies Social workers who "are meddling in all domestic and private affairs."

Couzens wrote that certain issues that Dhlomo discussed, such as his concern for animals, may have been "a reaction to a further stereotype about Blacks" (R.R.R. Dhlomo: An Introduction 7), and this theory can definitely be applied to the topics under discussion in "Timbuctoo University". Specifically, Roamer mentions the paternalistic principles of the South African government who "do things for you and will not let you do them yourselves because you are still like little children." Another is the stereotypical belief that black people belong to an entirely uncivilised culture who differ from Europeans in being unable to "manage their own affairs like all civilised people."

Roamer concludes "On Timbuctoo University" with a resoundingly negative judgement on separate development:

So you see that of all the races in this country, ours is the most looked after and wisely nursed; for it is provided with special facilities of developing along lines that twist and turn – ending in Futility!

The frustration evident here, and penned in savage satire, is not only understandable in a man who has based so much of his own life on a hybrid society made up of elements of Zulu and European culture, but also predictable. Dhlomo is an educated intellectual who has been treated like a fool, told that tea is only of benefit to Europeans, and possibly even told, although this may have been made up for effect, that tap-water could quite possibly be detrimental to his people and his culture. Even when Dhlomo is extremely frustrated, however, he is able to use his acerbic wit to great effect, as he does by sarcastically saying that blacks are “the most looked after and wisely nursed” race, while the true intent of his article (and his final phrase) is to show how false this sentiment is.

An interesting juxtaposition with the columns that I have dealt with so far, and which attack authority so vehemently, are the columns that deal primarily with women, and a woman’s role in “modern” society. I will examine one such column, and show that while a modern, progressive society means an equal footing for people of all races, this aspiration towards equality does not, at this time, for Dhlomo extend to women of any race. “For Dhlomo woman’s place is clearly in the oven” (Couzens, “R.R.R. Dhlomo: An Introduction” 5)

The column that I shall discuss in this vein is also my first mention of Jeremiah and Joshua, characters whom Dhlomo adopted from Stephen Black. It is entitled simply “On Women” (January 11 1941), and is in the form of a dialogue between Jeremiah

and Joshua assessing the pros and cons of a modern woman versus a traditional one. It also includes two other characters who were regular participants in Roamer's column; Betty Bettina and Nurse Jane Maplank.

While both women are fairly modern and forward-thinking, they have adapted to the city in very different ways. Betty Bettina is more attractive, sophisticated and glamorous. Nurse Jane Maplank (a plain Jane as thick as a plank?) is sensible and hard-working.

"On Women" begins with Jeremiah's announcement to Joshua that "After years of toil and hardships with Betty Bettina I decided to give her up and take Nurse Jane Maplank." Joshua congratulates Jeremiah, but asks "why did you drop her like a hot brick?" This is the beginning of a debate in which the values that a wife is thought to need, according to Jeremiah/Roamer, are spelt out. Once again, then, Dhlomo uses the mask of humour to make a serious examination of a critical social issue, in this case the role of gender in modern society.

Betty is very affectionate and loving, to the extent that her thoughts are focussed on men and her appearance, and "thinks life is made up only of love-making and admiration." Jeremiah even says that "If you love her dearly treat her as if she were a delicate glass ready to break at any moment, is her idea of true love." Another problem with Betty is that "she knows she is beautiful and that makes her vain and useless." Betty is useful only for "playing tennis, piano and holding on to some man at dances and doing her hair," and this is, according to Jeremiah, "only modern enough

for the one who plays only at love; not for one who wants a wife.” Jeremiah, however, does “not want a beauty-model for a wife, [he] want[s] a useful sensible woman.”

A wife, then, must be useful and sensible, according to Roamer. And this is exactly what Nurse Jane is. Betty is “a modern beauty who runs away once you complain of a headache,” while “At least Nurse Jane Maplank will know how to nurse me when I get ill.” Betty is unable to even make a cup of tea (Jeremiah: “My dear boy, I have spent whole afternoons with that girl without even smelling a cup of tea...”)! The ‘tea-theme’ is an interesting one that is frequently repeated in Roamer’s column, and in the newspaper as a whole. During the war years every issue of *Bantu World* had an advert for “Five Roses Tea”. In this case it is used as an example of something that even a domestically-challenged wife could make, but that is not the end of the theme. ‘Tea’ is also unequivocally English; it is on tea that the British Empire was built, and is therefore a symbol of civilisation and modernity, a symbol that Dhlomo appropriates for his own use. Jeremiah wants a wife who “takes good care of my home, herself and the family,” and he is fairly sure that Nurse Jane will be able to do this, for she is “at any rate... a hard-working girl.”

Roamer deals often with similar situations. In fact, there are three columns entitled “On Women” in 1941 alone (January 11, October 4, October 11), another called “On Wife Getting”, and many including either Betty Bettina or Nurse Jane Maplank, or both. Often the situation is similar, and Roamer discusses the difficulties that vanity, jealousy and impracticality bring to a relationship, especially when one rushes into a marriage based on admiration of one’s partner’s looks, or without truly knowing your partner. Sometimes Roamer considers the effect of *ilobolo* on modern marriages, as

he does in *An African Tragedy*. In all, however, when Roamer talks about women, it is with respect to their capacity to be or to become 'good' wives, and not their place as individuals in society. Even Maplank, who is a nurse, is evaluated as a potential wife rather than as a productive member of society. The fact that her career is that of nurse, a very traditional job for women in these conservative times – especially with a war on - emphasises the gender inequalities of society. Even Dhlomo is fostering these gender inequalities, rather than challenging them as he would racial ones.

Roamer's position on women is a perplexing one. Whilst in today's terms Roamer's position would be unacceptable, it need not, I feel, detract unduly from Roamer's constructive influence on South African society. While he does discriminate unfairly against women, virtually nowhere in the world at this time were women treated equally, so this historical factor must be taken into consideration before condemning Roamer entirely.

These columns deal not only with women, but also with the effects of modernity. Betty is an example of modernity affecting a woman negatively, and she forgets her role as a wife. Nurse Jane Maplank is a more promising character, able to adapt to modern city life, and retain those characteristics that make for a successful wife. In this case, I feel that Dhlomo is reverting to his ideals of a Christian modernity, for Betty is vain, superficial and often dances. In short, she focuses on the pleasures of life. Nurse Jane Maplank, on the other hand, is solid and dependable (once cured of the jealousy "disease"), principled and all in all an upstanding member of society, and more importantly (in Dhlomo's eyes), a good candidate for a wife.

Herbert Dhlomo wrote that “The African journalist...is hampered with irritating restrictions, and is not free to speak out loud and bold... They are expected to write on every topical subject under the sun for there is no division of work” (‘Busy Bee’, *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 20 October 1945). “Nevertheless”, writes Couzens, “Dhlomo recognised his own power and influence when he wrote that the press was probably even more influential than the other ‘leading organ of Bantu opinion’, the Church, and that it ‘shapes and directs the thoughts of tens of thousands’”, an indication of the huge readership that they reached (*The New African*, 276).

I have discussed the restrictions that journalists faced at this time, and taking them into consideration, it is an amazing feat for a journalist to have written under these conditions for four decades, as Dhlomo did. It is also evident from his journalism, a small section of which I have examined, that in it he continued his call for a modern and democratic South Africa in which all men would stand on an equal footing. He also used his position of influence to attack the authorities, and to illustrate their failings to his wide black audience. By doing this he gave the black reader an idea of what they could expect from life, and what they deserved. Simultaneously he kept to his Christian principles, warning his readership against the vices of Johannesburg and encouraging them to only accept those trappings of modernity that are morally acceptable.

It is through his satire, however, that Dhlomo was most savage as a critic of white authority. From his position on the periphery of society he was able to become an eloquent and powerful figure, a dissident voice of protest. He also played the role of a constructive voice, though, reaffirming black culture and creating a sense of solidarity



and community amongst the most marginalized people of South Africa. His influence is undeniable, and he played an important role in opening up the media to black intellectuals, and giving them the confidence to challenge authority, thereby fostering in them a more positive sense of an African modernity.

### Conclusion

In this study I have tried to show how Herbert and Rolfes Dhlomo played an important role in the establishment of a sense of African modernity. Their combined influence was significant, in part because of their long careers, especially in the case of Rolfes, and also because of the wide range of subject matter that they dealt with. Because of the length of their careers they witnessed the beginnings of this African modernity, and indeed made some of the earliest steps themselves.

In the course of my research I have used the term 'African modernity' to mean a way of reappropriating those aspects of modernity that gave it its power (such as religion, education and technology – literature included), and entering into modernity in a way beneficial to, and under the control of, the African himself. One way that this was done in South Africa was through the appropriation of literature generally, and specific texts such as *The Pilgrim's Progress*. This helped the African intellectual to conceive of a present and a future that was both African and part of a broader, modern identity, and also enter into the international discourse that was modernity.

I have made constant reference to a sense of Christian modernity, and indeed this is where both Herbert and Rolfes Dhlomo begin their own progression into modernity, clearly showing the influence of their early missionary education in their literature. Herbert Dhlomo began with *The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nongqause the Liberator*, in which he advocated both education and Christianity, but which also contained the seeds of nationalist sentiment. Drawing on Alain Locke's "New Negro" idea, Dhlomo

became more focussed on the fate of the black African, and less on individual achievement, as reflected in both his critical and creative writing.

With time Herbert Dhlomo became interested in fostering nationalist sentiment and creating a national voice, as is reflected in the poems that I examined, which chronologically represent this change in his purpose. Dhlomo's concept of 'nationalism' can, however, be ambiguous. At times he calls for a unified South Africa, as in "The Question: Beasts or Brothers", but at other times his 'nation' is more secular, such as in "South Africa", or exclusionary, when he advocates excluding Indians from African socialising. These changes of purpose are also stated directly in his critical work, and mark what Locke described as "The rise from social disillusionment to race pride" (10-11). Instead of emphasising clinging to the vain hope of peaceful and equal assimilation into South African society, Dhlomo began to voice the wrongs prevalent in South Africa. By doing this, and by promising action against them, he installed national "race pride" in his readership.

Like Herbert Dhlomo's *The Girl*, Rolfes Dhlomo's first work of fiction, *An African Tragedy*, was also heavily influenced by the morals of Christianity and an individual progression into modernity through Christianity. A didactic and moralising novel, *An African Tragedy* was also very topical, dealing with issues that affected a large portion of the black population of South Africa, such as forced migration of labour, and the problems arising as a result of traditional African culture coming into contact with European modernity and its accelerated progress.

Like Herbert Dhlomo, Rolfes Dhlomo also changed his position over time. Also, like Herbert Dhlomo, he moved from advocating a Christian, moralising form of modernity and towards a call for black national unity. Rolfes Dhlomo differed from his brother, however, in the manner in which he called for this unity. Where Herbert Dhlomo was obvious and outspoken, Rolfes Dhlomo became a master of satire, mocking and verbally attacking the authorities from a position of relative safety, behind a mask, or pseudonym. In his criticism, Rolfes Dhlomo was perhaps even more savage than Herbert Dhlomo, and when using the pseudonym "R. Roamer Esq." no topic or group was safe from attack.

While "The New Negro" by Alain Locke has been more closely linked with Herbert Dhlomo, Rolfes would almost certainly have been familiar with it. A notable quality of "R. Roamer Esq." was the sense that Roamer was confident enough to confront his detractors and the authorities on an equal level, and this is one of the characteristics that Locke's "New Negro" would possess:

**The intelligent Negro of today is resolved not to make discrimination an extenuation of his shortcomings in performance, individual or collective; he is trying to hold himself at par, neither inflated by sentimental allowances nor depreciated by current social discounts...(Locke 8)**

The readership that Rolfes would have been aiming at, largely black African, some highly educated and many self-educated, would have appreciated this sign of parity, and one assumes that they would also have been inspired by it, a sign that they too could become equally involved in the discourse of modernity.

I have argued that the work of Herbert and Rolfes Dhlomo helped to create an opportunity for themselves and others to enter into modernity, and to create a sense of the position of the black South African in modernity, thereby creating a sense of an African modernity. Nationalism, I have also argued, is an integral part of this, unifying the black African population of South Africa as it did, and emphasising the fact that it was the community, and not only individuals, who were becoming part of modernity. According to Edward Said nationalism is “an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages” (“Reflections on exile” 161). R. Roamer did just this, affirming the commonality of the community by emphasising the fact that the black population had common problems, and a common potential.

I am not suggesting that Rolfes and Herbert Dhlomo formed between them a single, original, founding moment from which sprang modern black South African literature. A national literature and culture is not created by a single individual or a solitary book, although it can possibly be defined by one, but “is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence” (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 155). And while Sol Plaatje’s *Mhudi* might be plotted on the time line of South African literary history as the beginning of the growth of such a national literature, I am suggesting that by writing at the time that they did - and as voluminously as they did - the Dhlomo brothers proved to their peers, their successors and especially their readers that *Mhudi*, *An African Tragedy* and *The Girl Who Killed to Save* need not be thought of as isolated landmarks in an otherwise barren landscape.

Appendix

## 1. "South Africa"

This beauty's not for me! My home is not  
My home! I am an outcast in my land!  
They call me happy while I lie and rot  
Beneath a foreign yoke in my dear strand!  
Midst these sweet hills and dales, under these stars,  
To live and be free, my fathers fought.

Must I still fight and bear anew the scars?  
Must freedom e'er with blood, not sweat, be bought?  
You ask me whence these burning words and wild;  
You laugh and chide and think you know me well.  
I am your patient slave, your harmless child,  
You say. . . . So tyrants dreamt as e'en they fell!  
My country's not my own – so will I fight!  
My mind is made, I will yet strike for Right!

12 April 1941

Reprinted in *H.I.E. Dhlomo: Collected Works*. Eds. Visser, Nick and Tim Couzens.  
Johannesburg: Ravan Press 1985. 112-113.

2. "The Question: Beasts or Brothers"

Would you have me as a brother?  
Or a revengeful beast?  
Would you have us help each other,  
Or have our hates increased?

Would you have us stay your progress,  
Grip, bruise you like a chain?  
Is your aim to halt our progress;  
Why? How? What end? What gain?

Would you have us all face upward  
And hail the sun and stars?  
Or, frustrated, peeved, and both sides  
Inflict and nurse race scars?

Would you have us live despairing?  
Starve, kill, revolt and die?  
Or free men co-operating:  
Wing aiding wing to fly?

Would you have us work together  
And live and build in peace?  
Or prefer us fight and blather,  
And racial hell release?

Would you have us as your neighbours,  
Or enemies within?  
Are our hopes and patient labours  
To end in bloody din?

Brother I am not your neighbour . . .  
Was fatal Cain's philosophy:  
As thyself so love thy neighbour . . .  
Is to be strong, great, wise and free!

**Previously Unpublished**

In *H.I.E. Dhlomo: Collected Works*. Eds. Visser, Nick and Tim Couzens.  
Johannesburg: Ravan Press 1985. 372-373.

## 3. "Because I'm Black"

Because I'm black  
 You think I lack  
 The talents, feelings and ambitions  
 That others have;  
 You do not think I crave positions  
 That others crave.

Psychology  
 And Zoology  
 Have proved that Race and blood  
 Are a fiction....

All men are Man?  
 Diversity means not disunion –  
 It is God's plan;  
 White blood and black in test transfusions  
 Answer the same.  
 They harbour childish vain delusions  
 Who better claim.

Because the people eat and sing  
 And mate,  
 You do not see their suffering.  
 You rate  
 Them fools  
 And tools  
 Of those with power and boastful show;  
 Not Fate, but fault, has made things so.  
 Beware! These people, struggling, hold  
 The last trump card;  
 Subdue them now you may  
 'Tis but delay. Another day  
 When God commands they will be bold . . .  
 They will strike hard!

22 January 1949

Reprinted in *The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo* by Tim Couzens. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985. 112-113.

## 4. "Minstrel Man"

Because my mouth  
Is wide with laughter  
And my throat  
Is deep with song,  
You do not think  
I suffer after  
I have felt my pain  
So long.

Because my mouth  
Is wide with laughter,  
You do not hear  
My inner cry,  
Because my feet  
Are gay with dancing,  
You do not know  
I die.

Hughes, Langston. "Minstrel Man". Reprinted in *The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo* by Tim Couzens. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985. 112.

5. "H.I.E., H.I.E.,"

Me and all my brothers dark,  
 Those that mumble in the dust,  
 Without a hope, without a joy,  
 Streaked with tears for ravaged Africa  
 Have, with thy silence, ceased to live.

.....

In vain we seek the lost dream to regain,  
 In vain the vision yet to capture:  
 The Destiny of a Thousand, Million dark folk  
 Who seek, who yearn-  
 Alas! A fruitless toil.

....

H.I.E., H.I.E.,

Speak to us again!  
 Whisper thoughts yet to empower us  
 To live the Dream, to live the Vision  
 Of a free Africa over again.

Nkosi, Lewis. "H.I.E., H.I.E.," *Ilanga Lase Natal*. 22 October, 1955. Reprinted in *The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo* by Tim Couzens. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985, 356.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Dhlomo, H.I.E. "The African Artist and Society." *Ilanga Lase Natal* 5 March 1949.

Reprinted in *English in Africa* 4.2 (1977): 71-72.

----- "African Attitudes to the European." *The Democrat* 1 December 1945: 24.

----- "Bantu culture and Expression." *Ilanga Lase Natal* 23 July 1948: 15.

Reprinted in *English in Africa* 4.2 (1977): 67-69.

----- "Because I'm Black". 22 January 1949. Reprinted in *The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo* by Tim Couzens. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985. 112-113.

----- "Drama and the African." *South African Outlook* 66.1 (October 1936): 232-235. Reprinted in *English in Africa* 4.2 (1977): 3-8.

----- "The Falling Leaf". Unpublished. Dhlomo Papers. Killie Campbell Library. Durban.

----- "Language and National Drama." *The New Outlook* (March 1939): 8-10. Reprinted in *English in Africa* 4.2 (1977): 0-11.

- "Let Africans Speak for Themselves." *Ilanga Lase Natal* 27 May 1944: 11.
- "Masses and the Artist." *Ilanga Lase Natal* 10 April 1943: 8. Reprinted in *English in Africa* 4.2 (1977): 61-62.
- "Nature and Variety of Tribal Drama." *Bantu Studies*. Volume 13. 1939. Reprinted in *English in Africa* 4.2 (1977): 23-36.
- "The Question: Beasts or Brothers". Previously Unpublished. In *H.I.E. Dhlomo: Collected Works*. Eds. Visser, Nick and Tim Couzens. Johannesburg: Ravan Press 1985. 372-373.
- "South Africa". 12 April 1941. Reprinted in *H.I.E. Dhlomo: Collected Works*. Eds. Visser, Nick and Tim Couzens. Johannesburg: Ravan Press 1985. 112-113.
- "Unknown title". *Ilanga Lase Natal* 26 April 1948. In *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals: African Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality*. Bhekizizwe Peterson. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2000.
- Dhlomo, R.R.R. *An African Tragedy*. Lovedale: Lovedale Institution Press, 1928.
- "Bought and Paid For". *The Sjobok*, 16 May 1930. Reprinted in *R.R.R. Dhlomo: Selected Short Stories*. *English in Africa* 2.1 (March 1975): 25-28.

----- "R. Roamer Esq. On His Talks." *Bantu World* 15 March 1941.

----- "R. Roamer Esq. On Non-European Front." *Bantu World* 25 January 1941.

----- "R. Roamer Esq. On Raids." *Bantu World* 18 January 1941.

----- "R. Roamer Esq. On Timbuctoo University." *Bantu World* 19 July 1941.

### Secondary Sources

Alvarez-Pereyre, Jacques. *The Poetry of Commitment in South Africa*. London: Heinemann, 1984.

Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. Second Edition. London: Routledge, 2000.

Attwell, David. "Reprisals of Modernity in Black South African 'Mission' Writing". *Journal of South African Studies* 25.2 (June 1999): 267-285.

Attwell, David. "Modernizing Tradition/Traditionalizing Modernity: Reflections on the Dhlomo-Vilakazi Dispute". *Research in African Literatures* 33.1 (Spring 2002): 94-119.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and his World*. (1965) Translated by Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Barber, Karin. *The Generation of Plays: Yoruba Popular Life in Theater*.

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Bhabha, Homi K. (Ed). *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990.

Bhabha, Homi K. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse".

In *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Phillip Rice and Patricia Waugh.

London: Arnold, 1989.

Chabal, Patrick. "Mozambique". In *The Post-Colonial Literature of Lusophone*

*Africa*. Patrick Chabal (ed). London: Hurst and Company, 1996.

Chapman, Michael. *Southern African Literatures*. England: Longman, 1996.

Couzens, Tim. "R.R.R. Dhlomo: An Introduction." *English in Africa* 2.1 (1975).

----- *The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo*.

Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985.

----- "Pseudonyms in Black South African Writing, 1920 – 1950". *Research in African Literatures* 6.2 (Fall 1975). 226-231.

De Kock, Leon. "Textual Capture in the Civilising Mission: Moffat, Livingstone, and the Case of Tiyo Soga." *English in Africa* 21.1 and 2 (July 1994).

Du Bois, W.E.B. "Race Intelligence". In *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader*. Ed. David Levering Lewis. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995. 197-198.

Eagleton, Terry. *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature: Nationalism: Irony and Commitment. Field Day Pamphlets*. Derry: Field Day Theatre Company Limited, 1988.

Fanon, Franz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1952. Reprinted: London: Pluto Press, 1991.

Fanon, Franz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. In *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft et al. London: Routledge, 1995. 153-157.

Fuze, M. *The Black People and Whence They Came: a Zulu View*. 1922. Trans. H.C. Lugg. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1979. viii.

Gérard, Albert S. *Four African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.

Gray, Stephen. "The Theatre of Stephen Black: An Example of Cultural Discontinuity in South Africa". In *Literature and Society in South Africa*. Eds. Landreg White and Tim Couzens. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1984.

Hofmeyr, Isabel. *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of "The Pilgrim's Progress"*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Hughes, Langston. "Minstrel Man". In *The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo* by Tim Couzens. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985. 112.

Irele, Abiola. *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*. London: Heinemann, 1981.

Johnson, R.E. *Indians and Apartheid in South Africa: The Failure of Resistance*. PHD Diss. Boston: University of Massachusetts, 1973.

Kidd, D. *The Essential Kafir*. London: 1904.

Locke, Alain. "The New Negro". Alain Locke, Ed. *The New Negro*. United States of America: Touchstone, Reprint edition, 1999.

Marks, Shula. *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism and the State in Twentieth-Century Natal*. Johannesburg: Ravan, 1986.

Marotti, Arthur. *John Donne: Coterie Poet*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986. In *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* by Dustin Griffin. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1994.

Masilela, Ntongela. "The "Black Atlantic" and African Modernity in South Africa".

*Research in African Literatures* 27.4 (Winter 1996): 88-96.

Moffat, Robert. *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa*. London: John

Snow, 1842.

Mphahlele, Ezekiel. *The African Image*. London: Faber and Faber, 1962.

Nkosi, Lewis. "H.I.E., H.I.E.,". *Ilanga Lase Natal*. 22 October, 1955. Reprinted in

*The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo*.

Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985, 356.

Ogude, James. *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*. London,

Pluto Press, 1999.

Paulson, Ronald (ed). *Satire: Modern Essays in Criticism*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall,

1971.

Peterson, Bhekizizwe. *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals: African*

*Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality*. Johannesburg:

Witwatersrand University Press, 2000.

Plaatje, Sol T. *Native Life in South Africa*. London, 1916. In: Marks, Shula. *The*

*Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism and the State*

*in Twentieth-Century Natal*. Johannesburg: Ravan, 1986.

Rich, Paul. "Romance and the development of the South African Novel." In *Literature and Society in South Africa*. Eds. Landeg White and Tim Couzens. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1984.

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1994.

Said, Edward. "Reflections on exile". *Granta* 13 (Autumn 1984): 158-165. In *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*. By James Ogude. London: Pluto Press, 1999.

Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990.

Sepamla, S.S. "To Whom it May Concern". In *Hurry Up To It!*. By Sydney Siphon Sepamla. Johannesburg: AD Donker, 1975.

Sitas, Ari. "Traditions of Poetry in Natal". In *Politics and Performance: Theatre, Poetry and Song in Southern Africa*. Ed. Liz Gunner. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994.

Snead, James. "European pedigrees/African contagions: nationality, narrative, and communality in Tutuola, Achebe and Reed." In *Nation and Narration*. Ed. Homi K. Bhabha. London: Routledge, 1990.

Steadman, Ian. "Towards Popular Culture in South Africa". In *Politics and Performance: Theatre, Poetry and Song in Southern Africa*. Ed. Liz Gunner. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994.

Timbuktu Education Foundation. <http://www.timbuktufoundation.org/university.html>.  
Accessed: 30 November 2004.

Turner, B.S. (ed.) *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity*. London: Sage, 1990.

Turner, Noleen Sheila. "Elements of Satire in Zulu Oral Traditions". Thesis: (M.A., University of Natal, Durban, 1990.)

Visser, Nick. "Introduction". *English in Africa* 4.2 (1977): 1-2.

Visser, Nick and Tim Couzens. Eds. *H.I.E. Dhlomo: Collected Works*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press 1985.

White, Landreg and Tim Couzens. Eds. *Literature and Society in South Africa*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1984.